

JIM & HARRIET MOODY

Mentions in [The Daily Herald-Tribune](#), Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada



MR. AND MRS. W. J. MOODY
... on his 91st birthday

Old Time Ferry Pilot Marks 91st Birthday

Moody's Crossing Was Named For Him

BEZANSON (Staff) — The man after whom **Moody's Crossing** was named took a long pull on his pipe.

"Yes sir," he confessed, "I made a good move when I came to the Peace River Country, I've got no regrets."

W. J. **Moody** celebrated his 91st birthday last night and he was doing what he likes best — reminiscing about the old days.

"I remember the day we arrived here," he was saying, "this was nothing but a jangle of brush. The old Edison Trail ran along side our house, but they weren't using it then, we had to clear the trail before we could use it."

Mr. **Moody**, his wife and four sons, arrived in the Peace River Country in 1913 seven years after coming to Canada for a better chance at the good life. They settled in the last civilian homestead on this side of the Smoky River right next to its banks.

RAN FERRY

And that's how **Moody's** crossing came to be. For more than 20 years Mr. **Moody** and his sons operated a ferry service across the Smoky.

The ferry was a few steps down from the huge steamers Mr. **Moody** knew in South Hampton, England, where he was an engineer's assistant at the docks for 12 years.

But he finally decided life in

Canada didn't offer much of a chance for his family of four boys — he had been married in December 1906 and the couple celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary this fall.

In 1912, the **Moody's** boarded an ocean liner and sailed for Canada and better opportunities. For several years, while trying to see a living out of a

to this area as **Moody's Crossing**, however.

"We use to operate 24-hour service," Mr. **Moody** said, adding travellers often routed them out of bed in the middle of the night for service. The ferry was of the cable variety — "the push and pull type."

BIG FLOOD

Life along Peace River Country rivers is not without its dangerous moments. Each spring, the river goes on the rampage but 1936 was the year of the Big Flood.

That spring, the water completely surrounded his house about 200 yards from the river's edge.

The wheat fields were inundated and a three-foot high crop ripening was covered to within six inches of the top of the stems.

Mr. **Moody** farmed on one-half section of land along the river valley when he arrived. All other homesteads in this area had been reserved for the returning soldiers and the one he picked was the last civilian location available. Taking ad-

vantage of regulations of the period, Mrs. **Moody** also filed on a quarter-section.

"We got our farm all at once," Mr. **Moody** said, "but it was just like a jangle when we arrived."

Mr. and Mrs. **Moody**, who was 80 this summer, have four boys, Bob and Tim of Bezan-son, Bill of Victoria, B.C., and Ray of Goodwin; 14 grandchildren and 46 great grandchildren.

Mr. **Moody** admits he doesn't possess any recipe for long life, but yes, he has smoked a pipe all his life and no, he isn't afraid of getting lung cancer.

"I'm still growing," he declared stoutly, "smaller, I think."

The
Roving
Reporter

homestead in Central Alberta, Mr. **Moody** worked double time running a power plant at Vegreville.

ON HIGHWAY

The Edison Trail crossing had moved west when Mr. **Moody** arrived and bush and weeds had tangled the original trail. The family backed it out so they could travel to Bezanson.

In 1925, the trail was relocated again and **Moody's Crossing** was used. The highway has gone past the **Moody** homestead on the banks of the Smoky since.

About 1923, Mr. **Moody** began operating the ferry and continued until 1942 when he retired. Then a son took over until 1949 when the present steel bridge was completed.

Mr. **Moody** recalled a few chilly spills in the river while operating the ferry, but there were "no narrow escapes. I used my head."

Local residents still refer



This Was Yesterday

By ISABEL M. CAMPBELL

IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE PUBLIC got hooked on bingo and a \$1 ticket could convert a Wednesday into a "Winsday", the real cliff-hanger was judging the day and time that the unpredictable Smoky River shed its ice and started to run free. That day was called "Derby Day."

According to the Herald-Tribune of April 19, 1951, "Winner of the Grande Prairie Elks derby was Hugh Sinclair of Flying Shot. Mr. Sinclair won himself a chesterfield suite by estimating that the river would break at 1.15.20 p.m. on April 11. A radio was won by Mrs. A. Thiesen of Grande Prairie, taking second prize with her estimate of 1.11.11 p.m. Mrs. M. Durda of Grande Prairie won a food mixer with her guess of 2.22.22 p.m.

Unlike most years there wasn't a huge crowd lining the banks to watch the ice breakup. Ron Moody, a resident near the bridge, got up from dinner at his parents' home and walked down to the river just in time to see it begin moving.

