

Medicine Hat Cowboy Life



In this issue:

Gophers

June 2023

Official Newsletter for Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation

Back in 2021, The Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation initiated a video/publishing project in partnership with Meliora Service Dogs, an organization that teaches veterans and first responders and their families how to train their own service dogs. Our mandate was to share the stories of these vital dogs and their handlers in video as well as in print. (See our March newsletter for more information on Meliora Service Dogs).

Our final Paws and Poems videos were posted in May and the printed books, with illustrations by Faye Fedrau, (cover by Gena LaCoste), (printing sponsored by pet-friendly hotel, Home Inn), are now available for only \$20 by contacting our president, Jen Zollner, MHCPPresident@gmail.com

Learn how these amazing dogs save their handlers' lives. Discover their quirky antics that make them so lovable. And enjoy the stories and poems, written by various members of our team, but mostly, Jen, who spearheaded and carried much of the project.

With a small government grant and the sale of the books, MHCP is able to generate funds to help collect stories and preserve rural history in the Medicine Hat area. Get your copy today!

Paws and Poems

A collection of stories and poetry about service dogs in the Medicine Hat area



Top Hand by Gena LaCoste



Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation



www.MHCowboyLife.com



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

From my Perch on the Corral:

The idea for a 'gopher' theme started when their feet were included in our "Paws and Poems" project. I knew they are really squirrels, Richardson Ground Squirrels, and now I know Sir Richardson collected them here and sent them to England where scientists chose the name.

The real gopher, the pocket gopher is somewhat of an underground farmer, but there was no room in this newsletter to explain that. We needed space for the many gopher stories.

My own story about 'gophers' started when I was a kid walking the prairie carefully spooning poison wheat far down each hole first thing in the spring. 'Don't get it on your hands!' was the warning, yet it smelled so sweet it was tempting to eat it. I had better luck trapping gophers than I had snaring them but I didn't collect much money in gopher tails compared to the children in the

stories. Our municipality paid one cent a tail, some paid two cents, some municipalities had to stop the program because too many tails were coming from neighboring areas with no such program. Some kids tried doubling their earnings by cutting the tails in half.

Who would have guessed the rodents spend that much time hibernating? I can see why they need to quickly fatten up when they are awake which explains why they insist on eating my daughter's crop. There are times she calls them names and Gopher is not an endearing name she'd give her son. I wouldn't want it to be my distinguished surname either. I do, however, admire the communities and farmers that have found ingenious ways to use the gopher to encourage visitors.

I have to admit I like watching the cute antics of gophers. It's the males I see first thing in spring, and the ones running across the road in later summer, are carefree, careless teenagers. Interesting that the females live longer than the males and we can predict when the single mothers are underground raising the kittens. Here's thinking if we know more about them and their predators, we can hopefully keep their numbers under control.



Jen Zollner, President,
Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation

Medicine Hat Cowboy Life is the official newsletter of the Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation, (a registered Society in the Province of Alberta), published four times per year by Shelley Goldbeck, DTM, Vice President and Webmaster of MHCP. Our mandate is to preserve, promote and celebrate cowboy traditions and country living in the Medicine Hat area. If you wish to submit articles or information of interest to our readers, please email MHCPPresident@gmail.com subject: Newsletter.



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Fun Facts About Gophers

- ❖ they're not gophers at all but ground squirrels (also called prairie dogs)
- ❖ their tail is constantly trembling, thus are referred to as Flickertails
- ❖ their ears are so short they look more like holes in their head
- ❖ they give ultrasonic alarm calls; they also 'speak' in audible sounds
- ❖ chirp whistle warns of aerial predators like hawks
- ❖ high pitched whistle warns of terrestrial predators
- ❖ they eat greens and seeds, but they're also cannibalistic.
- ❖ hibernating 210+ days means they need to consume vast amounts of food



Hibernation

- ❖ each animal hibernates alone in a special chamber
- ❖ they each prepare their own chamber four to six weeks in advance
- ❖ they hibernate eight to nine months of the year, certain ages at different times of the year:
 - ❖ Males: come out of hibernation first thing in spring (mid March depending on the weather)
 - ❖ Females: appear about two weeks after males and then mate
 - ❖ females are only fertile for two to four hours each spring
 - ❖ female will mate with several males, each male with about ten females
 - ❖ gestation period is 23 days
 - ❖ they only have one litter per year, an average of six per litter
 - ❖ kittens/pups are born naked, blind and helpless
 - ❖ young remain underground about 30 days with only the female caring for them
 - ❖ weaning age is 25 days, they are independent when they're 26-33 days old
- ❖ Adult Gophers: hibernate as early as July
- ❖ Teenagers: don't hibernate till September or until freeze up

NASA is Studying Hibernation.

