

*Castor  
&  
District  
Museum Society*



*Preserving Our Pioneer Heritage*

**The Museum is open 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from the beginning of March to the end of November.**

**For Museum tours on other days/times, please call:**

**Town Office: 882-3215  
John Wright: 882-3271  
Dorothy Schnell: 882-2116  
Madge Marshall: 882-3409**

*Our Mission*

**The Castor and District Museum exists to foster, stimulate and promote an understanding of the natural and human history of the Castor community and surrounding district. Our collection relates the pioneer stories of farms, industries and settlement in this region.**

Castor lies just west of the junctions of highways 36 and 12. As you approach Castor on highway 12 you cannot miss our heritage elevator, the sole survivor of Castor's elevator row. Head for the elevator and our museum can be found opposite to it on the north side of Pacific Avenue.

There are four distinct parts to the Museum:

1. The main Museum building.
2. The Machinery Compound and Shop.
3. Beaver School
4. The Alberta-Pacific Grain Elevator.
5. Preserved Railcars

## The Museum

The Museum building itself was originally Castor's CPR station. It houses artefacts documenting the settlement and growth of Castor and District from its earliest beginnings.

Two stained glass windows, reputed to have been rescued from Chicago Stock-Exchange during the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, distinguish the lobby. It also houses an extensive collection of photographs of people and events from Castor's earliest years. If you want to sit and read the stories of people who lived in Castor, or the memoirs of local men who served in the armed forces from the Boer war to the Korean War, take a seat and learn of their experiences. Perhaps one of your ancestors is in these pages.

To the right you can find exhibits portraying life as it would have been on a visit to the hairdressers, the Castor hospital and even the dentist's office in days gone by. You can also sample early issues of The Castor Advance, books and magazines, or look at some of the amazing devices, which brought music and entertainment to lonely homesteads and farms. Also in this section you can find features from Castor's early landmark buildings, most of which were lost to fires. You can also find some examples of amazing pioneer outdoor wear.

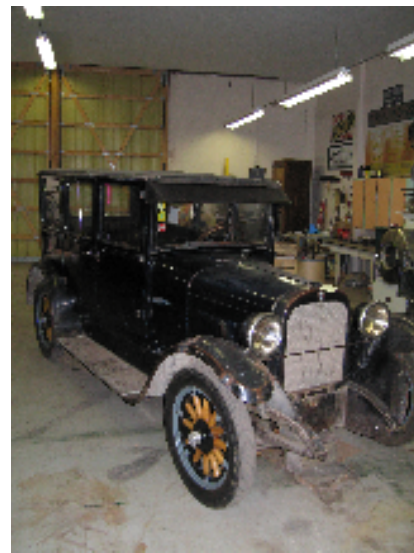
To the left of the lobby you can view ladies' fashions from the early 1900's to the 1930's and wonder at the care that it must have taken to keep such clothing clean and fresh when all washing was done by hand with soap in a tub. On the other hand, you can marvel at the delicate elegance of these stylish outfits. In this exhibit you can also find examples of original military uniforms donated by local people who served in various branches of the armed services.

In the stairwell, sports uniforms and trophies show how sports teams lent prestige to prairie towns like Castor and provided a major source of entertainment. Fiery local rivalries flourished in ball, curling and most of all, hockey.

The upstairs shows typical scenes from a fairly well to do Castor house around 1915 to 1920, with a complete kitchen, dining room, sitting room and bedroom fully furnished with period items donated by local families.

## The Machine Shop and Compound

The shed houses running vehicles from the 1920's to the 1950's, some of which have interesting local histories.



The black Ford Model T (on loan) enabled the local Catholic priest, Father Leconte to execute his rounds of pastoral duties in Castor and the surrounding municipal District of Progress (precursor to the County of Paintearth) in the 1920's.

Mr. John Grove purchased our original and un-restored Dodge Brothers sedan in 1926 at Parr Motors, a dealership that used to stand just a block to the north, where Castor's Post Office can now be found. John Grove's family returned the car to Castor by in 2003 and it runs at local events and parades.

Castor's 1946 vintage Saskatoon Fire Engine and a running example of a 1950's Farmall tractor complete the running exhibits.

At the back of the shop is very early I.H. wooden threshing machine. A collection of early buggies, sleds and an extensive variety of hand tools, foundry, machine tools and implements round out this display.

Outside, you can find many of the implements local farmers used to till, seed and harvest the land, giving a clear impression of how much labour and time was invested in a crop in days gone by. At the south end of the compound is an early backhoe mounted on a GM chassis. Completing this display at the east end of the compound are a variety of buggies, grain wagons and tractors with names from the past such as Minneapolis Moline, Oliver and McCormick Deering. In the compound and to the east, we also have very early examples of a road grader, swathers and mower-binders.

