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cbirh
Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History

NOVEMBER 2026

The Basin Record

Coals from my Campfire



Ernest Fee Hellman at his best - working in the outdoors - Images courtesy of CBIRH

Ernest "Fee" Hellmen was an outdoor enthusiast born on March 9, 1918, in a two-room log cabin across the Kootenay River from Wardner, B.C. With Bull Mountain and the entire Rocky Mountain range within reach, he had "A lifetime love affair" with East Kootenay and its backcountry. Fee grew up in a tradition of hunting, fishing and working in the bush. Fortunately for later generations, he also learned to write about his experiences, first in columns titled "Coals from My Campfire" and then later in his evocative book "Kootenay Country."

Fee Hellmen's writings always focused on 'place' – backcountry trails, running his guide-outfitting business back of Lumberton, and exploring up and down the Kootenay River. An excerpt from a "Whatsit?" column in The Kootenay Advertiser of March 24, 1980, gives readers a sense of Fee's work:

"Many Waters Campground was located on Wildhorse Creek just above the 17-mile post on the present logging road. Big game guides who camped there with their hunters in the fall, pursuing the variety of trophies that abounded in the area before the loggers arrived, gave the spot the name 'Many Waters'. As was so often the case with early-day place names, the name was both colourful and descriptive. At the location, several small springs bubbled from the ground. A small creek rippled in from a group of high alpine basins to the east. Just a stone's throw to the west, and barely below the camp's level, flowed the waters of Wildhorse Creek."

With that much local colour and history, the CBIRH believes the public should have access to Fee's work. The Hellmen family has bestowed the family photo collection on the Institute, so alongside the wide range of photos already in the CBIRH vaults, we are putting some of Fee Hellmen's writing online.

The Hellmen Collection will be CBIRH's first attempt to try and recover some of our development costs through membership access. We offer CBIRH members passwords with their yearly fee, which provide access to a growing body of human and natural history work on our website at www.basininstitute.org. Access to our massive online photo collection will remain free.



Ernest Fee Hellman at his best - at the helm of his cabin- Images courtesy of CBIRH

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Cranbrook High School Girls' Bugle Band

Emerging from World War II (1943), the Bugle Band carried Cranbrook forward across Canada and into the western U.S. Over time, some 4,000 young women joined and marched into history – conquering the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) and Calgary Stampede numerous times, as well as the Montreal Expo (1967) and Expo86 (1986) in Vancouver. East Kootenay was known across the country as the home of these amazing young women.

An enduring legacy of that 80-year triumphal march is the thousands of photographs, trophies, ribbons, and documents the CBIRH has gathered. The collection continues to grow with former members such as Carmen (Carmie) Calonna recently donating her marching uniform, more photos and a touching memoir:

"Being a band member meant everyone was treated the same. The same expectations, and just showing up for one another. We were ambassadors for our dear city of Cranbrook, B.C., and that was a big responsibility, not taken lightly. The city would give us a grand welcome every time we returned home after being away. More than likely to have won awards and trophies."

Now the Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History (CBIRH) has volunteers working on that 80-year timeline, charting the amazing energies of Cranbrook's most effective ambassadors and collecting more individual memories from Band participants. This work will eventually culminate in a large multimedia web exhibit. If you have movie footage, photos, or memories, please contact the CBIRH.



The Cranbrook Girls Bugle Band – Images courtesy of CBIRH

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Fall at Fort Steele Heritage Town