When gophers are hibernating they are in a torpor-like state in which their metabolism slows down so much that their body temperature can drop below freezing, and yet they don't suffer the same side effects like freezing, muscle loss or loss of bone density. NASA is learning about how medically induced hibernation (keeping the body cooler) may help astronauts in a weightless environment. It could also work for heart and stroke patients to improve medical outcomes.

Life Span

Females live about four years (maximum six), males live only one year (maximum two or three). The major cause of death is predators and starvation. Only 1/2 of the females and 1/5 of the males each year reach adulthood.

Terminology

Doe - female gopher

Buck - male gopher

Pup, kit or kitten – baby gopher



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Gopher Control

Toxic Baits:

The timing of bait application is two to three weeks after the first gophers appear and before the spring greens appear. This targets the female population. Strychnine is no longer available. An alternative is zinc phosphide that turns into phosphate gas in the stomach. The gas dissipates so non-target poisoning is reduced. Anticoagulants such as chorphacinones and diphacinones are also used but they require multiple baitings.

Human Predators:

Shooting, trapping, drowning and burrow fumigation are labor intensive. Sprinkler irrigation systems don't drown them out like flood irrigation did.

Natural Predators:

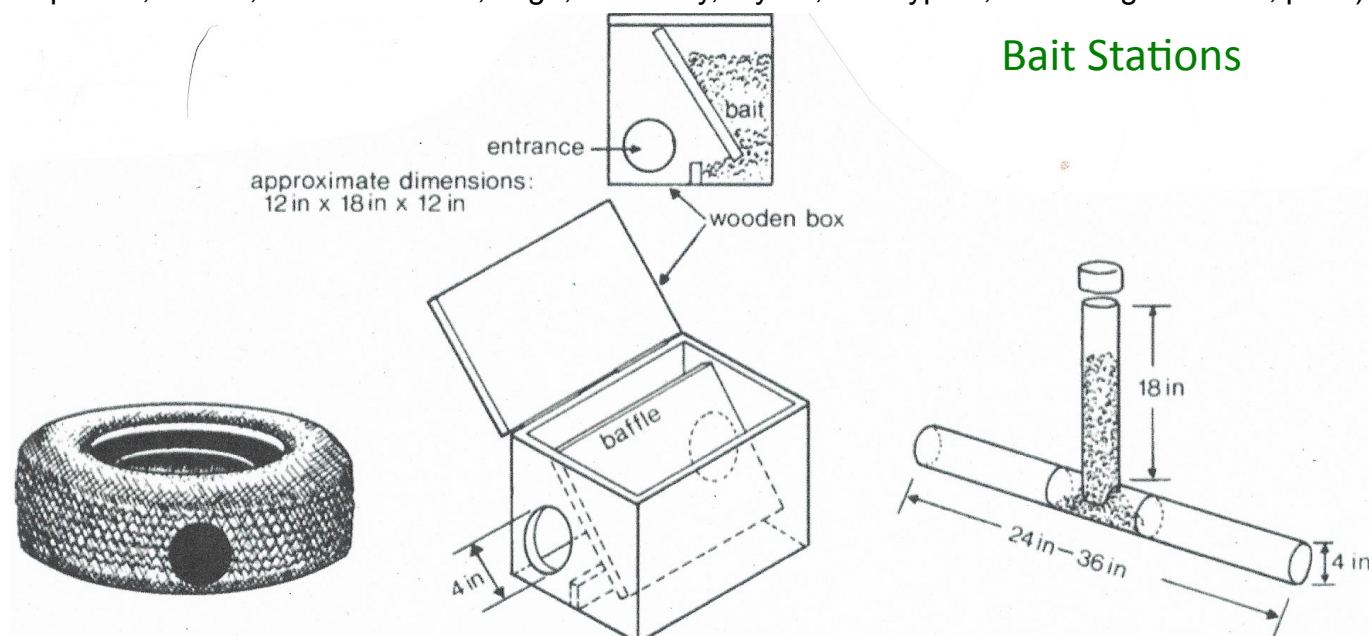
Badgers control the population by 60-80% by getting into the burrows while gophers are in torpor. However they leave a big mess. Ferruginous hawks can eat 400-500 gophers during nesting and are endangered, so building stations for them to nest is suggested. Other predators are coyotes, foxes, wolves, long-tailed weasels, rattlesnakes, bullsnakes, owls and falcons.

