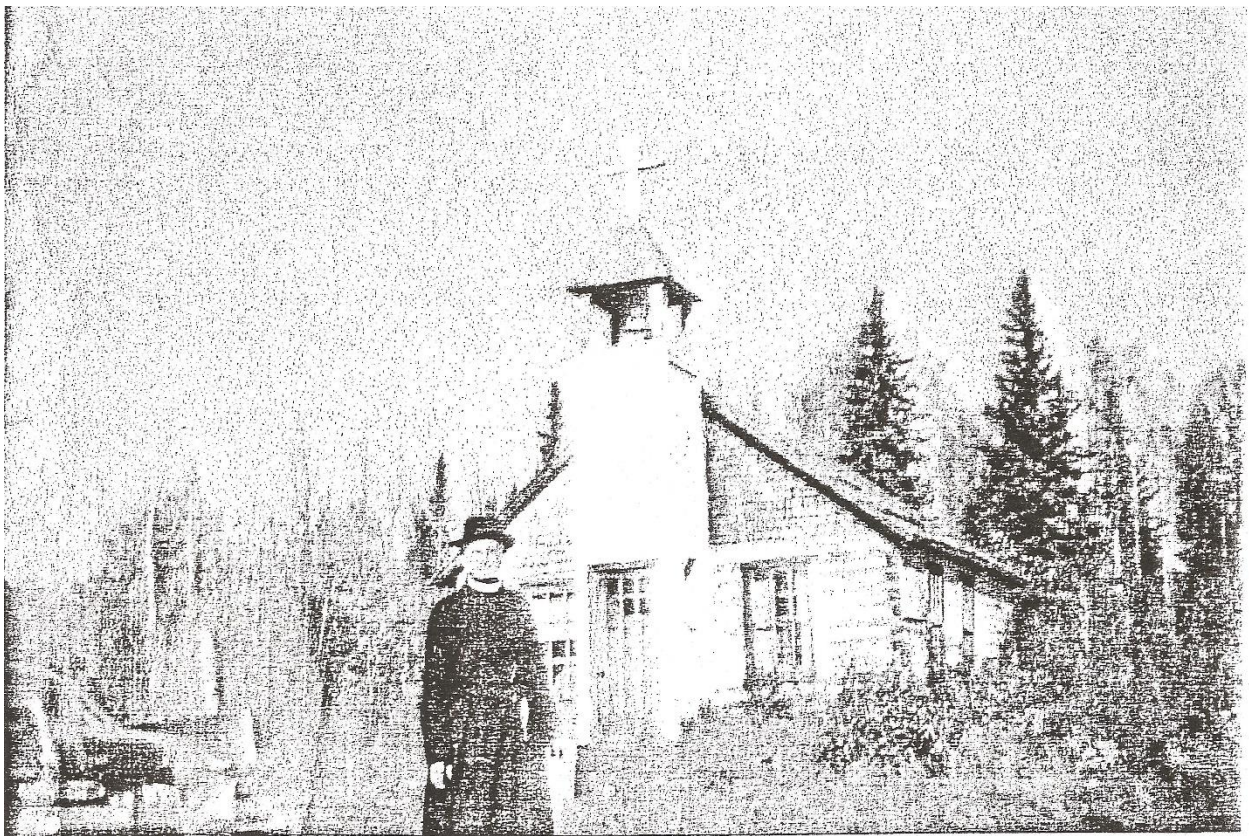


# ***The Church of St. Leon le Grand***

## ***A History of the Catholic Church and Early Families of Calling Lake, Alberta***



## PREFACE

*“On this fourth day of the month of March, of the year 1951, I solemnly blessed the church of Calling Lake, under the patronage of St. Leo the Great, pope, in the presence of the Fathers Benedict Guimont, OMI, Superior District of Wabasca and Louis Paul Lachance, OMI, a missionary, and about sixty gathering of the faithful.”*

Henry Routhier, O.M.I.

Bishop Naissitanus

Coadjutor Vicar Apostolate of Grouard

*\*Translated from the dedication document provided by Rose Cardinal.*

This work, undertaken by Avard Mann and the Kito Sakahekan Seniors Society, is an attempt to provide a brief summary of some of the historical events of the Calling Lake community, in particular, the history of the first Catholic Church built in Calling Lake in the late 1940s. This church is still standing and it is the community's desire that it be restored and dedicated a historic site under Alberta Culture's Historic Places program.

This history also starts to paint a picture of early settlers in the area. As such, it relies on a number of interviews, publications and other resources that provide some information about the area and for which we are grateful. Note however, that the Calling Lake area has a rich and varied history, and this work barely scratches the surface. At a minimum, we hope it provokes others to undertake more thorough works in the future.

