

# SMOKY RIVER CAFES

## The History behind “Gaboury’s Café” near Bezanson

***Although the majority of residents of Bezanson and surrounding areas only recall Gaboury’s Café, the business actually began years earlier and was known as the Ferry Inn followed by the Way Inn, and after Gaboury’s ownership, it was known simply as Smoky River Café.***

Vivian and Lyall Roe arrived in the Debolt area in 1932. They subsequently moved to the Smoky River where they built what they called a stopping place known as the “Ferry Inn”. Unfortunately, the river flooded in 1935 and destroyed the building. They did rebuild but left the area in 1939.

In 1941, George and Thelma Ames from Bezanson operated the “Ferry Inn”; however, the log building burnt to the ground in 1942. The Ames’ decided to forgo the Inn business and moved back to their farm at Bezanson.



Bill McCready built a new café in the mid-1940’s known as the “Way Inn” and operated it until 1953 when he moved to Red Deer.

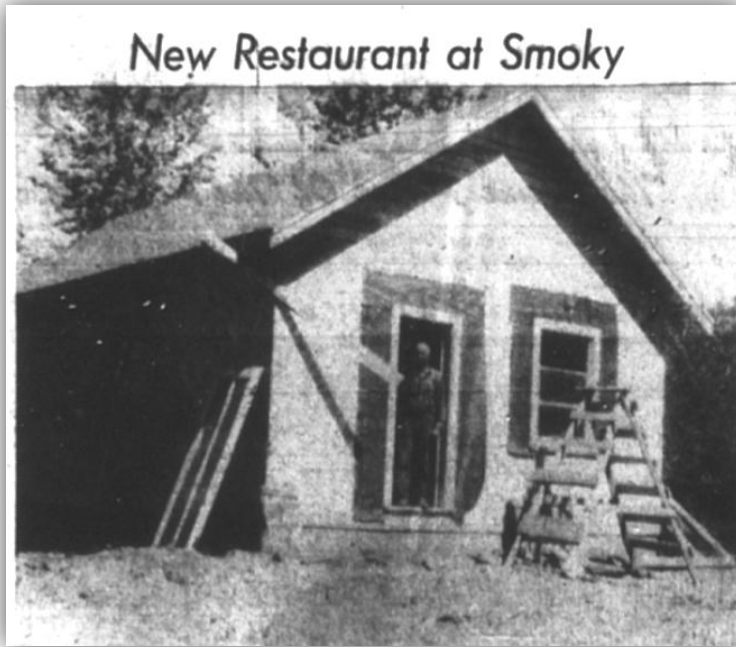
Elsie Ford from Bezanson, who had been cooking for the bridge crews in 1948-49, decided to purchase the business. She soon realized, however that it was not as busy as



when the ferry was operating. Unfortunately once again, the building burnt to the ground. Elsie did have intentions of rebuilding but once she was advised that the original location could not be used, she lost interest and moved to New Brunswick.



Last ferry ride to cross the Smoky River - 1949



Gene Gaboury in doorway – August 1955

In 1955, **Eugene and Mary Gaboury** from Bezanson, decided to venture into the restaurant, store and gas business. They signed a 99-year lease on land next to the Government Campsite at the Smoky River. It was a family venture as sons, Bud and Lawrence; and son-in-law, John Sarmaga, helped with the construction of a new 20' x 30' building at the old location. Pens and sheds to contain and house the pigs and chickens were also built. A gas pump was located in front of the store facing the highway. Their main customers at that time were those who were working on road-paving and bridge-construction crews. Mary was well-known for her delicious buns and pies and no-one could ever forget

the “home-made ice cream” that was made in a large wooden ice-cream maker. She had the perfect recipe for a mixture of cream, salt, ice, and precooked custard of eggs, vanilla, cream and sugar to produce a sweet, smooth ice cream. You could sit on the round stools at the counter and spin around as you enjoyed your tasty treat. In the café section, there were a number of tables and chairs. The adjoining room to the north was the kitchen and a small bedroom. The access to the unfinished basement was on the exterior of the building. An ice-box was the refrigeration system used for the café/store. In the back yard stood the ice-house that was filled with sawdust to keep the ice from melting all summer. There were also two cabins for travelers who wished to stay overnight. Many of Gene and Mary’s grandchildren spent portions of their summer holidays at the river and assisted their grandparents by stocking the shelves and filling the pop cooler. The Gaboury’s decided to move to their homestead land in Goodwin and sold the business to the Linde family sometime around 1970.

The Linde family eventually sold the business to Irene Workman who in turn, sold it to the Rockefeller family who were relatives of the Loewen’s - all three families were from Goodwin/DeBolt area. The Rockefellers had the business for a very short period of time as the flood of 1972 carried all the buildings downstream. As it was inevitable that the area would flood again, they decided not to rebuild.



For a period of time, the Provincial Government operated a campsite at the bridge complete with a building that you could cook in and several picnic tables were set-up at various locations along the river bank. However, once plans were in place for a four-lane highway, the Government closed the Provincial Campground and sold the camp-shack to a “youth group” who moved it to Rick Erlendson acreage in Goodwin where it was used as the headquarters for horse-riding bible camps.

## Smoky River Cafe

It was the end of an era; however, many of us have fond memories of glorious summer days spent at the river enjoying the great outdoors. I, for one, will never forget Mary Gaboury's home-made ice-cream.

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Written by Wanda Zenner – April 2020

### **Reference:**

Smoky to Grande Prairie History Book

Newspaper articles

Interview with Maxine (Sarmaga) Maxwell and Janet (Gaboury) Waldner

Note: The west bound lane on the four-lane is where the little café' was located.