Hawk Artificial Nest Pole Brochure:

<http://multisar.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FEHA-ANP-BrochureWEB-Feb-2012.pdf>

Natural Control (for gardeners):

- ❖ flood the gopher tunnel system
- ❖ plant gopher repellent plants (lavender, catmint, rosemary, strawberries, etc.)
- ❖ place battery or solar powered ultrasonic emitter in the yard at ground level: creates vibrations that annoy small pests
- ❖ use products that repel gophers (peppermint oil, fabric softener sheers, coffee grounds, castor oil pellets, fish oil, Tabasco sauce, sage, rosemary, thyme, eucalyptus, scented geraniums, pine.)



Bait Stations



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Town Council Gopher Solution

(A satire on municipal politics regarding gopher control)

Complaints came to our office of the gophers around town,
The golf course is in ruins, need to get their numbers down.

Discussion 'round the table had ideas flying high,
We brainstormed our creative thoughts; to boost this town we try.

But first we need to check the rules, if wildlife they might be,
We can't get rid of all of them with ow-er hunting spree.

Poison strychnine has been used and really did the trick,
But it would also make our pets get worse than really sick.

There's no way we can shoot them like the farmers tend to do,
Just think of all the trauma that the killer would go through.

Could we chase the gophers out into the neighbour's yard?
To make sure that they don't return, we'd hire us a guard.

We could leave the grass uncut, around the whole outside,
Gophers can't see distances, but golf balls there would hide.

Gophers don't like marigolds or daffodils or coal,
We'd beautify the golf course when we plant them 'round each hole.

Or could we spread the kinds of things that gophers do not like?
Dryer sheets or mothballs so they'll want to 'take a hike'.

There's stakes you drive into the ground that vibrate, I am told,
Or we could pipe annoying music down each dog-gone hole.

The live trap method doesn't work, you can't humanely kill,
There's no site to release them, not even on Capitol Hill.

That gave the mayor a splendid plan, we voted, all said yes,
Behind a glass display case we will show off their cuteness.

Folks from all around the world will love our live display,
An economic boom when folks are here to holiday.

by Jen Zollner

Stories from Seniors

A collection of stories and poetry by and for seniors
who've lived and worked in rural areas around Medicine Hat



Cover Art: Preacher and Parson
by Gena LaCoste



Hale
Hearing

Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation

Stories from Seniors and Country
Stories books available for only \$15
each. To purchase contact Jen at
MHCPPresident@gmail.com
Watch the accompanying videos on
our web site. Search stories.
www.MHCowboyLife.com

Country Stories

A collection of stories and poetry by and for seniors
who have lived and worked in rural areas around Medicine Hat



Three Heads are Better Than One
by Gena LaCoste



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GOPHER TOURISM

World Gopher Derby: The derby put little Eston on the world map (population 1000, 70 km SE of Kindersley, SK). Every July 1st they had a "Sportsarama" that highlighted gopher races. It was run just like a horse race where you can bet for your gopher to win. They had a structure where eight gophers at a time were 'dumped' on the 'track', then would 'race' to get to the light at the end of the tunnel. First one to reach the end and tip the tube down was declared the winner. But after running for many years, it was discontinued due to a shortage of willing volunteers. Its operation was actively opposed by PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals).



Photo by Joseph Butel

World's Largest Gopher: Find it in Eston, SK built to commemorate the town's infamous World Gopher Derby. It stands 8' high and weighs 3000 pounds. It's probably the only Gopher in the area that farmers will tolerate!

