



# Golden Nuggets

## Historic Markerville -a walk down memory lane

**BETH HUISING LIVES ON A FARM WITH HER FAMILY A FEW MILES FROM THE HAMLET OF MARKERVILLE, ALBERTA. AS MUSEUM MANAGER, SHE IS A YEAR ROUND EMPLOYEE AT THE HISTORIC MARKERVILLE CREAMERY MUSEUM, AND SHE STANDS WITH SOME DEDICATED SUMMER STAFF AND AN ARMY OF VOLUNTEERS!**



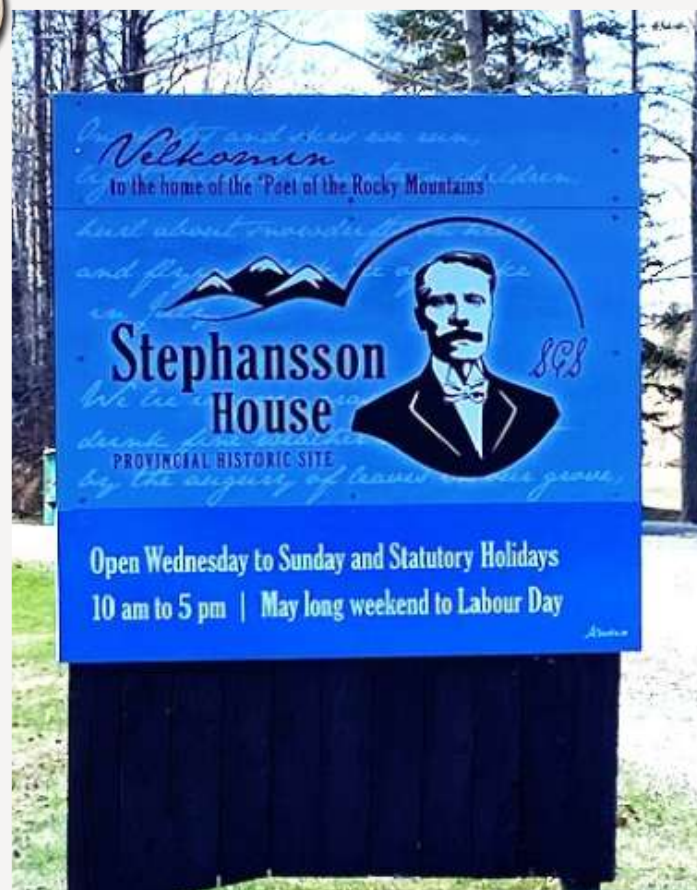
*"We raised our children two miles from here. This hamlet holds a special place in my heart," said Beth.*

There are many year-round tasks to keep the heritage sites bustling, and volunteers show up in droves to support the beloved village. They are Board members, community neighbours, far-flung museum enthusiasts, and descendants of the Icelandic settlers who started the whole endeavour.

Five major attractions in the area, all designated Provincial & Municipal Historic sites, draw thousands of visitors each year. The Creamery Museum, Markerville Lutheran Church, Fensala Hall, Buttermaker's House, and nearby Stephan Stephansson House each share a glimpse into the rich agricultural history of the area and the impact of Icelandic Settlers. Together, the structures represent a unique journey into Alberta's heritage.



"It all started in the late 1880s with a group of 50 Icelanders who settled here," said Beth. "At the time, the federal government was creating creameries to boost local economies. C.P. Marker, who was a dairy commissioner for the Northwest Territories (the area of 'Alberta' was part of the NWT from 1870 until it became a province in 1905), arrived to the creamery in 1902 – the townsite is named after him. During its 70 years of operation, the creamery won numerous awards for the quality of its butter."



According to the interpretive plaques throughout Historic Markerville, creameries were the only industry to enjoy government sponsorship. The Dominion Government offered to supply a butter maker, financial and managerial assistance, to provide loans for equipment and to pay rent on the building. In turn, a local farmers cooperative would erect a building, ensure adequate water supply and have at least 400 cows in the area. Thus, 34 farmers formed the Tindastoll Butter and Cheese Manufacturing Association in 1899.

When the creamery closed in 1972 the structure and the other landmarks were left to deteriorate, until the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society was formed two years later to begin their extensive restoration projects. The first project was restoring the 1889 homestead of Stephan G. Stephansson, an influential farmer, politician and poet. The restoration took several years and upon completion in 1976, was established as a Provincial museum with visitors from all over the world.

The group then turned their attention to the creamery that was 'well worn' from the years of neglect. In 1986, the Markerville Creamery reopened its doors, restored to its 1932 appearance and transformed into a museum, coffee shop and community gathering spot.

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# STROLL THROUGH YESTERYEAR

***"The Creamery Museum is set up to look like it did in the 1930s and it is the second oldest creamery in Alberta," said Beth. "It had a huge impact on Central Alberta and many farm families in the area brought their cream to the site for decades while it was in operation. They would pull up with their horse and wagons full of dairy cans of cream. It took a lot of cream to produce the volume of butter they were churning out in the creamery."***



*Icelandic baking day at Historic Markerville*



*Antique cream cans have become a children's train at the museum!*

The museum's large churner could hold 2,000 pounds of cream at a time! It would separate out the buttermilk, which was often fed to the area's pigs, but the whole point was the 1,000 pounds of butter that would be produced with each production. It would be cut into 50-pound squares for deliveries farther away or sold in a brick-size that we are more familiar with for those closer. Small towns throughout Central Alberta, along with Calgary and Red Deer, were regular destinations for the prized butter.

"We heard stories that in WWII it was sent overseas because of the shortage there. It was stored in the Cold Room here at the creamery, with water from the Medicine River. The Markerville Creamery is the big draw here, but this area has other fascinating landmarks, lots of nature to explore and a peaceful atmosphere. We're so happy to let people know what's waiting here for them when they visit!" said Beth.

A trip to Historic Markerville will also take you to:



...restored Buttermaker's House, built in 1913 and restored in 2020, now houses a popular artist in residence program that opens its doors to writers, musicians, painters, performers and more!



...busy Fensala Hall, the site of numerous concerts and events, is a designated Provincial Historic site - also the longest continuously operating community hall in Alberta.



...the restored Lutheran Church, built in 1907. Reverend Hjalmsjon arrived from Iceland a few years prior and became the only full-time resident minister until he passed away in 1950. The church is now used for special events and services.

There is also the nearby Tindastoll cemetery, officially established in 1903. The Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society gained legal ownership in 2008 after the local community board requested their assistance in caring for the cemetery. Of course, they undertook an extensive restoration of the site.

Alongside the museum structures, the hamlet of Markerville is bursting with artistry through its studios and streets. Yes, there is a tandem bike hanging from some trees along the river!



The Museum entryway was the coal room, required to keep the fire going 24/7 to run the huge boiler that ran the steam powered equipment. Beth showed how the 20 horse power engine, fed by the boiler, supplied all the power and steam for the creamery. That hard work and gumption remains evident in the area to this day!

This hamlet of 40 residents is deceptive, as hundreds of volunteers and thousands of guests are also part of the community. You've got to experience it to understand – and you're just in time! The busy summer season is underway – it's time to explore!

And if you wind up becoming a huge fan like I did, a \$25 membership provides an Honorary Icelandic designation. Gleði! (Icelandic for a 'general sense of joy, pleasure and happiness')