

Glen Leslie Church

Restoring a Provincial Historic Resource

An architecture-themed issue of Telling Our Stories would not be complete without talking about the importance of restoring and preserving buildings of historical significance. We are thrilled to share this guest contribution from Wanda Zenner, who was involved in the restoration of the Glen Leslie Church east of Grande Prairie.

Designation: Provincial Historic Resource

Date of Designation: October 6, 2011

Location: SW 6-72-3-W6

6 km southwest of Beazonson

20 km east of Grande Prairie on Highway 670

Heritage Value:

The heritage value of the Glen Leslie Church lies in its architectural significance as a rare example of a log church with exposed exterior walls. This type of con-

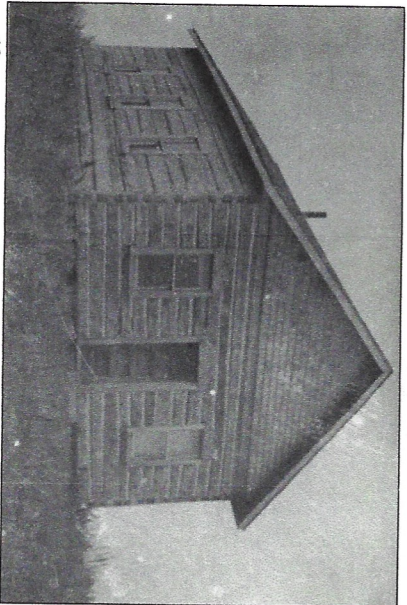


Above: Thomas and Margaret Leslie, 1935 (photograph courtesy of Wanda Zenner)

struction was once common for churches and other buildings in Alberta, but existing examples of this construction technique are now rare.

Once an area east of Grande Prairie was surveyed in 1909, it soon became settled by those who were seeking land ownership by means of homestead applications. The immediate area had been settled by several members of the Leslie

Left: Glen Leslie Presbyterian Church, 1917. (SPRA 032.08.08.0115)



Above: Picnic at Glen Leslie Church. Kenneth (?) Morrison at far right, Ed Leslie far left. Also Grandma Moon, Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Ross Wales, Hazel Patterson, Mrs. Kimble, Gladys Leslie, Steve Garrett. Ca. 1932. (SPRA 430.01.15)

family and subsequently named "Glen of the Leslies"; however, the name was eventually shortened to Glen Leslie. As soon as the farmers had their homes and barns built, their attention turned to the construction of a church. Up to that point, services had been held in the home of the area's prominent resident, Thomas Leslie, and presided over by Presbyterian minister, Reverend Alexander Forbes. In the winter of 1913, Thomas Leslie and Reverend Forbes jointly acquired

ten acres of land upon which to build a church. In 1914, a meeting was held to formulate a plan for the church and it was decided that it would be constructed of logs. A local carpenter, Alf Olson, was hired to oversee the project with all other labour being donated. A local farmer donated seasoned logs that he had on hand, with the under-

Right: Glen Leslie Church gathering. Dorothy, Tom, and Margaret Leslie are seated in the middle with children Keith, Kenneth, and Bill Leslie seated at their feet. 1938. (SPRA 430.01.42)



standing that the community would replace them once time was available to do so. Work began the following spring as soon as the crops were seeded. A trench was dug, with stones being used as the foundation. The logs were stripped of their bark, partially squared, and laid horizontally with the corners joined by hand-cut, dove-tailed notches under the craftsmanship of Nels Meyers. The church was weatherproofed with chinking between the logs. Wood shingles, originally pine, covered the roof and the gable ends. Entry to the church is gained through the south elevation via a five-panel door, which is flanked by double-hung windows. A row of three evenly spaced double-hung windows runs along both the east and west elevations. The window and doorway openings are accentuated with trim intended to resemble segmental arches. The interior had handcrafted pews, a raised altar, and a wood-plank floor. Although many early churches in rural Alberta were constructed of logs, these buildings were often demolished, sold, or upgraded as finances and available

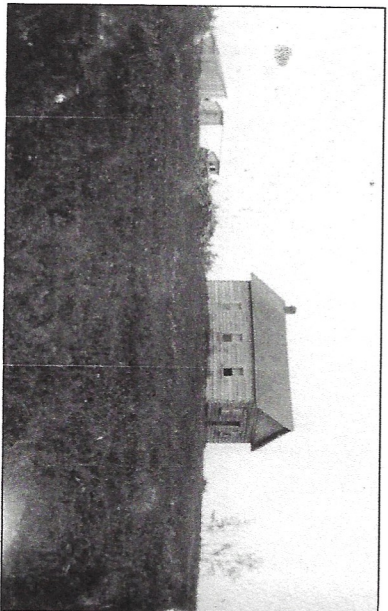


Above: Children in front of the Glen Leslie Church (also the Somme School) include three Christie girls, two Minchin boys, Charles Wales, Sarah Minchin, and Alfred Wales. Ca. 1920. (SPRA 430.01.038)

building technology and materials improved. The church opened for its first service on October 31, 1915 with a total cost of \$468. Although the Glen Leslie Church was ostensibly a Presbyterian church, the congregation included adherents of various Protestant denominations and it eventually became a United Church. The Glen Leslie Church offered regular worship services until 1964. Since that time, it has been used occasionally for worship services and more regularly as a community centre.

While purpose-built for use as a church, the building was also used as a school from 1918 to 1928, providing instruction for the Somme School Division. In the photograph at right, note the large woodpile used during the time that the building was utilized as a school.

Right: Glen Leslie Presbyterian Church was built in 1915. It was used as the schoolhouse for Somme School from 1918 to 1928. (SPRA 2005.069.07, fonds 281)



Over the years, the building succumbed to the ravages of time and was at the point of collapsing. In 2011, a meeting was held at Beazonson to see if there was sufficient interest in restoring the building. A committee, the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group, was formed and would act as a steering committee for the County of Grande Prairie. Funding was provided by donations and grants from the County of Grande Prairie and the Alberta Historical Resource Foundation. Once a contractor specializing in restoring log buildings was hired, work began in 2013. A crane removed the roof and

top three rows of logs, with the remaining logs being removed manually and numbered. The floor was removed in one piece, and the old cement foundation was removed and replaced with a new foundation, complete with a centre support and vent holes. The bottom logs that were beyond repair were removed and replaced with new logs and then the remaining logs were painstakingly installed in place. The roof was then re-installed by a crane, and windows were re-glazed, repaired, and then reinstalled. The original door was repaired along with the original lock. The roof was re-shingled with cedar shingles and shakes



were replaced on the gable ends. The work was completed in 2015, just in time to hold a Centennial Celebration with over 300 people in attendance. The church was re-dedicated by Reverend Malcolm from the Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grande Prairie. Several dignitaries were present: Chris Warkentin, MIP for Grande Prairie-McKenzie; Harold Bulford, County of Grande Prairie Division 1 Councillor; Gary Chen, Alberta Culture's Heritage Conservation Advisor for



the Northern Region, and Leah Miller, board member for the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.

In 2016, the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group received the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation's prestigious award for conservation for their work restoring the Glen Leslie Church.

References:

- Alberta Register of Historic Places
- Glen Leslie Church Centennial History Book

All photographs on this page courtesy of Wanda Zenger.

Top left: A crane removes the roof and top three logs of the Glen Leslie Church, 2013.

Bottom left: The Glen Leslie Church in May 2015.

Bottom right: County Councillor Harold Bulford and Wanda Zenger with the Heritage Conservation Award presented by the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, 2016.

