

MOOSE & STELLA NELLIS

Mentions in [The Daily Herald-Tribune](#), Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada



This Was Yesterday

By ISABEL M. CAMPBELL

"MOOSE" NELLIS, one of the area's earliest pioneers, and always a staunch supporter of the south Peace he helped to settle, made front page news for Herald-Tribune readers that Dec. 2, 1948.

"Completing an 8,000 mile motor trip that brought them close to the Gulf of Mexico, Mr. and Mrs. L.J. **'Moose' Nellis** of Bezanson and Mr. and Mrs. Bill Nellis of Glen Leslie, returned home last week. They visited relatives and friends in Minnesota, Idaho, Arkansas and southern Louisiana. . . But in spite of a wonderful trip in every way there is no place like the Peace River country in which we live and farm, 'Moose' said with emphasis."



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RURAL COMMUNITIES WERE HOPING TO progress from the coal oil lantern-hand milking-wash board-wood burning cookstove era to the envied push-button convenience for their urban brethren.

"A meeting was held at Crystal Creek hall to discuss or explore the possibility of forming an Electrical Power Co-Op which would embrace the area east of Grande Prairie to the Smoky River." the Herald-Tribune of Sept. 29, 1949 chronicled. "L.J. 'Moose' Nellis occupied the chair while Ira McLaughlin, MLA, acted as secretary for the meeting.

George O'Brien, manager of Canadian Utilities Ltd., gave an outline of the procedure to be followed in setting up a power Co-Op . . . and the probable cost of having electric power in the farm homes. It was found that there are about 70 farm homes which could be served by this proposed line.

"Should plans as outlined at the Crystal Creek meeting materialize, history once more would be made as this meeting could be the starting point of what may be the first electrical power co-op north of Edmonton."

Bezanson Team Whips Visitors

By Mrs. Donld Ames

BEZANSON — The Bezanson basketball squad didn't appear too friendly when they played host to the Harry Balfour boys and girls as the girls won 20-10 while the boys won by a whopping 47-14. The next games will be Sexsmith at Bezanson.

"Moose" Nellis celebrated his 79th birthday January 13. To prove that you are only as old as you feel "Moose" is very active at the local curling rink. He is skipping a rink that is showing many younger men just how it should be done.

Roy Robideau is away to Edmonton for medical attention.

Mrs. Leon Repetowski and small child are staying at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Repetowski while Leon is away at work.

New trailblazers and recollections of a Bezanson pioneer who wasn't



ISABEL CAMPBELL
This was Yesterday

When is a pioneer not a pioneer? When he arrives in the South Peace before March 24, 1916 over the just-constructed ED&BC railway instead of over the old Edson Trail.

To **Moose Nellis**, who came into the North on the third train to Grande Prairie, but who lacked only a few weeks to be eligible for distinction as a "pioneer" with inclusion into the history "Pioneers of the Peace" compiled by the Grande Prairie and District Old Timers' Association it was a frequent source of complaint by the man from Minnesota.

"A painter by trade, a lumberman at heart and a bit of an adventurer too, he had left his home in Minnesota to get in on the expected bonanza to accompany a massive pulp and paper development near here," the Daily Herald-Tribune reported June 1, 1966. He homesteaded in 1916 'as close to the old townsite of

Bezanson as I could get - 6½ miles north,' he said.

"For old Bezanson, the future looked pretty rosy that year and most of the land around the four-storey community hall had been taken up by speculators, since an American company had acquired from the federal government all the timber rights to large tracts of forest in the Bezanson district. The company was launching plans for a pulp and paper mill and a sawmill at the junction of the Wapiti and Smoky Rivers.

"The development was contingent on one thing - a railway under construction from Whitecourt to Grande Prairie passing adjacent to the project site.

"Mr. Nellis came. So did World War One. The railway didn't come. And neither did the pulp development. When the province of Alberta took over administration of natural resources the American company lost its timber rights.

"The train and the engine kept running off the track," Mr. Nellis recalls. "Lots of times we could have walked faster than it was travelling."

"In the fall of 1916 he decided to return to Minnesota to get his wife and family, returning in the spring of 1917.

"Although he couldn't come to the Peace Country on it, he remembers sections of the famed Edson Trail which traversed the country near the route followed by Highway 34 east and crossed the Smoky River near the present bridge.

"There used to be a stopping place on the trail a few miles from here. I think the trail turned north and wound through the Kleskun Hills. When I bought my Model T Ford in 1927 we went for a drive along part of the trail. The Model T was gravity fed and we had to back up one of the hills it was so steep.