**Cover Picture:** Reverend Father Habay, Oblate Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.), in front of the Calling Lake Church in September 1962. Provided courtesy the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan.

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## TIMELINE

Date	Event
Pre- 1700s	Nomadic peoples use the lake and its resources seasonally.
Late 1700s	Cree, Métis, European fur-traders and missionaries are present in the Calling Lake area.
Late 1890s	Families come from Lac La Biche and Lesser Slave Lake to settle at Calling Lake.
1890	Adelaide Giroux Mayas is baptized in Calling Lake by Reverend J.B. Giroux.
1896	A Roman Catholic mission is established at Wabasca by Reverend J.B. Giroux.
1899	The Treaty Commission stops at the mouth of the Calling River.
1903	Jean Baptiste Gambler and Adelaide Giroux Mayas are married at Calling Lake by the Reverend J.B. Giroux, OMI.
1910	Calling Lake becomes an outpost of Athabasca's <i>Revillon Freres</i> trading post.
1913	The Dominion Telegraph opens a telegraph station at Calling Lake.
1916-1917	New settlers arrive including the Crawfords, Gislasons and McKinnons.
1917	The road between Athabasca and Calling Lake is completed by Oscar Crawford and crew.
1918	The McIntosh and Fredericks arrive at Calling Lake from Lac La Biche.
1919	A postal service is started by Mr. McIntosh.
1920s	More homesteaders arrive including the Bentleys, Bowers, Clapiches and Tanasuiks.
1921	The first telephone line is installed with telephones at the Gorman's and Crawford's.
1924	Parents build the first school building.
1930-31	Mr. Day and Mr. Joe Uchtyl blaze a new road that is a more direct route to Athabasca.
1948	A small, log Roman Catholic Church is built in Calling Lake.
1940s	The fish Inspector is Ludwig Silver.
1943	Frank Crawford sets up a lumber mill north of the Calling River bridge.
1945	Fur farming (mink, martin and fox) becomes a major activity.
1952	The Athabasca Bridge is officially opened.
1955	The Ellefson lumber mill provides a new opportunity for local employment.
1955	Lakeshore cabin properties are made available by the Provincial Government.
1955	The Mennonite Service Unit arrives in Calling Lake.
1958	The road to Sandy Lake is completed by an oil exploration company.
1962	A new Catholic Church is built in Calling Lake.
1966	The power line from Athabasca is built by Calgary Power.

## CHAPTER 1 ~ INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a community; or rather it is many stories which together describe the creation of a community. Calling Lake is, at this time, a thriving centre which maintains its links with the past through its senior residents and their families; at the same time welcoming those who see commercial opportunities and those who appreciate the natural and recreational advantages of the lake and its surroundings.

Additionally, the community of Calling Lake is looking at restoring the original Catholic Church built in the community in the late 1940s. Restoring this building, and uncovering its story, is an important part of local history. Thus, we set out to find out more...



## CHAPTER 2 ~ FIRST PEOPLES

Calling Lake was given its name because of the sounds it makes when it freezes in the winter: these sounds are often heard echoing for a long distance. At least several hundred years before the missionaries turned their attention to this area, Canada's Aboriginal peoples likely inhabited the shores of Calling Lake.

The occupation of Alberta is believed to have occurred at some point after the end of the last ice age and the withdrawal of the great ice sheets about 11,000 years ago. First people may have migrated from the north-west through an ice-free corridor between ice sheets, entering the plains of North America. Or they may have travelled down the west coast before moving inland. Today, there is still much to be uncovered about the origin of Alberta's earliest people.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of how they got here, over many centuries, various populations developed different characteristics and languages and became identified with specific areas. Eventually, inhabitants of northern Alberta were identified as Athabaskan speaking Beaver, Sarsi and Slaves. Evidence left by early peoples included cutting tools, projectiles and scrapers made by chipping and shaping different types of stone. Some of the early sites with such evidence in northern Alberta include Vilna, Lac La Biche, and Lake Athabasca. However, some tools found at these northern sites resemble those found at pre-historic campsites on the prairie, suggesting these people also had contacts with those of the central and southern prairies.

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<sup>1</sup> There are many academic publications on Alberta's archaeological history but for a good overview, see *Current Evidence allows Multiple Models for the Peopling of the Americas* by [Potter et al.](#) 2018.