Autumn at Fort Steele *– Erin Knutson Photos – CBIRH*

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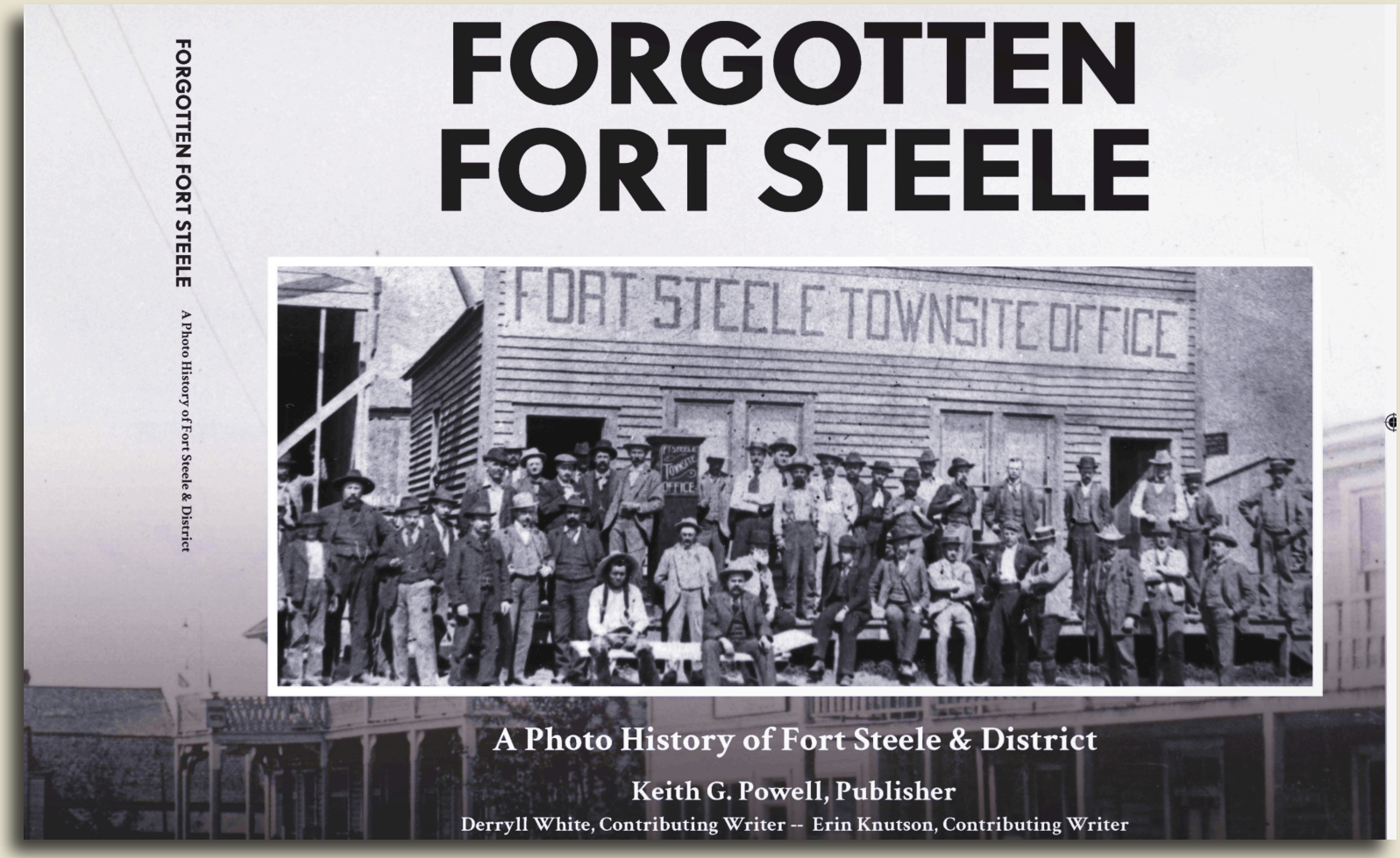

Forgotten Fort Steele arrives in time for the Holidays - Image courtesy of Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History and Wild Horse Creek Press

Forgotten Fort Steele on Horizon

We are pleased to announce the upcoming release of Forgotten Fort Steele, our fourth book produced in partnership with Wild Horse Creek Press, Fort Steele Heritage Town, and the Cranbrook Archives Museum and Landmark Society (CAMAL).

This beautiful publication showcases the best of our extensive image bank while creating a visual chronology of Fort Steele's history. The book appeals to history enthusiasts and coffee-table book collectors alike, and its November-December release makes it an ideal holiday gift.

We thank our partners and everyone involved in making this unique book series (Forgotten Cranbrook, Kimberley, and Moyie) possible. We appreciate the opportunity to share this historical resource with you.