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Looking Over The South Peace

Moose It Is

"Just call me Moose," the oldtimer declared. So **MOOSE NELLIS** it is. Mr. Nellis who lives on his 1916 homestead about one mile east of Bezanson, says he got the nickname from a brother, but declines to reveal his given Christian name. "If you called me anything else but Moose no one would know who you were talking about," he insists.

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No Farmer!

But Moose Nellis Learned How He Tells The Roving Reporter

BEZANSON (Staff) — When Moose Nellis bundled up his family and headed for the Peace River Country 50 years ago this April, he wasn't planning to farm.

"I had never ploughed a furrow of ground in my life," he says, "until I got up here."

Mr. Nellis was a painter by trade, a lumberman at heart and a bit of an adventurer too when he reached this district.

He had trekked from his home in Minnesota to get in on the expected bonanza which was to accompany a massive pulp and paper development near here.

He homesteaded in 1916 "as close to the old townsite of Bezanson as I could get - that was 6 1/2 miles north."

ROSY FUTURE

For old Bezanson the future looked pretty rosy that year and most of the land around the four-storey community hall had been taken up by speculators.

The idea was this.

An American company had acquired from the federal government all the timber rights to large tracts of forest in the Bezanson district. The company was launching plans for a pulp and paper mill and a saw mill at the junction of the Wapiti and Smoky Rivers a few miles from the old townsite.

The development was contingent on one thing - a railway under construction from Whitecourt to Grande Prairie passing adjacent to the project site.

Mr. Nellis and his father had

done considerable work for the American lumber company developing the project. A friend suggested if Mr. Nellis wanted to get in on the chips, he should head for the Peace Country and settle as close as possible to Bezanson townsite.

NO RAILWAY

Mr. Nellis came. So did World War One. The railway didn't come. And neither did the pulp development. When the province of Alberta took over administration of natural resources, the American company lost its timber rights.

In short, that's the story of why the old townsite of Bezanson no longer exists and why Mr. Nellis made it in the Peace River Country as a farmer.

Mr. Nellis came into the north on the third train to Grande Prairie in the spring of 1916. The trip started at 9 a.m. Monday, April 3 and ended at 7:30 p.m. Friday.

"The train and the engine kept running off the track," Mr. Nellis recalls. "Lots of times we could have walked faster than it was travelling."

"There were a couple of passenger coaches on the train and not much else."

"There was a newsie. We ate all his sandwiches, then won all the money back playing poker with him."

RETURNED FOR FAMILY

In the fall of 1916, Mr. Nellis decided to return to Minnesota and get his wife and family. But first, he purchased a semi-completed barn for \$1 a log and had the material shipped to his homestead for a cabin.

He returned with Mrs. Nellis and two children in the spring of 1917.

Although he didn't come into the Peace River Country on it, Mr. Nellis remembers sections of the famed Edson Trail. He said the trail use to traverse

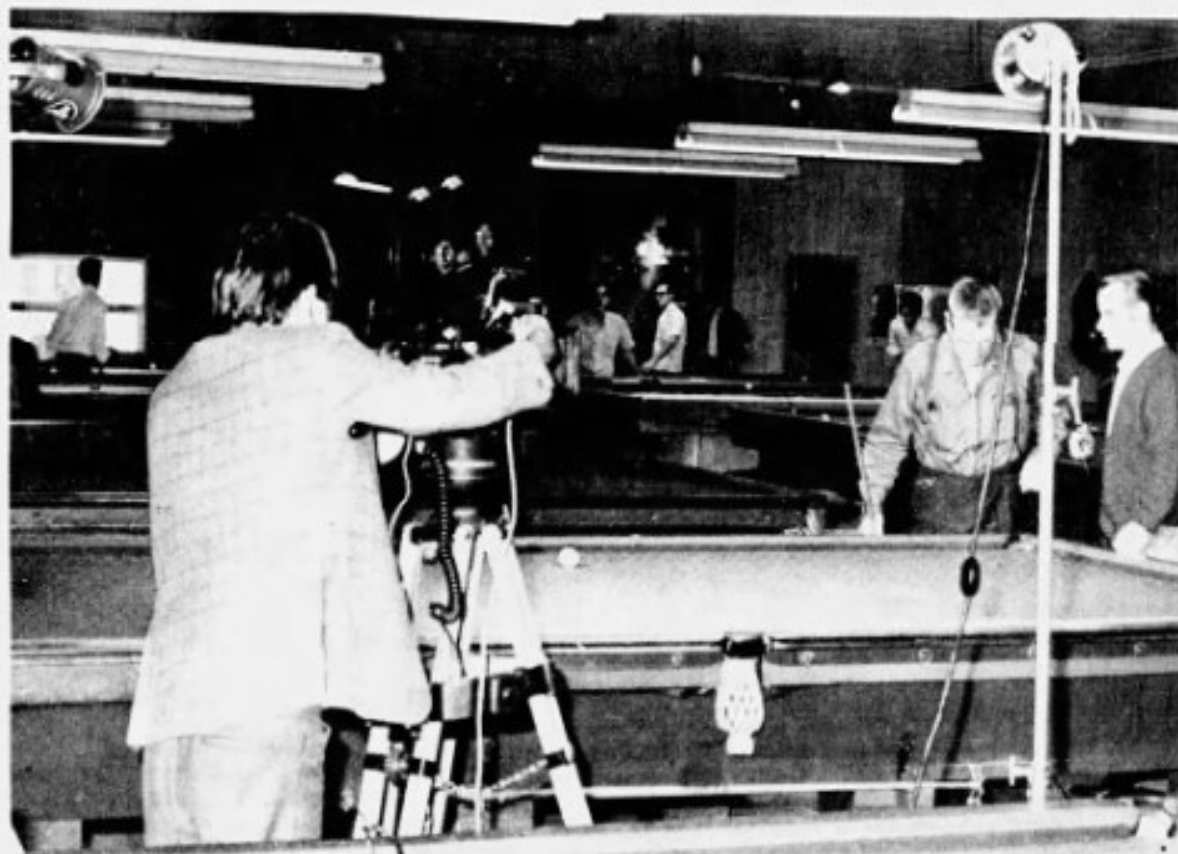
country near the route followed by highway 34 east and crossed the Smoky River near the present bridge.