Evidence of early occupation at Calling Lake was found at sites near the Calling River in the course of studies carried out in 1964-67 by Dr. Ruth Gruhn of the University of Alberta (Gruhn 1981). Excavations took place on Mr. Ken Sutton's property. Several hundred finished artifacts were recovered including: spear points, arrowheads, scrapers, micro blades and adze blades. Most were made of locally found quartzite, quartz and black chert. The great number of stone chips at one site indicated that major work was done there to produce tools and projectile points. In addition, traces of bone recovered confirmed that fish, deer, moose, elk and beaver had been processed for food, clothing or shelter. Fire burnt rock and charcoal indicated cooking sites. Researchers consider these sites as characteristic of seasonal hunting or fishing camps and that the people using them were either nomadic or split off periodically from another larger group. Although samples were small, radiocarbon dating of these materials yielded figures of 365 years before present (1600 AD), 1190 bp and 1150bp (800 AD). Elders of Calling Lake talk about an oral tradition that says First Nations people followed a migration pattern, living at Calling Lake for a time to fish off the lake and then moving to Rock Island to hunt.<sup>2</sup>

Looking at more recent history, by the 1700s, it is thought that most of the resident population of Calling Lake Beaver Indigenous peoples had moved to the west to occupy the land in the Peace River area. More recent inhabitants of the area were Woodland Cree, largely from the Lac La Biche area.<sup>3</sup> By this time, trade routes were expanding throughout the area as the Hudson's Bay brought traders, settlers, missionaries and Aboriginals from the east, who in turn spread out from established settlements like Lac La Biche to hunt, fish, farm and trade in unoccupied lands such as Calling Lake. The Calling River, which leaves Calling Lake at the southeast corner of the lake, meandering east until it discharges to the larger Athabasca River, connects this area to a major waterway – the transportation corridor of the period.

These early fur traders sometimes camped at Calling Lake long enough to catch their winter supply of fish. Some European fur traders intermarried with the Woodland Cree, creating a number of Métis inhabitants who continued to be involved in fishing, trapping, and freighting throughout the Athabasca-Calling Lake-Wabasca areas. Those inhabitants that stayed to settle in the Calling Lake area laid the foundation for the community of today. Descendants of these families, including the Cardinals, Gamblers, Grandebois, Jacobs, Powder and Warnique's continue to constitute an integral element of the present community.

In the late 1800s, the federal government negotiated Treaty 8.<sup>4</sup> The treaty was initially signed by the Woodland Cree at Grouard, and then signed in other communities including Wabasca (in 1899 by Chief Joseph Bigstone). With the signing of the Treaty, several "Indian Reserves" were established including Jean Baptiste Gambler Reserve at Calling Lake.

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication Avar Mann as well as notes from the May 5, 2011 Calling Lake Historical Celebration workshop.

<sup>3</sup> This concept is consistent with statements by the local Cree that their ancestors, coming from Lac La Biche in the early 1800s, found the Calling Lake area deserted. Av Mann, personal communication.

<sup>4</sup> For information on Treaty 8, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_8).

Charles Mair wrote about this area as he passed through it in 1899 with the Treaty Commission.<sup>5</sup> He commented on the need for an improved wagon road (“instead of the present dog-trail”) from Wabasca to Rock Island Lake, past Calling Lake and on to the Athabasca Landing. He also described the Commission’s stop at the mouth of the Calling River – one of their points of distribution of scrip payments – and of meeting one of Calling Lake’s oldest inhabitants, Marie Rose Gladue. Mr. Mair remarked that the common language spoken at that time was mostly Cree with a bit of English and French.

After Alberta became a province in 1905, the area northeast of Lesser Slave Lake, including Calling Lake, was placed under the administration of Improvement District 17 East (North). In 1995, it was incorporated as the Municipal District of Opportunity. In the late 1950s, the government opened Calling Lake to “Cottagers” and lots were drawn for and developed over the next 10 years or so. As the municipality developed and as land was made available by various means, it made it possible for more people to stay and the community started to take on the character as we know it today.

Today, approximately 300 people live in the Hamlet of Calling Lake.<sup>6</sup> Another 250 members of the Bigstone Cree Nation live on Jean Baptiste Gambler Indian Reserve No. 183, located on the east Shore of Calling Lake.



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<sup>5</sup> For more about the Treaty Commission, see *Through the Mackenzie Basin* by Charles Mair and R. MacFarlane, William Briggs publisher, 1908.

<sup>6</sup> See the Calling Lake [2016 census profile](#) and the Jean Baptiste Gambler 183 [2016 Census profile](#).

## CHAPTER 3 ~ EARLY SETTLER LIFE

Homestead records from the early 1900's show three or four families already settled in the area and applications from families in Lac La Biche area for land on which to pursue farming, hunting, fishing and trapping.

In 1916, a number of settlers began arriving in the Calling Lake area – lured by the prospect of carving out a living by fishing and trapping. Jacob Crawford and Gisli O. Gislason arrived to undertake commercial fishing activities on the lake. George McKinnon also arrived and became a well-known trapper. Crawford's sons, Oscar and Stanley followed their father to Calling Lake and at various times, one or both were involved in fishing, running a store and a sawmill. Their first year, Oscar took a crew and completed the 45-mile road between Athabasca and Calling Lake.

