

Notes

For Eulogy for Michael J. Dawe

January 4, 2024

Friends, Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears. Such is the familiar line from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar given to Marc Antony as he prepares to deliver scathing comments to Brutus who assassinated Caesar. His speech concludes with the sentence, 'The good that men do is oft buried with their bones.' We are here today to give thanks and praise for the life of Michael J. Dawe lest his good deeds be lost with time.

So, lend me your ears, please. It is an honor for me to have been invited by Michael's family to provide some remarks today to help us to appreciate and to remember him. I have had the privilege of knowing Michael for more than sixty years and of having worked with him in the Museum and Archives for 20 years. Over that arc of six decades, I have come to know Michael's many facets and take delight today in sharing aspects of this very special central Albertan.

My earliest recollection of knowing Michael is in the early 1960s when he was awarded the very distinguished and coveted Governor General's Gold Medal for his first class marks in Grade IX. Michael was a serious, keen and successful student who came from a family whose watchword was Education and their motto was Service. His father, G. Harold, was the Superintendent of Public Schools, 35 year Secretary Treasurer of the Public Library Board and co-founder of Red Deer College (now Polytechnic). His mother, Jean, taught English at Red Deer College and his uncle Wellington was the Principal of Lindsay Thurber High School and whose Master's Thesis was the first published History of Red Deer. Michael's father was a man of formality and rectitude while his uncle was much more relaxed and informal. Uncle Wellington became Michael's mentor and idol. In turn, Michael himself became the mentor and idol of his nephew, Michael, known as Mick. Mick developed a keen interest in politics and history and academics from his uncle Michael. Despite being challenged by Cerebral Palsy, Mick managed to earn a Ph.D. in Philosophy at age 29.

Michael next came to my attention when he joined the Red Deer Archives Committee. Red Deer boasted the first municipal archives in Alberta as a result of

Alderman Ethel Taylor being scandalized by discovering that boxes of City of Red Deer papers were being burned as rubbish. We can take comfort to know that Michael is reunited with the visionary volunteers of the first Archives Committee including community builders like Wellington Dawe, Ethel Taylor, Ted Meeres, Stewart Meeres, Gordon Caton, Sylvia Bentley, Hugh Bower and Ed Barrett. It should be noted that the Committee included the trifecta of learned local historians, Ted Meeres, Wellington Dawe and young Michael Dawe. We shall not soon see such a powerhouse compendium of historic resource information.

The Archives Committee had been housed in the elevator shaft in the basement of the Public Library. Shortly after the new Museum building was opened in 1978 the Archives moved to occupy its spaces in the new building. About that time Michael was hired on a summer employment grant to work with Archivist, Sylvia Bentley, in the Archives. His employment was made full time and permanent when Sylvia retired and for the next 20 years Michael provided leadership to the Committee and helped the people of the area to become aware and appreciative of their roots.

Michael led a very aggressive collections-building program at the Archives. I recall him getting all of the David Thompson Health Region records that were in danger of being lost. He had served on the Health Region Board and was not about to see several dozen bankers' boxes of records be destroyed. He encouraged people to deposit their documents and papers in the Archives to build a robust biography collection. While cultivating possible donations, Michael relied on his congenial and folksy manner where he always had time to chat, tell stories, hear stories and show people that he cared about them and their issues. He was very generous with his time and was always prepared to take the time necessary. People loved him. Michael developed a wonderful repertory of unique Red Deer stories that he shared at every opportunity. Among my favorites are The Greggson family collecting fleas for the Rothschild Collection in Britain, Mickey the Beaver, Rosalind of Old Basing (a Jersey cow with the highest butterfat production in the British Empire) Charlie Snell's library of socialist literature that he was asked to dispose of and which he buried under his garage located on the site of the present Court House, Nettie George Parker having designed the provincial Crest of Alberta, the Ella Parsons letter during the 1920 'flu epidemic, Mr. Russell inventing puffed wheat squares and the role of Roland Michener as his Scout

troop apprehending a criminal. In my days as Mayor, when I regularly was asked to bring greetings to a visiting assembly of Albertans meeting in Red Deer, I often used some of these delightful vignettes to impress upon our visitors that Red Deer was a very special place.

Throughout his career at the Archives, Michael was centrally engaged in the research, writing and publication of a series of history books on Red Deer and area. These included **Proud Beginnings** by Georgean Parker, his own **Illustrated History of Red Deer** and several other privately commissioned and published histories. Just 10 years ago this month, Michael published a book to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of The City of Red Deer. It is entitled **Memorable Red Deer**. In addition to publications, Michael was a prolific freelance writer who provided popular weekly columns for the Red Deer, Sylvan Lake and Innisfail newspapers. He was also frequently called upon to provide speeches at community events, to share his stories and to give many eulogies for old timers. Unlike many archives professionals, Michael was always very welcoming to genealogists who came to the Archives seeking information on family histories. He would assist them in research and encouraged them to explore the collections.

As a professional Archivist, Michael took courses to keep abreast of the impact of electronics and digital capabilities being introduced to assist with archival filing and recovery. He was a founder of the Alberta Society of Archivists and very supportive of other professional groups. He served as a course builder and an instructor in their learning programs.

Throughout his career, Michael had a deep sense of community service and building. He was appointed and served generously on many boards and committees, with special emphasis on health care causes, assisting children with special needs to learn, civic committees, Rotary Club of Red Deer East and was elected to two terms as a member of Council of the City of Red Deer. The community responded in appreciation for his wide ranging service record with many accolades. Michael was proudest of twice being named "Red Deer's most beloved citizen," Red Deer Citizen of the Year in 2013, and receiving both the Golden Jubilee and Diamond Jubilee Queen Elizabeth II medals. His father had received the Silver Jubilee Queen Elizabeth II medal.

It is not death that brings us together today where we have set aside our schedules and chores, but it is love. Your presence here today is testament to the affection we all share for Red Deer's Most Beloved Michael Dawe.

In conclusion, I would like to relate a story that I feel likely reflects the feelings of many here today. A precocious little four-year old girl, on being told of the passing of an older and dear family friend is remembered as saying, "That is too bad. I wasn't through with him yet."

Thank you.