As a non-profit society, our mandate is to preserve, present, and share the region's history. Thank you for your donations, which have supported our mission for over twenty years. Please purchase from CBIRH and help support our work. at www.basininstitute.org

We hope you enjoy Forgotten Fort Steele as much as we do.

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Growing up with Dick & Jane - SD#5 Exhibit

With simple stories and gentle watercolour illustrations, the Dick and Jane series became one of the twentieth century's most recognizable early reading programs. Zerna Sharp developed these books for William S. Gray's basal readers to support young children learning to read.

Dick and Jane books were introduced in classrooms in 1930 and remained central to early reading instruction until 1965. For nearly four decades, schools in the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking countries used these readers. Their popularity peaked in the 1950s, when 80 percent of first-grade students learned from them.



Reading with Zerna Sharp



Anna Majkowski & Carol Johns flank the See Spot Run Exhibit at the SD#5 Board Office - Derryll White Photo

Dick and Jane readers were designed for younger primary grades, especially grades one to three. Simplified language, large print, and prominent illustrations supported early literacy.

The large font helped children sound out words, and the illustrations aided comprehension. Each book featured familiar characters and simple events, allowing students to follow one story at a time. Titles included "Dick," "Sally," "Jane Helps Dick," and "Three Little Dogs." Although critics have pointed to stereotypical depictions of white, middle-class Americans, the characters "Dick," "Jane," and their sister "Sally" became household names. The series remains both a cultural artifact and a reflection of its era.

While the series contributed significantly to literacy education, it also reinforced exclusionary ideals and societal biases, including gender roles, racial exclusivity, and class privilege.Dick and Jane's legacy offers important insights for education today. Key considerations include representation, effective teaching methods, and balancing nostalgia with educational progress. As we strive to create stories that uplift and empower all children, Dick and Jane remind us to learn from the past as we build a more inclusive future. Dick and Jane have earned a lasting place in history, and their names are synonymous with early reading books.

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Teachers gather to kick off a fresh semester and to discuss 'Name That Teacher' - Erin Knutson Photo

Volunteers make a difference

With local histories at risk of being lost or forgotten, CBIRH's community-driven preservation approach is more important than ever. Our volunteer-led, flexible way of working helps ensure these stories will inspire and teach future generations.

"Name That Teacher" is a community initiative that documents and identifies archival information to honour and celebrate the region's educational history. The program invites individuals to share stories, photographs, and memorabilia from their educational experiences, and engages retired teacher volunteers to enhance CBIRH's digital archive. This initiative is a collaboration between CBIRH, the British Columbia Retired Teachers' Association (BCRTA), the Cranbrook District Teachers Association (CDTA), and School District No. 5 (SD#5). Participants are encouraged to bring memorable items from their educational journey. Community members interested in history and education are also invited to volunteer to support this project.

"This initiative celebrates past educators while fostering a sense of community among local teaching professionals," said CBIRH Volunteer Historian Derryll White.

For more information about "Name That Teacher" or to inquire about volunteering, email info@basininstitute.org or call 1-250-489-9150.

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Sponsors and Partners

The CBIRH would like to acknowledge and thank our donors, volunteers, sponsors and partners. Our mission is made possible with the support of these groups and individuals.

Time is a valuable commodity, and our organization greatly appreciates the time and dedication of our volunteer base, which supports data entry and activation in our archives and contributes to many other departments, including accounting, community outreach, and consulting.

We are fortunate to have a solid board of directors, who bring individual strengths to the CBIRH and have made many contributions and donations over the years. Our board members are generous and gifted individuals, and we are incredibly grateful to have their expertise and support as we continue to bring history to the world, especially to the Canadian Columbia Basin.

Thank you to our excellent IT and Web Development support through Murray Technical Excellence and Eggplant Studios for their continual guidance, insight, and expertise as we continue to develop our digital footprint and presentation.

As always, donations and members are vital to our success. We invite you to continue partnering with us through donations, fundraising, and collaborations to help us preserve and share history. For more information, to volunteer, or to donate, please visit basininstitute.org or email info@basininstitute.org.

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