

FEATURE

Restoring the Glen Leslie

A century of stories behind local church

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Standing east of Grande Prairie, behind a copse of trees and on a hill which once nested a family of skunks, is the Glen Leslie Church.

For decades, the building served as a church, a school, and a hub for the communities of Glen Leslie and Bezanson; almost a century later, when the church had fallen into disrepair, that same community came together again to restore the historic building.

It is a story that begins in the early part of the century, when residents of the Glen Leslie community east of Grande Prairie decided to put together

their money and hard work to build the church.

“Back in 1914, after the area was surveyed and settlers were moving in, and once they had their houses and their barns and all of that built, then they needed a place to worship and to gather,” says local Wanda Zenner.

“They had a meeting in the fall, and then they decided that the next spring, as soon as the crops were seeded, they would get going and actually get this built.”

Logs were on site in the spring, and the first service was held in the church on Oct. 31 of 1915.

Initially a Presbyterian Church, the building would later become part of the Unit-



PHOTO BY AUSTIN PAYEUR

Wanda Zenner stands outside of the Glen Leslie Church. Over 10 years ago, Zenner spearheaded the Glen Leslie community into restoring the historic building.

ed Church of Canada, and held regular services until 1964.

As time went on, Zenner says the little building became badly weathered.

“On the west side, the logs were actually starting to go outward, and it was getting to the point that if we didn’t do something soon it was actually going to collapse into itself,” she says.

“So we got a group together and everyone certainly felt that it was worthwhile preserving.”

The Glen Leslie Church was designated a Provincial Historic Resource in 2011, and Wanda Zenner was named the president of the Glen Leslie Church Preservation Group, formed in that to oversee the restoration project.

Zenner says that while doing research at the South Peace Regional Archives, she discovered her grandfather and great-uncle’s names on a sub-

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Left, the roof of the Glen Leslie Church was lifted in 2013 to remove the three bottom logs on its western wall.

Below, the Glen Leslie Church doubled as a schoolhouse, hosting classes on weekdays and social functions and church during the weekends.



scription list of locals who had contributed money to the cause.

“My grandfather pledged \$2, and my great-uncle had pledged \$2,” she says.

“And that was a lot of money back in 1914; so I thought that the least I can do is to see that this little building is preserved for future generations to enjoy.”

During the restoration, Zenner says she uncovered all kinds of stories about the building and the area.

Glen Leslie itself was named after Thomas and Margaret Leslie, who homesteaded in the area 1909 with their three sons, Norman, Ed, and Bruce.

“There were so many Leslies homesteading in such a close area it was called ‘Glen of Leslies,’” says Zenner.

“They were really instrumental in getting the church going back in the day.”

For years, the church served as the site for everything from church services to box lunches.

From 1918 to 1928, the building doubled as the schoolhouse for the Somme School District, hosting classes on weekdays and social functions and church during the weekends.

To this day, one corner of the building still has the marks from where schoolchildren would split the firewood.

Charlie Wales was a Glen Leslie resident who received his education there and would later be active in the management of the church and cemetery.

When the Glen Leslie Preservation Group started the building restoration, Zenner says he shared his own stories about the building.

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WANDA ZENNER

“He had the best stories to tell,” Zenner says.

“He was saying that when they were picking a spot for the church, it was on a bit of a hill so they had to take part of the hill down, and apparently there were skunks that had burrowed into this hill.

“So the schoolchildren, they’d go out at recess and lunchtime, and they’d play with these skunk holes and the skunks, and they’d come back in much to the teachers dismay because they weren’t smelling too well.”

Sagging beams were replaced by Chinook Log Homes, which lifted the roof off with a crane to replace the bottom three rows of logs.

Besides those, the building still has the original roof, walls, and hardwood floors.

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