Ken Turcot Memorial Gopher Derby: The Saskatoon branch of SK Wildlife Federation ran the derby in 2002 and 2003. It was discontinued in 2004 partly because the ground squirrel population had dropped. The entry fee of \$20 gave a chance to win a percentage of the total pool money. There were also random draws, one ticket to each person who submitted one tail and another ticket for 50 tails. The frozen tails in bundles of 10's were tallied by local municipalities and submitted. But the derby attracted tremendous criticism from animal rights groups



Above right: Gopher starting gate.
Below right: World's Largest Gopher

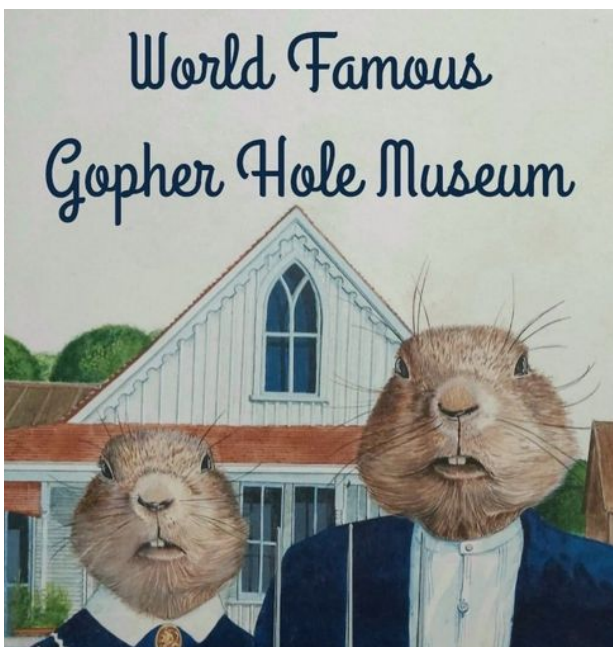


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Gopherville Fun Village: was an amusement park by Langenburg, SK near the Manitoba border. It opened in 1986 and ran for almost 20 years. It boasted an 88' bike, world's largest; (it held 44 riders). Other attractions included miniature golf, a trampoline, the world's largest swing, a train 'The Gopherville Express', Gopherville Gardens, the miniature church and a petting zoo. Unique items were for sale at the General Store, including "Gopher Patches" (stuffed toy gophers dressed as characters). To satisfy the hungry tums there was a Gopherville Ice Cream Parlour and Restaurant. (Note: There were UFO sightings there in the 1990's)

SK Farmer Gopher Hunts:

- ❖ some farmers offer free room and board and even free ammunition to any willing visitor
- ❖ a farmer spoke of tourists driving 17 hours from Manitoba and BC to hunt gophers
- ❖ some Quebec men had a meeting in Saskatchewan; they arrived three days early just to go gopher hunting
- ❖ one farmer invites hunters from the US to have their way with gophers on his farm. He even charges them for the privilege.
- ❖ gopher hunting is somewhat of a Saskatchewan tradition through which father/son and father/daughter relationships have been developed



World Famous Gopher Hole Museum: Torrington, east of Olds, AB, is the home of the "World Famous" Gopher Hole Museum. This attraction features stuffed gophers posed in a series of scenes, from a hair dresser to a preacher to an RCMP officer. After the decommissioning of railway lines and the subsequent closure of the town's grain elevators, the Village of Torrington applied for a one-time \$9,000 grant from the Government of Alberta to create a tourist attraction to generate business for the community. At the last of three brainstorming meetings for the grant, one woman (referring to the area's gopher overpopulation) jokingly suggested to stuff 'gophers' and put them on display. They had their tourism concept! Before opening they were the target of a PETA campaign to stop them, but the little town prevailed and they really are famous!



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The Gopher Poem by Bill Simmons

(A Tall Tale with a Moral so True)

I woke up this morning, I slipped on my jeans,
I looked out my window, a beautiful day it seemed.
So I grabbed me a cup of coffee and had me another fill,
Walked out to my pickup truck but a gopher had ate my wheel!

My wife says, "Would you look at that! It seems we need a cat!
So I went to town and bought a cat but the gopher too ate that.
So I went to town and I bought a hound, the meanest I could find,
I took him home and turned him loose, he'd catch that gopher in time.

The next morning when I awoke the hound was not around,
But under a tree was that gopher, well fed and laying down.
I went back to town and told the man, "That gopher he ate my hound!
"I'm afraid I'll need something meaner than that, I must take that gopher down!"