### **Beaver School**

We think that our school is the most authentic and complete example of its kind, illustrating how education was delivered from the 20<sup>th</sup> century's earliest decades until the 1950's. Its excellent and original condition is enhanced by authentic furniture and period school texts. Beaver School served the needs of students who lived in the Beaver district, roughly 10 miles north and four miles east of Castor, from 1919 to 1959. In 1939 it became part of the Castor School Division, which administered eighty-one school districts, each of them with its own little school. Beaver was the last of these to be closed. Genealogists may find evidence of family members in the old registers and yearbooks at the back of the room. Life at many of the Castor School Division's one-room schools is also recorded in the extensive collection of school photographs.



### **Alberta-Pacific Grain Elevator. (A Provincial Historic Resource)**

Did you know that the original purpose for elevators was to literally "elevate" grain so that it could be loaded by the force of gravity into railcars? This relieved farmers from the backbreaking labour of climbing the cars with sacks of grain to load them by hand.

There is some debate about the exact age of our elevator, but all local evidence points to the fact that the elevator was constructed and completed in July and August of 1910. According to our local history book, the railhead reached Castor in 1909 prompting the construction of the elevator shortly thereafter, and the growth of the town around both it and the CPR station. The Castor Advance of Thursday, July 7, 1910, states that construction was already well advanced on the elevator, and a second article from Thursday, August 4, 1910, informed its readers that the elevator was now open and ready for business. According to the data compiled by the Alberta Grain Elevator Society (A.G.E.S), its origins in 1910 would make Castor's elevator the second oldest preserved



wooden elevator in the Province, and an artifact from the very beginnings of this town and region's permanent settlement.

The elevator is a very original, traditional, wooden elevator of crib construction. It has suffered little in the way of alterations and additions. Its bins have a total capacity of 37,000 bushels. By virtue of its age, originality and excellent condition, the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky, Minister for Alberta Community Development, declared our elevator a Provincial Historic Resource in 2004, endowing it with the maximum level of provincial protection and enabling the Museum Society to access Government funds and expertise in its preservation.

## Railcars

To complement our grain elevator exhibit, we have a collection of Canadian Pacific railcars comprised of:

- Double deck livestock car.
- Grain boxcar.
- Grain tankcar.
- Caboose.

All our railcars have been restored to pristine condition and date from the 1950's to the 1980's. They are parked on a section of line next to the elevator. Our caboose can be opened to visitors and like the rest of our railcar collection it is in pristine condition.



## *Why Save that Dusty old Relic?*

Sceptics may argue “why go to all this trouble over just a dusty old grain elevator?”

There are many answers to their scepticism:

Firstly: In 1999 there were approximately five hundred wooden grain elevators in Alberta. Today fewer than half that number survive, and demolition proceeds remorselessly. Many survivors are relatively modern, or radically modified and less significant historically. Few currently enjoy the protection of preservation groups.

Secondly: we must look to a future where virtually all of these structures have disappeared, to a time when a



common place elevator becomes a unique artifact, a heritage building as significant historically to the economy of this Province as any city-centre sandstone building.

Thirdly: grain elevators were unique prairie landmarks; visible for miles they existed nowhere else in the world. When first built, they voiced the status of ambitious, fledgling towns as significantly as cathedral spires did in medieval Europe. It would be a shame to allow such distinctive and striking landmarks to disappear entirely from the landscape, existing only as fading memories in history books. They are distinctively Canadian too: school children all over the world recognize elevators on the prairies as Canadian icons, much like Mounties in red coats, or lumberjacks in checked shirts. Preserving such parts of its culture helps a society to feel a sense of identity: of where we have come from, who we are, and what we should therefore become.

Fourthly: elevators exhibit wood and iron technology from the early nineteenth hundreds and mark the very beginnings of fixed settlement in Alberta. Few societies have enjoyed the luxury of preserving such early evidence to show future generations “how it all began.”

Usually the sceptics who doubt the value of preservation have lived so close to elevators all their lives, they have become blinded to them by familiarity, or embittered by perceptions of large grain companies who exploited the small farmer. But they are not all the same. When Castor’s skyline changed forever, its last three elevators disintegrating into debris and dust before the onlookers, two old farmers were heard to agree, “It’s a good thing the Museum preserved that last elevator. It’s the oldest, you know. I remember delivering my first load of grain there when I was a kid.” Perhaps these words are hopeful signs that minds can change as radically as the prairie skyline.

By virtue of its age and original condition Castor’s 35,000 bushel Alberta-Pacific elevator became a Provincial Historic resource in 2004, enabling the Museum Society access to Government funds and guidance in its preservation. Come and visit us to find out how grain was delivered, graded, stored and loaded onto railcars for delivery to countries all over the world.