More settlers came to Calling Lake in the 1920s and 1930s including the McIntosh's, Uchtyl's and many others. Nick and Rose Tanasiuk carved a home out of the local wilderness, first at Rock Island Lake and later at Calling Lake.<sup>7</sup> Most settled on the east side of the lake, but in 1933, the Samuelson's built on the west side of the lake.

To feed their families and make a living, these first families undertook many commercial ventures. Many tried their hand at trapping and fur-trading. Some utilized wild hay meadows to raise livestock and eventually cleared enough land to plant crops. Chester Read Day or "Buffalo Bill" tried to establish a large ranch at Calling Lake, bringing in a number of cattle and putting up tons of hay. But in the end, the northern climate proved too harsh, and this venture was not successful.

Ice fishing was good for bringing in some extra cash over the winter. In 1923, high quality whitefish could be caught, packed on ice (not frozen) and taken to Athabasca by horse and wagon (4 days round trip). In Athabasca, the fish were sold to the Athabasca Fish Company, for transport and sale to markets in Edmonton, Winnipeg, and as far away as New York.

In 1926, James McIntosh became one of the first fish buyers at Calling Lake, followed later by Stan Crawford. McIntosh would eventually buy a plane, hiring Joe Irwin as pilot, to fly fish in from surrounding lakes, then in to Athabasca, where it was inspected, boxed and trucked to Edmonton and put on the rail. One plane load contained 700 pounds of fish and could be flown round trip to Athabasca

### *Early Settlers ~ Nick and Rose Tanasiuk*

Nick and Rose Tanasiuk were the first pioneers at Rock Island Lake (30 miles north of Calling Lake) arriving in 1920. They had to build bridges and roads to get there.

Many folks remember how the Tanasiuk brothers came to Calling Lake for school. They lived in a small cabin south of White's Creek (today known as Two Mile Creek) and walked home 30 miles on weekends!

After 26 years of trapping, fur-trading, ranching, farming and a few other activities, the Tanasiuks moved to Calling Lake in 1946 where they ran a store (Nick's General Store) and dance hall. The store later became the Moosehorn Market. Today, the Tanasiuk name lives on in the *Tanasiuk Recreation Area and Campground* at Rock Island Lake.

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<sup>7</sup> See A Place Called Rock Island Lake, written by Nick Tanasiuk (copy provided by Av Mann).



in one hour. Hay Lake, southeast of Calling Lake, used to be an airstrip where float planes could land to bring fish in. One such plane loaded with fish and piloted by Walter Kilbough, crashed in the Pelican Mountains.

Throughout the 1920s, fishermen were paid from 1.5 – 3.5¢ per pound but the price in New York was as high as a dollar! The fishing season started December 1 and went through until the end of March. By the late 1920s, there were as many as 30 outfits (3 men units) working the lake and by 1932, the lake had been fished out. That same year, approximately 13 million whitefish eggs were brought from the government hatchery at Slave Lake and released into Calling Lake to restore the fishery.

The fishery also provided food for local fur farmers. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, several local individuals, including Chris Schmelzle, Sam McKelvey and Mabel Overholt raised cross foxes (red and silver foxes). At one point, the Gislasons operated a “Fitch and Fox” farm. Fur farming became a major economic activity in the 1940s when mink and martin became popular. Mr. McIntosh has the first mink ranch. Crawford’s also tried mink for a while. Mr. Ken Sutton had the first martin ranch.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Early Settlers – The McIntosh and Frederick Families***

Mr. James McIntosh brought his family to the Calling Lake area from Lac La Biche, in 1918. The family spent their first winter on the north end of the lake where they bought fish and furs from the locals. Later the first fish plant would be operated by Mr. McIntosh who also owned the first vehicles in the area (a jeep and truck) and the first airplane (a Robin purchased in 1929). He also operated a steam engine power saw mill.

Another family, the Fredericks, travelled with the McIntosh’s from Lac La Biche. Mrs. Peggy Fredericks parents, Happy and Katherine Powder, and sister Sophie (and Benjamin) Cardinal, were already living at Calling Lake.

## **CHAPTER 4 ~ PROGRESS COMES TO CALLING LAKE**

With an increase in settlers, came the increasing need for services. In 1913, the Dominion Telegraph ran a line through Calling Lake and a telegraph station was soon opened (with later stations at Gorman’s, Crawford’s and McIntosh’s). In 1919, James McIntosh started a post office, delivering the mail from Athabasca to Calling Lake twice a month. Mail carrier services were taken over by Gisli Gislason in the 1930s, and later by his son Jake (by horse in summer and sleigh in winter).