He said, "My friend, I can fix you up." He went to the back and came back to me,
And in his hands was this small box with small hole so something could breathe.
He said, "I won't tell you what it is, just take it home and set it free."
Then he charged me a hundred bucks and said, "Don't worry, it's guaranteed."

So I took it home and I showed the wife, then we opened that box outside,
Out came this pink ribbon on a female gopher that had these big blue eyes.
Well right then our gopher fell in love, we could not imagine this to be enough,
But we see that gopher every now and then, he looks stressed and kinda beaten up.

The moral of this story? Well, all morals do come in time,
Sometimes it takes a female to keep us males in line!



Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry
Foundation 2023 Souvenir
Coaster. Get yours free with a
2023 foundation membership!

Gopher in Sign Language: <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=gopher+sign+language&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:11380402,vid:BJTtZkIMiWc>

Gopher Tales: What's That Smell?

story from Medicine Hat resident, Ila Dillabough

The farm was a good place to raise their children. Farm life and two busy boys brought lots of excitement. There was the time the house had an awful smell. It wasn't the slop pail or the bucket with chicken scraps. It seemed to be worse in the bedroom half of the house and it was getting worse. What could it be? It was even worse in the boys' bedroom. Putting soda in their sneakers didn't seem to make it any better. "Before school starts again we had better clean out this room!" There in the back of the drawer in the desk they found it. Rotting gopher tails!! The ones the municipal office gave one cent each for. Now they each gave us their own scent!

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Gopher is in the Name

- ❖ Gopher what we mistakenly call the Richardson Ground Squirrel (there is a pocket gopher)
- ❖ A gopher ball is a baseball pitch that is hit as a home run
- ❖ A gopher snake is another name for a bull snake
- ❖ Horned gophers are extinct rodents
- ❖ There is a gopher plant, a gopherberry, a gopher frog and a gopher turtle (in deserts)
- ❖ Noah used gopher wood, from a deciduous tree, to build the ark.
- ❖ Gopher is a program for browsing the internet and Gopherspace is its files
- ❖ Gopher State is Minnesota (North Dakota was a Flickertail State)
- ❖ Gopher/Gofer is a distinguished English surname, it's also a boy's first name
- ❖ There's a Gopher Cabin on Gopher Street in Banff, AB. (only 1/4 km long)
- ❖ There's a Gopher Bay and a Gopher Gulch in Alaska,
- ❖ Gopher holing is needing to go to the bathroom (you can guess why it has that name)
- ❖ A gopher/gofer is someone ranked below, an assistant to a senior person (Go for this! Go for that!)
- ❖ Gopher is also a company or employee that transports commercial packages or documents



Above: Gopher Crest
Below: Gopher Shield



Gopher Tails: Descendants of Tailless Gophers

In 1954 in the Flickertail State we were having a family reunion. Almost all of the cousins had grown up in the North Dakota area and were more than familiar with gophers and what a nuisance they could be. However, one great uncle had moved to New York City where he and his wife were raising their four sons. They had never been "out west" so they were ready for all the sights and experiences away from the big city.

Upon their arrival, the first thing the sons wanted to do was catch a gopher and collect the tail. No problem, there were millions. With a trap in hand, the cousins helped them find the nearest gopher hole and set the tap. Within minutes a gopher was caught. Excitedly the New York boys ran to the trap, cut off the tail with their new pocketknives and released the gopher from the trap.

"Why did you let the gopher go? we asked. To us, the only good gopher was a dead one. But they thought gophers were a rare rodent that they should let it go without doing it any more harm. After that, the joke in the family was to look for any "tailless" gophers that might be descendants. At their 1999 family reunion one NY son still had among his possessions that same "North Dakota gopher tail."



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Gopher Tails:

Snaring My First and Last Gopher

My older brother was catching gophers by trap and by snaring them. It looked easy and if I got two cents for every tail, too, I would be rich. I could see the pennies and then the dollars rolling in. Dad was working the field beside the pasture. I didn't know exactly how to proceed with my project, so Dad said he would help me lay out my first snare. That done, I lay down and quietly waited to start having the money roll in. Dad went back to working the corn field and I patiently waited.