"There used to be a stopping station on the trail a few miles from here."

"I think the trail turned north a little near here and wound through the Kleskun Hills. When I bought my model T Ford in 1927, we went for a ride along part of the trail - at least they told us it was part of the trail. The model T was gravity feed and we had to back up one of the hills it was so steep."

HAS LICENCE

Mr. Nellis still has a driving licence and a 17-year-old half-ton truck. At 80 years of age, he has to take a driving and medical test every spring but has never had an accident in his life which resulted from a driving error on his part.



Gordon College interviews **Moose Nellis** between shots in the Grande Prairie pool hall.

Salute to Grande Prairie

By BILL GILBERT
of our staff

Grande Prairie and district residents will get an interesting look at their city Labor Day.

The view will be through the lens of a movie camera, and will appear on a CFRN-TV special on the city titled "Salute to Grande Prairie."

The special presentation was filmed in the city this week by cameraman Bob Peterson and interviewer Gordon College.

The pair spent three days in the city, and began their interview with Mayor Elmer Borstad. And the last time the cameras rolled they focused on **Moose Nellis** of Beazanson, one of the area's old-timers.

Filmed in the Grande Prairie pool hall yesterday the oldtimer's interview will be the sound behind

a stretch of film on the Grande Prairie Pioneer Museum.

The purpose of the film is to show what Grande Prairie is today and what is happening in the city.

The memories of **Moose Nellis** will serve as a quick history from the formation of the city to its present day situation.

The crew shot 3,400 feet of film and 2,000 feet of sound of which one-third will be used.

The special will be introduced with a welcome to Grande Prairie from Sunwapta Broadcasting's president G. R. A. Rice.

Sunwapta, which owns Channel 13 of the CTV network, has chosen Monday as the date for the special because that is the date the station hits the city live. The city special will be in color.

Also included in the half-hour documentary will be interviews

with last year's citizen-of-the-year Bill Bowes, using the city's main street as a backdrop; a talk with Municipal Hospital board member Dr. Joe Storcer; a discussion with college president Dr. Henry Anderson; film clips of the Daily Herald-Tribune; shots of the RCMP headquarters; the arrival of a CP Air jet at the city airport; a talk with chamber of commerce communications chairman Eric Jerrard, and shots of numerous points of interest in the city.

The special which begins at 2 p.m., will open and close with a shot of the city emblem, the Trumpeter Swan.

It should prove to be a fast and interesting trip around the city and is only the beginning of the information programming CFRN-TV plans to undertake in the city.

2 Announcements

OPEN HOUSE will be held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. L.J. (Moose) Nellis Sunday, August 8, 1971 from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. in honor of their 60th wedding anniversary. No gifts by special request.

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Sixty-three years together



Moose and Stella Nellis

By LINDSAY BROWN

With the high rate of divorce and the low rate of marriage these days, Moose and Stella Nellis are a real rarity. The couple celebrates their 63rd Wedding Anniversary tomorrow.

The Nellis were married in Duluth, Minnesota in 1911, in Moose's mother's dining room, in a simple, quiet, homey ceremony. But it didn't stay quiet for long...the minute the couple was pronounced man and wife, an unholy racket started up just outside the front door. Friends and neighbors had gathered around the house; shouting, yelling, singing, blowing horns and banging on pots and pans.