The road at this time was corduroy (made of planed poles laid side by side to avoid sinking) surrounded by muskeg: almost impassible in a wet summer! To improve road transportation between these communities, Oscar Crawford was made road foreman in 1919-20 and vastly improved



<sup>8</sup> See Sutton, Ken. 19xx. Bad Storms on Calling Lake, a collection of Tales by Mr. Ken Sutton <http://digicon.athabasca.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/AthaArch&CISOPTR=2237&REC=7>

the time required for a roundtrip. In 1930, Mr. Day and Mr. Joe Uchtyl blazed a new road that was a more direct route to Athabasca.

In 1921, the Gorman's and Crawford's were the first families to get phone services in Calling Lake. But it was too costly to maintain so the Government sold it to J.H. McIntosh (Mr. Mac). He also found it was costly to run so he replaced it with a commercial wireless station. The first school in Calling Lake was established in Gislason's store on the Calling River in 1917. Mr. Arthur Cooke was the first teacher. In 1924, Mr. McIntosh travelled to Edmonton to negotiate with the Province: the parents would build a log school and provide a \$100 towards a teacher's salary. In return, the province would supply a teacher for five months of the year. The first school building was built three miles north of Gislasons and R.A. Hicks was the first teacher. Mrs. Cloe Day was the teacher in 1931-32 and remembers organizing box socials, Christmas concerts and track meets. By 1962, the school had grown to four rooms.

By the 1940s, forestry was beginning to replace fishing and trapping. In 1943, Frank Crawford purchased a timber berth immediately north of the Calling Lake bridge where he sets up a lumber mill.<sup>9</sup> The mill changed locations many times over the next few decades. Bissell and Mikkelson also operated mills in the area. The Ellefson lumber mill opened in 1955 and operated until 1966 when it was sold to Federated Co-op.

The road from Athabasca north was now graveled (but wouldn't see pavement for some time). The opening of a new bridge in 1951 at Athabasca would have greatly improved transportation as well as the shipment of goods from these mills. (Previously, one had to ferry across in the summer or wait for an ice bridge in the winter). It also opened up the area to tourism. Lakeshore cabin properties were made available by the Provincial Government in 1955. Mr. Day built the first resort cabins at the lake. The completion of the road to Sandy Lake by an oil exploration company further extended the economic potential of the area. In 1966, Calling Lake truly entered the modern era receiving electricity from a new power line built by Calgary Power from Athabasca.

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<sup>9</sup> For a good article on Frank Crawford's mill, see page 12 of [Trails & Tails newsletter](#). Issue 10 Feb. 2011.

## CHAPTER 5 ~ A CHURCH IS BUILT

The Roman Catholic Church, as a physical entity, came rather late to Calling Lake, the first church building not completed until 1948 and this not blessed until 1951. To the south, a Catholic church had been established at Athabasca in 1891 - half a century earlier - although it had no permanent staff until 1905.

To the north, Father Alphonse Desmarais was the first Catholic missionary in the area known today as Wabasca-Desmarais, arriving in 1891. Reverend J.B. Giroux established a permanent mission at Wabasca in 1896. Giroux was also a witness to the signing of Treaty 8 in 1899 in Wabasca. Many other *Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)*<sup>10</sup> followed, although records of their challenges seem scant until Father Rogier Vandersteene, an oblate priest based at Wabasca in 1946-49, published a book about his experience in 1955, titled *Wabasca: Ten Years of Indian Life*. Father Vandersteene was also an artist and an excellent reflection of his beliefs and his art can be seen online at [http://oblates.library.ualberta.ca/Many\\_Thresholds.htm](http://oblates.library.ualberta.ca/Many_Thresholds.htm).

### ***The Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan***

The Catholic community of Calling Lake would originally have been under the authority of the Vicariate Apostolic of Athabasca Mackenzie, established on 8 April 1862 as a suffragan of Edmonton. However, the Vicariate Apostolic of Athabasca was split off on July 3, 1901 and renamed as the Vicariate Apostolic of Grouard on March 15, 1927. It was later elevated to the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan on July 13, 1967. For more about the Archdiocese, see <http://www.archgm.ca/parishes.html>.

Although a permanent structure was lacking, this is not to say there were not efforts to service the Calling Lake area prior to 1948. According to the *Athabasca Herald*, Jean Baptiste Gambler married his wife Adelaide Mayas (daughter of Jean Baptiste Mayas and Marie Anne Misinisikapaw) in Calling Lake in 1903. They were married by Oblate J. B. Giroux who had also baptized Adelaide in Calling Lake in 1890. This event, and others like it, would have taken place in local Calling Lake homes.