I was lying there looking at the clouds rolling by when I snuck a peek at the hole just as a little gopher had come up. He unknowingly stuck his head through the loop and looked around to see if anyone was there. Yikes! I pulled the snare tight around his head. I had him! There was only one thing wrong, I had forgotten to ask Dad what the next step was. There was this gopher looking at me with a noose around his neck and there me looking right back at him. I was looking right into his little black eyes. I got scared because I thought he looked like he was going to attack. So I jumped up and ran across the field, the snare with the gopher right behind me. He was airborne at times and hitting the cornstalks all along the way. I couldn't let go of the binder twine because then I'd let loose of the gopher tail.

It took a few minutes for me to reach Dad at the end of the field. He stopped the tractor and looked down. What he saw was a bloody mangled mess of a gopher. Even the tail was gone; it had completely worn off. That was enough for me. It was the end of making my fortune in gopher tails.

Children's Camp Songs:

Great green gobs of greasy, grimy gopher guts,
Mutilated monkey's meat,
Concentrated birdie's feet,
Great green gobs of greasy, grimy gopher guts,
And me without a spoon!

Flunky Jim / Gopher Tails

*I am the flunky of the house, they call me Flunky Jim,
You'll find me knocking around the yard in a hat without a brim,
My overalls are shabby and I have no shirt at all,
But I'll going to get a new outfit with gopher tails in Fall.*

*Ch: Knocking around the yard, boys,
Knocking around the yard
It isn't such an easy job don't fool yourself, old pard
My overalls are shabby and I have no shirt at all,
But I'm going to get a new outfit with gopher tails in Fall.*

*At night when Pa comes from the fields, he calls for Flunky Jim,
He pats me on my curly head and my hat without a brim,
He's apt to say, "Oh Flunky Jim, your clothes are far too small,"
But you're going to get a new outfit with gopher tails in Fall.*

*I counted all my gopher tails, I almost have enough,
To buy a hat, a fancy shirt and pants that have a cuff,
And then I'll hand my old ones down, they really are too small,
Oh, I'll be swell, when I sell my gopher tails in Fall.*

How to Field Dress and Cook a Gopher, a step-by-step guide: <https://www.instructables.com/How-to-Skin-and-Cook-Gopher/>



Gopher Tails: A Parker Pen for Evelyn

In 1927 Evelyn Olson was ten years old. Now that she was in the fifth grade, she was required to do her "written work" with pen and ink. Evelyn had a straight pen from which the steel writing point could be removed when you needed to replace the worn one. But writing with a straight pen was a frustrating experience because sometimes the point would drop a blob of ink as one wrote, and then the whole page would have to be rewritten. Neatness was a must.

The smiling teacher, Miss Blake, had shown the students her pen, a Parker Pen. How marvelous to have a container inside the hollow barrel that you could refill from the inkwell and write a whole page without refilling! A straight pen needs to be dipped into a bottle of Sanford's ink after every four words. How smoothly and noiselessly the Parker pen would glide over the paper, and never, never drop a blob of ink. Evelyn longed to have a pen like that but she knew her parents couldn't afford the \$3 to buy one for her.

Then came summer vacation and herding cows, the regular job for all country boys and girls. This lonely work gave Evelyn the time and opportunity to catch gophers; the township paid a bounty of 2 cents for each gopher tail. If she could catch 150 gophers, she could earn the \$3 to pay for a Parker Pen, but the family only had three gopher traps. That didn't deter Evelyn from her goal for one moment. There would be three gophers in the traps in the morning, and during the day she could snare them.

Evelyn counted the gopher tails every Sunday evening with a vision of a gleaming black Parker Pen in her hands, one that would never, never drop a blob of ink. Every morning she was anxious to get out to check her traps. August 13th was the day to sell the gopher

Circular No. 93

October, 1928

MANITOBA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND IMMIGRATION
WINNIPEG, CANADA

AWARDS IN GOPHER AND CROW EXTERMINATION COMPETITION--1928



The Gopher and Crow Extermination Competition of 1928 has been quite successful.

The competition opened in the spring and closed on September 1st, allowing all contestants until September 10th to send in their returns. The number of competitors was 1,850, which compares with 1,842 competitors in 1927, 762 in 1926 and 1,680 in 1925.