Moose and Stella were not alarmed however, it was merely the customary wedding shivaree. The way the custom went, friends would gather after the wedding ceremony, making as much noise and nuisance as possible, until the newly-married couple invited them all in for lunch and beer. In this case, Moose Nellis had the keg of beer ready and waiting for the shivaree-ers, who poured into the house for

the post-wedding festivities.

CAME TO PEACE

Four years after their marriage, Moose came to the Peace Country to get a piece of the prosperous land that abounded in the area. He came up on one of the first trains to come over the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia railroad. According to Moose, the train was off the tracks more than it was on. "Whenever the train went off the tracks, which was often, we'd get off and walk up the track a mile or so and eventually the train would catch up to us later," he said. The train trip from Edmonton to Grande Prairie took six long days.

Moose then homesteaded the land he is still living on, about 1½ miles east of Bezanson, and, a painter by trade, began looking for work.

Stella, along with 16 members of her family, joined Moose a year later. "The 17 of us arrived in Grande Prairie with a five-dollar bill between us," she said.

The Nellis by this time the proud parents of three boys and one girl, settled into their freshly-built log cabin,

which was situated just a few feet away from their present home.

HUNTED GAME

A five-dollar bill divided among 17 people didn't go very far, so the Nellis's used the resources at hand to feed themselves and their children.

Thus, before women's lib was a mere gleam in someone's eye, Mrs. Nellis was, by today's standards, a liberated woman.

"I had my own .22 and I used to go out and shoot prairie chickens, rabbits, whatever was edible to feed my family," she said.

Mrs. Nellis built fences, dug wells, and just generally did whatever was needed around the farm, to keep the family going.

In those days, the fact that women did this kind of work was not a political issue, "you did it because you had to, there wasn't anyway you could get out of it," said the 82-year-old Mrs. Nellis.

As a house painter, who says he painted "damn near all the houses in Grande Prairie at the time," Moose was often forced to stay in the city during the week to work, only coming home on

weekends. When asked if she was ever scared staying by herself in the then near-wilderness, Mrs. Nellis replied, "I wasn't ever scared to be by myself, and I'm not now, either."

NEVER MISSED

Moose, puffing on his ever-present cigar, said proudly, "In all the 63 years we've been married, I've never missed a meal. Some of them were more than a day late, but I never did miss one."

Mrs. Nellis is still going strong, and does all her own housework and baking. "In all the years we've been together, there haven't been more than four or five loaves of store-bought bread in our house. That's why I'm so healthy, it's her cooking," said the 88 year-old Mr. Nellis.

The couple have seven children; five sons and two daughters. The two girls have left home; one is in Louisiana and the other in Manning, Alta. The five boys all live in this area.

Mrs. Nellis said she doesn't have any trouble keeping track of her 26 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren. She has four photo albums, full of the

smiling faces of all her young relatives. Some of the photos are yellowed with age, others are brand-spanking-new.

MADE ALBUM

One of the photo albums is made out of brown wrapping paper, cloth, and glue. Mrs. Nellis made it herself, during one of the frequent belt-tightening times. "The Dirty Thirties didn't seem that much different from any other time for us," she said.

Moose, whose real name is Lester, said he was given his nickname by his younger brother. "I was a pretty sharp dresser when I was younger, and my brother wasn't. Whenever he wanted to spruce up for a dance or whatever, he'd want to borrow my clothes. They never fit him though, because I was quite a bit bigger than him. So one day my brother said, 'you're nothing but a big damn moose, Lester, and the name stuck.'"

Mr. Nellis has gone by the name of Moose ever since coming here, and if anyone called him by his real name, they probably wouldn't get an answer.

Mayme (May) Branch, 81, of Alexandria, La.

Mayme (May) Branch passed away on June 29, 2004 at her home in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Born to Stella and **Moose Nellis**, of Bezanson, Alberta, on June 23, 1923. She married Herbert Branch and moved to Louisiana during World War II.

Leaving to mourn her passing, sons, James and his sons, Brian and Scott; her daughter, Merle, her daughters, Charlotte, Laura, Alison; eight grandchildren, three great-great-grandchildren; brothers, Lloyd (Lorna), Harry (Grace); sisters-in-law, Irene, Opal and Betty. Many nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, aunts, Margaret Robideau and Peggy Robideau.

Predeceased by husband, Herbert; her mother and fathers; sister, Myrtle and her brother-in-law, Bill; brothers, Orville, Ted and Bill.

Funeral to be held in Alexandria, Louisiana.