### **The Gamblers**

Jean Baptiste Gambler was born in Lac La Biche and moved to Calling Lake as early as 1885. He married twice and had 20 children, all born at Calling Lake. In 1915, Gambler applied for a parcel of land at Calling Lake which became Indian Reserve #183. He and his wife lived on this land and had a garden, chickens and other livestock. They also hunted for moose or deer and traveled to Wabasca or Athabasca for other supplies. After seeing many changes in the area, including the opening of the first bridge over the Athabasca, Gambler died in 1956.

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<sup>10</sup> For more about the oblates, see <http://oblatesinthewest.library.ualberta.ca/eng/media/b-bio-vandersteeneR.html>.

In 1908, Reverend Pétour, based at Wabasca, attempted to build a church at Calling Lake beside the cemetery. However, his efforts were destroyed by a W. Webbs, who owned land adjacent to the proposed church site. No other explanation of this dispute survives today. Priests from the Wabasca area or from Smith continued to provide services to the community. Mrs. McIntosh recalls *"The priest would come only once a year from Wabasca by dog team. He would camp here and stay for about a week. There was no church built, and he would have church in different homes."*<sup>11</sup>

Church resources were likely another reason for the delay in establishing a permanent base in Calling Lake. In 1905, the official status of the Catholic Church in Canada and the United States was changed from being a "mission" church, and thus receiving funding for its operation, to being an "independent" church having to finance its own operation. This change presented great difficulties in many areas. Additionally, with the cathedral built at McLennan in 1946, local church resources were likely strained. Nonetheless, in 1941, Bishop Langlois gave Reverend Guimont, then stationed at the mission in Wabasca-Desmarais, approval to build a church of "squared off logs" at Calling Lake.



The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in McLennan, Alberta.

#### **Bishop Ubald Langlois**

Father Ubald Langlois was a priest for 39 years and a bishop for 15. He was born January 24, 1887 in Bourget, France and was ordained as a Priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on June 6, 1914. Langlois was appointed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vicar Apostolic of Grouard in 1938. In 1941, he approved the building of a catholic church in Calling Lake.

Bishop Langlois died in Grouard in 1953. His body was laid out at St. Pierre in Montréal. A service was held at St. Joachim in Edmonton before he was buried at Grouard on Sept. 26, 1953.

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=8366512>



Father Guimont was a young man at the time, having just taken his first vows in Quebec in 1935. He was ordained in 1938. (He died in Quebec in 1978.) Although he had received approval to build the church in 1941, it took a few years to acquire the funds needed. In 1943, Father Guimont received a donation of \$140.00 (and an engraved chalice) from the Canadian Fathers of Extension (today known as Catholic Missions in Canada). This group of Ministers raised funds, largely from central urban Canada, to support

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<sup>11</sup> As relayed by Mrs. McIntosh to the 1963 Graduation Class.

the development of missions in more rural areas of the country.<sup>12</sup> "Father Guimont at Desmarais sent us a lovely letter of thanks after he received \$140.00 and an engraved chalice."<sup>13</sup>



**Father Guimont**

<http://www.mbsl.qc.ca/cyberd.php?e=I2Y3N2Ex>

One can only speculate, but presumably these funds helped to pay for the construction supplies required for the chapel to be built at Calling Lake the following year. The Church had already acquired the land many years previous. Although details vary, the story goes that Benjamin Cardinal<sup>14</sup> and his son Clopheus filed, or applied, on the 1/4 section on which the church now stands. Clopheus had five children when his wife died. He then remarried a widow who also had five children. The widow had Treaty rights so her children could attend the mission residential school at Wabasca. Clopheus was non-Treaty, however, so his children were not eligible. Clopheus wanted his children to attend school so he provided land for a church in Calling Lake in return for the Church accepting his children into school.

In 1944, building specifications approved by the Church were provided to the Tanasiuk brothers, Jim and Mike, and a contract for \$200 was signed. That winter, the brothers felled and skidded the logs to the building site and stripped off the bark with long knives. The logs were then left to dry. Eventually, the logs were hewn into the desired length, shaped by hand with broad axes and construction begun.

On Oct. 10, 1947, the small chapel was completed. It was a modest one-room square-log structure lacking any amenities like indoor plumbing but likely heated by a wood stove and a good supply of firewood. Some care was taken to complete some of its finer details like the dove-tail log ends, the cupola bearing a wooden cross, and the wooden shakes covering the cupola and gable ends. Both the inside and outside were chinked and six windows were installed.



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<sup>12</sup> "... in September 23, 1908, Monsignor E. Alfred Burke from the Diocese of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, founded *The Catholic Church Extension Society of Canada*, to raise funds to help 'cultivate the missionary spirit in the clergy and the people,' and 'to preserve the Faith of Jesus Christ among Catholic immigrants' then resettling in the Canadian West. For more information on Catholic Missions in Canada, see <http://www.cmic.info/our-history>.