"His father, William Moody, who came into this country when you could count all the white settlers living on the other side of the Smoky on your two hands, said that the break-ups aren't what they used to be. He said he has watched the river break up every year since he pitched a tent along the banks and his wife decided to build their home under a tree along the Smoky. Even in those early days Mr. Moody said, people used to jam the banks to watch the ice pitching and piling as it roared down the river. Ice floes used to often be as big as a house and took as long as 36 hours to finally clear. You could hear it for miles away, Mr. Moody said.

Mr. Moody said that in the 19 years that his family ran the ferry across the Smoky, the earliest they ever saw the ice go out was the year that the new bridge was built (1949). That year it went out on April 9.

"The Elks said that 56 people had taken tickets for the 11th in their fourth annual der'by."

Despite it all, Smoky has been good to him

By MIKE BEAUDIN
of our staff

The Smoky River has been Jim Moody's friend and neighbor through good times and bad for the past 63 years.

So when the Smoky flooded its banks Friday morning, destroying his entire crop of prime wheat, the disappointment showed in the 73-year-old farmer's eyes but there wasn't a trace of bitterness in his voice.

"This used to be the best crop of wheat in the country," Mr. Moody said as he gazed over a huge expanse of water, 15 feet deep in places, which covered his 212 acres of land, about 38 highway km east of Grande Prairie in the Smoky River Valley.

"It's all a gamble anyway," he said. "I'll just have to wait until next year. This (the Peace) is a next-year country anyway. Always has been. If it wasn't we'd never keep at it."

The flood will cost him the \$5,000 he spent putting the crop in and as much as \$22,000 considering income if he had been able to market his wheat. But Mr. Moody shrugged off the loss like a man grown accustomed to some hard times.

"You may lose a crop but you'll never starve in the Peace Country," he said. "If you have any initiative you can feed yourself off the land."

Mr. Moody has seen the Smoky flood her banks three times since he moved to the valley in 1919.

He lost part of his crop in the flood of 1935 but the worst came 37 years later in 1972 when the river almost wiped him out. He lost his entire crop and his

house was severely damaged when the water was four feet deep inside his home.

He had to replace all the floors and carpets in the house.

In 1974 the house was moved to a bluff overlooking the river when the government bought his previous site to build the bridge over the river.

"When I got up this morning I was glad (we moved)," he said. "At least the water wasn't coming up through the floor. So I guess it's not all bad."

"If we hadn't moved I wouldn't clean up this time. I'd just set a match to it."

But the good times have far outweighed the bad in his relationship with the river. For the most part the Smoky has been a good provider for Mr. Moody.

It's moisture has helped nourish his land into one of the most coveted pieces of property in the Peace Country. And before the bridge was built, he used to earn some extra dollars operating the ferry.

"It wasn't much but it helped us through the lean years," he said.

Mr. Moody has also been heralded as the river's unofficial guru — much to his chagrin.

"People used to come by in the spring and ask me when the ice was going to break up. They had bets on it. Who do they think I am? God? When I told them I didn't know some of them would get mad. They thought I had a bet on myself."

He says the only predictable thing about the river is that it's so unpredictable.

"There were no signs of it (the flood) when I went to town two days ago."

Even last night when I went to bed I never thought this would happen. It was able to rain like that for a week but the land would absorb it. Now it's all washed into the river."

The lonely sight of Mr. Moody pacing back and forth in front of his ruined crop was a sharp contrast to the scene at the Smoky bridge, which had been closed to traffic just down the road. Throngs of curious onlookers, in tow with kids, dogs and the latest in camera gadgetry, had gathered to see if the bridge would come crashing down.

A cluster of RCMP officers, Alberta Forestry officials and a crew of Alberta Transportation surveyors had also set up at the scene. The surveyors were busy trying to figure out how fast the water was rising.

Oblivious to the circus-like atmosphere not far from him, Mr. Moody had already figured out how high the water had risen. He had placed ten small stones by the water's edge and watched the water lap closer and closer.

"I'd say it's quit rising," he declared at noon. The government officials concurred with his findings.

Mr. Moody doesn't have much faith in the technocrats' ability to read the river. When told of the bridge close he chortled. "That's the height of stupidity. Why there's enough concrete in that bridge."

After the '72 flood, he said he never expected to live to see the Smoky rise over her banks again. He's not making that prediction this time.

"Now you never know. They say I'm ornery enough to be around here until I'm 100."

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This Was Yesterday

Isabel

Campbell



Festive time for local pioneers

"O Smoky, Father Smoky
"To whom the Indians pray,
"Riverman's sorrow, ferryman's honor,
"Take thou in charge today."