Awards were made on the basis of points, reckoned in 1928 as follows:

For each gopher's tail.....1 point
For each crow's egg.....2 points
For each crow's leg.....4 points (8 points per crow)

The results for the four years have been:

	1928	1927	1926	1925
Gopher's tails reported	37,041	82,552	Not part of competition	47,153
Crows' eggs reported	97,799	132,334	81,228	175,519
Crows' legs reported	74,329	85,663	72,438	28,243

On the 1928 basis of estimating points, the four years' competitions stand as follows:

	1928	1927	1926	1925
Points won	529,955	689,872	452,208	511,163

In 1928 1,000 cash prizes were offered. The Department has increased this number to 1,500 prizes, adding another 500 prizes of 50 cents each. The list of winners is presented herewith. Cheques to prize winners will be mailed about November 15th.

The Minister of Agriculture hereby expresses his thanks to the hundreds of school teachers and other public officials who assisted in carrying out the details of the competition; also he wishes to congratulate the contestants upon the fine showing made.

tails. Evelyn counted her tails. Only 146. She needed four more gopher tails and time had run out. She was a very sad little girl because this was her only chance to own a Parker Pen.

Three days later the family went to town for school supplies. Evelyn's mother bought tablets, pencils, pen points, a bottle of Sanford's ink. Lo and behold, Mrs. Olson had exactly eight pennies left over to help Evelyn pay for her pen! Evelyn gratefully hugged her mother. Her gleaming black fountain pen, just like Miss Blake's, would write smoothly and noiselessly and never, never drop a blob of ink.



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Gopher Tales (Not Tails!)

The Gopher House

In 1882 Jack Dashwood, a young Englishman, bought a 'stopping house' because it looked like a prosperous business. It was a place near Sheep Creek not far from where High River is now. It was one of the log shacks or cabins along the route from Calgary to Fort MacLeod for mail coaches and bull train stopovers. It was a place of rollicking good times with a meal of sowbelly and beans (the usual rangeland fare) and sometimes an overnight stay in your own blankets (everyone carried his own in those days). At noon there'd be a change of stage horses and they fed stagecoach passengers coming and going.

"It was not many months until Dashwood found that he must leave everything and go to work or face starvation. One day he sat idly on the steps wondering what to do to get some money. Just then a gopher a few yards away popped out of its burrow and this gave him the inkling of an idea. He dug a hole in the ground and put a cover over it. Then he advertised a show called "Gopher Jack" and had the temerity to charge five dollars admission. When the time for the show came, the audience was surprised to see the bewhiskered Dashwood bob up out of the hole and then duck down again. He did this several times and then came boldly out among them. For some reason the cowboys took it as a hilarious joke, and for the short time afterward in which he stayed in the country he was known as "Gopher Jack". The place was called the "Gopher House" for many years afterward, but today one lone spruce tree marks the spot where the "Gopher House" once stood."

excerpt from page 435,
"Leaves From the Medicine Tree"

Library Corner

The Medicine Hat Public Library serves as a community hub, providing convenient access to books, media, information and programs that help to educate, enrich, entertain, and inform. Anyone can use the library and its resources. As a library member, your library card allows you to take home books, e-books, magazines, DVDs, CDs, and audio books.

Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails

Memories of the One-Room Schoolhouse
by John C Charyk Book: 372.9712 CHA (1983)
The stories portray pioneer life and the spirit of the one-room school from the first hand experiences of the author's 45-year teaching career that started in 1928. Also included are interviews with former teachers, students and school officials. (see excerpts in library resources)

Gophers Don't Pay Taxes

by Mervin J. Huston: HUS Non Fiction: 813.54
HUS (1981) won the Leacock Silver Medal for Humor. Mervin writes the humorous adventures a young lawyer has as he tries to establish himself in an Alberta town he calls Blossom during the days of the Great Depression. The tales unfold the life of the community, the ridiculous, the stereotypes and the scandals as it unfolds the history of the times and delves into the most personal of details.