<sup>13</sup> Article: *The meeting will come to order: a question before the house*, by the President, in *The Canadian Register*, December 11, 1943.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Cardinal was an interesting figure. Born in 1870 at the Lac La Biche mission, he married Sophie LaPoudre in 1893. The couple had several children and spent some time in the Edmonton area before moving to Calling Lake. Benjamin passed away at the age of 100 years July 1970, having spent at least 65 of those years in Calling Lake.



Three and a half years later, on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1951, this church was blessed as the Church of St. Léon le Grand (St. Leon the Great or known locally as, St. Leo's) by Bishop Henri Routhier. Francis and Rose Cardinal, residents of Calling Lake since the 1940s, still have the dedication document bearing a picture of the original building as well as an interior picture showing the altar. From this document, we know that both Father Guimont and Father Louis Paul Lachance were also present. Lachance was another young missionary born in Quebec in 1916, ordained in 1941 (who passed away in St. Albert, Alberta in 2009 at the age of 93).



Interior and altar of St. Leon the Great Catholic Church, Calling Lake. Photo courtesy Rose Cardinal.

### ***Bishop Henri Routhier***

Henri Routhier was the first Catholic bishop to have been born in Alberta (in 1900). The son of Constable Jean Charles Routhier, Henri grew up in Pincher Creek, southern Alberta. Constable Routhier was the son of the prominent Quebec lawyer Basil Routhier who was one of the composers of the French version of 'O Canada'. The Constable dropped out of law school to join the North West Mounted Police at the time of the Riel Rebellion before moving to Alberta to raise his family.

Young Henri undertook his studies at the University of Alberta's Faculty Saint-Jean between 1913 and 1918. He also received an honorary degree from this institution. Henri joined the church and was appointed Co-adjutor Vicar Apostolic June 15, 1945, 4th Vicar Apostolic of Grouard on September 18, 1953, and 1st Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan on 13 July 1967, before resigning on November 21, 1972. Routhier died at Foyer Youville in St. Albert, Alberta on September 19, 1989. Services were held in both St. Albert and McLennan before he was buried on Sept. 28, 1989 in St. Albert.

At some point after the blessing took place in 1951 (but before Father Habay visited in 1962 – see picture on title page), a church bell was acquired and this addition required some modifications. Francis Cardinal can remember how heavy the bell was. Although it has since gone missing, it was probably very similar to the bell on the current church, which is cast iron and made in the late 1880s by the C.S. Bell and Company of Hillsboro, Ohio. To accommodate this weight, the cupola was removed and replaced with a bell tower, which also added a new entrance way (portico).





Over the years, various repairs to the church were made. At some point, the bell tower was again removed and the cedar shakes on the gable ends were replaced with carefully scalloped, vertical boards. Other modifications likely occurred but the essential character of the original building has remained.



## CHAPTER 6 ~ CHURCH ACTIVITIES

The old Catholic Church at Calling Lake was never staffed full time. Priests from Wabasca or Smith, travelling by dog sled in the winter and horse by summer, came up from time to time to perform needed services including weddings, christenings and funerals. At first, these services were performed in people's homes. Later on, they were performed in the little log chapel.

Activities in the church included all the usual things that occur in a community. Children were baptized, couples were married, and the deceased were given prayers and buried. At some point, Catechism classes were conducted by the Reverend Sisters and a group of local children were given their First Communion in the log church. The Calling Lake community was also part of a larger Catholic community and several Calling Lake residents also travelled to events such as the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage.

As progress came to Calling Lake, the church adapted as well. In 1962, Reverend E. Fournier became the first resident Roman Catholic priest at Calling Lake Spring 1966). Perhaps to better house his the Reverend constructed a new church at Calling church is immediately south of the old log church blessed by the same Bishop (Bishop Routhier) in 1963. The new church was first used for worship on the Feast of Christ the King, October 25, 1962. Today, St. Léon le Grand (or St. Leo's) offers mass services twice a month.



(Fall 1962 – congregation, Lake. This and was

## CHAPTER 7 ~ OTHER DENOMINATIONS

The Catholic Church is not the only religious institution to have sent missionaries into northern Alberta and this area was likely visited by other denominations. The Anglicans had established St. John's mission at Wabasca in 1894. However, none seemed to have had a permanent residence in Calling Lake until August 1955, when the Mennonite Voluntary Service arrived.



**The Mennonite Chapel built in Calling Lake in 1956.**

The Mennonite Voluntary Service was an outreach program for northern Alberta, created by the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference in collaboration with the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities headquartered in Elkhart, Indiana. Although they looked at a number of potential northern communities, their choice to set up in Calling Lake came through a number of coincidences.