"THAT VERSE HANGS ON THE wall of a couple who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary Thursday" the Herald-Tribune Dec. 19, 1958, noted. "The William James Moodys, who have lived on the banks of the Smoky River for some 39 years, sat back and relaxed for one day and let their sons and daughters-in-law take care of the chores.

"They sat back and read a telegram from Queen Elizabeth congratulating them on the Diamond Wedding anniversary; they sat back and read a letter from the federal deputy prime minister Howard Green; they sat back and read the cards from their many friends, relatives and well-wishers and they sat back and reminisced about how things were many years ago.

"As the snow came tumbling down outside the window, the fine old lady of the house turned and commented 'It wasn't like this the day we got married in Southampton. There was no snow but it was a frosty morning and I'll always remember the way the horses' hooves clip-clopped.'

"Back in 1919 when the couple with their family arrived at the Smoky, they set up their homestead where their present house is, just to the south of the bridge on Highway 34. The Edson Trail passed right outside their door and the Moodys established a hostelry which was used by very many of the early settlers moving into the Peace River country.

"Among the many travellers who availed of the hospitality of the Moodys was a former premier of Prince Edward Island who slept on the floor one night in blankets and tanned hides. 'All the beds were full so we offered him the best we could and he accepted' said Mr. Moody.

"I think it was about 1930 when I built my present home' said the oldtimer with pride. 'I built every bit of it myself with the help of my sons.'

"Drawing on his fund of memories he told how they held a housewarming party on New Years Eve. 'It went on until two or three o'clock in the morning after starting about nine the previous night. We had an old-time orchestra upstairs and a modern band down here. They took turn about and when the crowd was downstairs listening and dancing to the modern band, the boys upstairs, after they had a rest, would thump on the floor and start playing. First in ones and twos people started upstairs, then the whole crowd would be up there. After a while the modern orchestra would be fed up with having no one to play to — they would thump on the ceiling and start playing with renewed vim and vigor. Down would come the crowd, and things would continue like that all night.'

"Catering for the older folk, card games and just plain gabbing was going on in the old house. 'Yes, we sure all had a good time' Mr. Moody declared.

"I've often seen people arrive at the dances with gunny sacks wrapped around their feet because they couldn't afford shoes' the old man said. 'But still they came and enjoyed themselves.'

"First, old Mr. Moody and then one of his sons acted as ferryman from shortly after the ferry on the Smoky was installed, until the bridge was built. As a matter of fact the ferry and the crossing of the Smoky became so intimately linked with the family that it was known as Moody's Crossing and still is known as such by many of the oldtimers."

"That Ferry Question" was a headliner in the old Grande Prairie Herald Oct. 11, 1921. Settlers complained bitterly over the removal of the ferry from the old Bezanson town site where it had been established since 1915.

One faction of the country hoped to see Bezanson become the centre of trade; another faction protested, seeking to draw trade along a road further north. Scrap over the ferry climaxed when enterprising settlers took matters into their own hands and it was mysteriously cut loose from its moorings to find new anchorage down stream. As it was impossible to move the ferry back upstream, it remained and went into operation at Moody's Crossing.

"The Northern Tribune July 28, 1932, carried a front page picture, cutlines for which read "Ferry over the Smoky River at Moody's Crossing — Since the opening of the prairie and High Prairie, Moody's new highway between Grande Prairie and High Prairie, Moody's Crossing has become very popular. Last week several large parties camped there and said it was one of the best stopping places on the highway."

Progress was pushing back the frontier and by Aug. 17, 1949, Mr. Moody, ferryman for many years, stood on the deck of the 780 ft. steel five-span bridge within sight of his home, along with 12,000 other spectators gathering from all parts of the Peace River Country, for the historical opening of the Smoky River bridge.

"Speakers that day, among them the Hon. D.B. MacMillan, Minister of Public Works for Alberta, said of Mr. Moody 'The part played by the ferryman in the development of this country has never been adequately realized. He and others like him were the men who took passengers and vehicles of all sorts across the Smoky in all sorts of weather and at all hours of the day and night, sometimes even at the risk of life and limb, when ice jams or flood waters made crossing treacherous.'

Foot note: Announcement was made in the Herald-Tribune Jan. 9, 1967, that "Funeral service will be held for William James Moody, 91, one-time ferry pilot at the Smoky River Crossing. Mr. Moody died Tuesday at his farm residence along the river he helped progress conquer."

"Feb. 16, 1967: Mrs. Harriet Moody, wife of a former river pilot at the Smoky River Crossing near Bezanson, died in Grande Prairie hospital yesterday. Mrs. Moody, 89, came to the Peace River country 55 years ago with husband James and four sons and they installed a ferry system across the river . . ."

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