

Author fulfills lifelong dream with history books

BY Dan Singleton, MVP Staff

DIDSBURY - Jerry Janzen has fulfilled a lifelong dream of writing a history book on Didsbury's colourful history - in fact, he's written a 15-book series on the subject and has recently donated the works to the Didsbury Museum.

"It developed over 50 years, starting when I was 15, although the bulk of intensity was over a period of eight years," Janzen told the *Albertan*.

Janzen's 2,300 page series is titled *Didsbury, the First 80 Years*, with the books covering the period stretching from the start of settlement in 1898 to 1975.

The books detail Didsbury's history, as well as the history of some of the surrounding communities in Mountain View County. It covers everything from schools, churches, roads, rivers, rails, businesses, and the lives of the pioneers and residents who built the community.

Janzen, who now lives in Calgary, grew up in Didsbury. He explained that writing the books involved many discussions with members of his family, as well as much research from many sources.

"Unusual in today's world, I had an intense interest as a teenager, and luckily audio-taped my grandparents

telling their life story," he said. "My family arrived (in the district) in 1912. That was the seed. From there, I had many discussion with family members.

"Because I worked for the Didsbury Pioneer and Didsbury Booster (early local newspapers), I had access to all that existed since 1903. Other sources included the Glenbow Museum and other publications."

As part of the project, he accumulated 1,600 photos and cross-referenced 3,600 newspapers.

"Cross referencing newspaper information with details behind photos and family stories allowed me to unmask lost information," he said.

He explained that writing the books started with capturing his childhood, then his parents' history, and then the history of his grandparents and great-grandparents.

"Every bit of information discovered spawned more questions," he said. "Buy my father and mother did live their entire lives there (in the Didsbury district)."

Asked what was his favourite part of writing the books, he said, "Solving puzzles, unearthing lost information, discovering and articulating the 'life and times' of the various eras Didsbury evolved through, and correcting misinformation that has been propagating unchallenged."



Didsbury museum manager Dawn Stewart proudly displays the new 15-book history of Didsbury written by former resident Jerry Jansen, who now lives in Calgary.

Dan Singleton/MVP Staff

In the end he said he hopes the books will help preserve the colourful history of Didsbury and area.

"I am concerned that recent arrivals to Didsbury and the new generations are not interested in history at all and that the work and knowledge may ultimately disappear," he said.

The museum is planning to have an official unveiling of the book series, possibly next month.

"I think the museum wants to do some kind of launch," he said. "The

plan wasn't to sell it. The intention was mainly for self interest, then to capture, preserve and pass on the knowledge."

Dawn Stewart, the Didsbury museum's manager, said the books are available for in-person viewing at the library.

"We are able to do presentations on it but we are to lending out the books," she said. "We were thinking of having a casual come-and-go tea to introduce people to the series and the author."