Willis Yoder, a mission worker at Mirror Landing (later renamed Smith), became aware of plans to relocate the Mirror Landing Sawmill to the remote community of Calling Lake. At this time, Calling Lake had its small Roman Catholic log chapel, but no resident priest. Rolland Ellefson, the sawmill manager, was a devout Christian who had established close relations with the mission workers at Mirror Landing. He was concerned about moving his family and providing for the spiritual needs of his workers in a community with no active church. He offered to provide the necessary building materials, to be paid by labour in the sawmill, if the Mennonites would establish a voluntary service program at Calling Lake. The plan was to create a unit consisting of several workers who would serve as teachers, health care and social workers, while also providing spiritual instruction and leadership in a community which lacked such services.

Ike and Millie Glick from Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Richard Gingerich, a young man from Canby Oregon (hoping to avoid the American Military draft by discharging his obligation through service), arrived to build a chapel in Calling Lake in 1956. The church's first minister was Leo Jantzi. This service unit operated in the area until 1969, providing many social services including a health care centre and a nurse, kindergarten, etc. One of its recruits was Hilda (Eby) Crawford, who came from Drake, Saskatchewan to the community as a nurse in 1959 and stayed!<sup>15</sup>

Over a period of 35 years, from 1955 to 1990 the Mennonite Church in Calling Lake made a significant contribution to the community. It was staffed by volunteers with some support from national offices of

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<sup>15</sup> For more about the Mennonite Service Unit, see T.D. Regehr's paper, *Mennonite Voluntary Service Workers in Aboriginal and Métis Communities in Northern Alberta, 1954 – 1970*. University of Calgary.

the church. Its main aim was to strengthen the community awareness through social programs, health services, and training in industrial trades and domestic duties such as cooking, canning and gardening.

A small van was used to transport members throughout the community, bringing children to the kindergarten they operated and to transport sick or injured to Athabasca for treatment. One of the volunteers, Ike Glick, had a small airplane which facilitated contact with the satellite mission at Chipewyan Lakes and was used on occasion for medical evacuations.

On the economic side, one of the main aims of the church was to help to make its new members financially independent. The sawmill operated by one of the volunteers provided income for several workers as well as training which would make it possible for them to be employed elsewhere. Some were engaged as well in commercial fishing.

Many of the projects, like the kindergarten, health services and recreation were eventually taken over by other groups in the community but it is evident that the Mennonite church made a solid contribution in the period when it was active in the community. Many of the volunteers stayed on to become permanent residents after the church transferred its volunteer services to another area.

## **CHAPTER 8 ~ LOOKING FORWARD**

After the new Catholic Church was built, the old one-room log chapel continued to be used for various purposes by the community. The deceased were sometimes laid out for viewing here before their funeral. At one point, it was used for storage. Sadly, over the years, the building has fallen into disrepair. With the trees having overgrown the roof, water has seeped in the logs are badly rotted on the north side.

Although it will take some work, the community is hopeful that the building can be restored, and perhaps incorporated into a museum or other historical venue. Although it wasn't around that long, the little log chapel is an important part of the Calling Lake historical record and should be preserved for future generations.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Alberta Family History Society [www.afhs.ab.ca](http://www.afhs.ab.ca)

Alice B. Donahue Library and Archives Collection (<http://digiport.athabasca.ca/townarchives/>)

Athabasca Archives (member of Archives Society of Alberta [www.archivesalberta.org](http://www.archivesalberta.org) )

Athabasca Bridge Opening

[http://digicon.athabasca.ca/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/AthaArch&CISOPTR=14&CISOBX=1&REC=5](http://digicon.athabasca.ca/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/AthaArch&CISOPTR=14&CISOBX=1&REC=5)

[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can\\_digital\\_collections/athabasca/html/agriculture/index.htm](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/athabasca/html/agriculture/index.htm)

Athabasca Echo (newspaper)

Catholic Church sites:

- <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/blanu.html>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_Catholic\\_Archdiocese\\_of\\_Grouard%E2%80%93McLennan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Archdiocese_of_Grouard%E2%80%93McLennan)
- <http://digicon.athabasca.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/AthaArch&CISOPTR=2479&REC=2>
- Oblates in the West <http://oblatesinthewest.library.ualberta.ca/eng/order/vicariateAtha.html>

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Virtual Museum

[http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm\\_v2.php?id=search\\_record\\_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=387&hs=0&sy=&st=Athabasca&ci=&rd=96490](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm_v2.php?id=search_record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=387&hs=0&sy=&st=Athabasca&ci=&rd=96490)

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