Leaves From the Medicine Tree

by the High River Pioneers' and Old Timers' Assoc. 971.23 HIG (1960) The history of southern Alberta through the stories and biographies of pioneers and old timers prior to 1900. (see excerpts in Library resources) public domain on-line copy available: <https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/Explore/Tag/McComb--Slippery-Bill>
by JZ



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Getting a Pail of Water

The older children at the one-room country school welcomed the chance to escape from the classroom to get a pail of water from the school 'cistern'. On the way there were gophers and field mice to stalk and stones to throw. "One day the bigger boys discovered a dead gopher in the water and decided to give the 'cistern' a clean-up....The water was bailed out and a lad volunteered to crawl down to remove the decaying animal....He gathered the remains and deposited them in the bucket that had been lowered....Soon he gave the signal, and the boy at the windlass proceeded to draw up the pail. Unfortunately, when it was raised halfway up, the school bell rang. In his excitement to race to the school and beat the other boys, he let go of the rope. Down dropped the mud, the dead animal and decaying vegetation, right on top of the faithful lad at the bottom...Although he received a deep gash on the side of his head, nothing more serious happened. It was only after the teacher started to make inquiries about the whereabouts of her grade eight pupil that she learned he was still down the cistern."

-excerpt from page 24,
"Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails"

The Toilet Paper Mystery

The trustees of an Oyen one-room school had really "gone modern" when they introduced "real" toilet paper into the two school outhouses (one for the boys and one for the girls). But the store-bought tissues were disappearing at an alarming rate as the children discovered many other uses besides the traditional one. They cleaned their pen nibs, bandaged their fingers, bundled coins in it and used it to mark bases on the ball diamond. Even with these novel uses, there had to be another explanation why it was disappearing so fast.

"Then one day I (Mr. Charyk, the teacher) was able to solve the mystery....I saw....a strip of toilet paper extending from the outhouse, across the school yard and down the gopher hole....Some unseen force was pulling on the free end and unrolling the toilet paper from the spool in the outhouse....The soft fluffy absorbent tissues were ideal lining for their sleeping quarters. The gophers had discovered they just had to grab the free end with their teeth or claws and give it a sharp tug to get a convenient size to carry to his hole. Too bad the toilet paper from one manufacturer refused to tear easily. That's what led to the end of the mystery.

excerpt from page 32,
"Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails"

Gopher Hides

"For some reason or other, the thought entered my mind whether the "hide" (as I called it at that time) on the gopher was not of some value, as I had at different times heard people talk of selling the hide from mink, skunk, muskrat, wolf and so forth. Accordingly one day I went to the butcher and asked him whether he bought gopher hides, since I had seen people sell cow hides there. The butcher replied in the negative, and of course that settled it with me. *continued*

Read the rest of these stories:
on our website,
www.mhcowboyLife.com
Gophers page

Farm Girl and a Baby Gopher

Late one afternoon in April I ventured across the yard to toss a bowl full of vegetable scraps to the chickens....As I turned to go back to the house, something near my feet caught my attention.... Looking closer I found a strange mound of greyish soft hair -something that appeared to be digging...I could see it was a trembling baby gopher...It was a bit chilly outside. *continued*



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry and Western Music Show

Saturday, October 7, 2023
Medicine Hat College Theatre

Save the
Date!

Featuring



Ol' Ugly



Eli Barsi

- ◇ Afternoon Show
- ◇ Local entertainers
- ◇ Junior poets
- ◇ Meliora Dog Demo
- ◇ Stew Supper
- ◇ Silent Auction
- ◇ Evening Show

The first Saturday in October you are invited to attend the annual Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry and Western Music Show at the Medicine Hat College Theatre.

Our program continues to grow: More local entertainers will be there for the afternoon show. The Meliora Service Dogs were such a hit last year, we're bringing them back to promote our Paws and Poems project. The books will be available for purchase (along with Stories from Seniors and Country Stories). (See our videos online).

This year we've also added a stew and biscuit cowboy supper, with pie for dessert, a perfect way to get to know the performers and fellow Cowboy Poetry fans.

We are already collecting items for our silent auction. Donations are welcome. All

proceeds go to funding Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation activities.

We always like to develop young poets and we have some young'uns itching to tell their stories for our Hazel Rust Fund for Young Poets portion of our show.

We are very excited about our evening show performers. **Eli Barsi** is a Saskatchewan farm girl who sings about the land, sky and country life. **Ol' Ugly** will delight you with his stories about his brother Blue, Aunt Tilley and the characters at the Grub Box Café. Distinguished Toastmaster, Shelley Goldbeck will once again emcee the show. All the details will be revealed as we draw nearer to the date, which we advise you to mark on your calendar now!