

An Open Letter to the People of Saskatchewan

For three amazing weeks in May my wife and I had the privilege of touring Saskatchewan, visiting many villages, towns and cities and their residents which Gail Hapanowicz had organized for the celebration of the Provincial Flag. Our son John joined us for the second two weeks. I feel I must thank every one of those people for the incredible receptions they all gave us. Their friendliness, enthusiasm and kindness were outstanding in a way we'd never experienced before. From the youngest children to the oldest seniors and the highest dignitaries, every one of them will be remembered by us for their generosity of spirit, their cordiality, and, in particular, their enthusiasm for the flag.

Our first surprise was the moment we came off the Westjet plane from London and made our way to the airport concourse at Regina to be met by many people, film cameras, and spectators looking up at us as we came down the stairs. We had never seen anything like it. I thought some famous celebrity was on that flight with us. Thank you, Kari, for organizing such an amazing reception. I'd also like to thank all those people on the concourse who'd made a special journey to meet us: the Beutel sisters, Duane Senft (one of my Hodgeville High School students from the 1960s) and others.

After settling in at the Hodgeville Skool Inn and Hub, owned by Gail and Mirek, which was to be our main base, we prepared ourselves for our most intense 3-week experience of all time.

The next day was to be our first venue --- Swift Current Museum. I gave a flag presentation to the Lunch and Learn Club followed by lunch. I would like to thank the Club for the lunch and also the Museum Curator, Lloyd Begley, for his kind gift. The next venue was the retirement home Riverview Village Estates in Swift Current where I gave another flag presentation. I would like to thank those seniors for showing their enthusiasm for the flag.

Many thanks must go to the Gross family for connecting us with Donny Gross. Donny was one of my students and he'd expressed to his family his desire to meet with me. He was in a home in Swift Current so we met him in the foyer and he invited us up to his room. We had a short chat and he presented us with some of his splendid embroidery. Sadly, we heard that he'd died in the home 3 days later.

The next place for us that day was the Living Sky Casino in SC. I'd like to thank Trevor for inviting us to supper and Amy for providing the delicious food. Also many thanks to the Casino for the generous gifts. The final event of the day was to meet the Army, Navy and Air Force Cadets in their hall. The 605 Tarry Squadron gave us a very moving parade, showing us their strong

determination to get the marching as perfect as possible. Tears began to well as I watched – it was a special sight to see them. I was then asked if I would ‘raise the flag’ in the Hall which was another emotional moment because it was the first time that I’d ever done or seen a ‘raising of the Provincial flag’ since I designed it in 1968. I would also like to thank the Squadron for giving us special gifts --- a framed certificate, a cap, pins and tickets for the SC stock-car races. Thank you all for making the end of our first day so memorable.

I must mention at this point that throughout our 3-week tour Gail was the leader and driver and Mirek accompanied us every day. This was Gail’s tour as much as it was mine.

The next day was Hodgeville day. It started when George Tsougrianis of SWTV and his cameraman Craig Chaplin came to the High Skool Inn. George interviewed me in the old chemistry lab as a start for his planned flag documentary. Then we all went to the other School (the old Elementary School but now all grades in one school). We were greeted by the staff and students. After a coffee break we went to the gym to find the walls covered in the students’ own versions of the flag. The variety of designs was incredible and the imagination of those kids amazed me. This was followed by a march around Hodgeville with the students carrying and waving their own flags. The march ended at the cenotaph. Well done Hodgeville School! Lastly I was invited by Gail to cut a ribbon and raise the flag outside the Skool then go inside and unveil the big flag on her special flag-wall created by Mirek.

When we arrived at Moose Jaw (Day 3) we were greeted at the City Hall by the MLA Warren Michelson who introduced us to the Mayor, Deb Higgins, the Communications Manager, Carol Reynolds-Wittman, and Candis Kirkpatrick, the Head of Tourism. I was invited to raise the flag at the Police Station next to the CityHall.

The next tour was a very splendid one at the RCAF Pilot Training Base 15 Wing in the company of Warren. Our guide was excellent, showing us practically everything and with a clear explanation. We managed to get up the Control Tower and watched the Hawks coming and going on short training flights. Thank you Warren!

A lunch had been organized for us at the magnificent Grant Hall where we dined and chatted with all our hosts. Our grateful thanks go to all of you.

The afternoon saw us at the Moose Jaw Library where I gave the usual presentation about the flag to a very interested audience. This was followed by a visit to the Fine Foods Supermarket. We’d been invited by the owners, Harry and Sharon Watson, who met us at the entrance. Once inside we saw the most amazing Saskatchewan Flag cake, in fact 2 of them – one chocolate and one white! They made us very welcome, providing a slice of the cake and a drink. Sharon then gave us a tour of the Supermarket including ‘behind the scenes’.

They then asked if I would raise their flag outside which, of course, I did. After this was completed we were then invited by Harry and Sharon with great generosity to dine with them in the evening at the fabulous historic building – Hopkins Dining Parlour. It turned out to be a magic ending to a wonderful day in Moose Jaw. We can't thank you enough Harry and Sharon!

Every Sunday morning in Hodgeville Anne and Ellwood Barkman run a coffee morning that they call Common Grounds. There we met Duane Felt who had been one of my High School students. He'd joined the Hodgeville Elks and eventually became The Grand Exalted Ruler of the Elks of Canada. Quite an achievement! I'd been initiated into the Elks in the late 1960s in Hodgeville. Duane did the honour of presenting me with a wonderful Elks framed certificate for the flag design.

The next day we were on the road (this time a short journey) to Ponteix where Joan and I had taught in 1966-7 before we'd both been 'stolen' and taken to Hodgeville to teach! The first stop was the Museum and Community Centre in Ponteix and what an excellent example of good architectural design -- it was not there in the '60s. Thank you Lynne for showing us around that enormous collection of First Nation artifacts found locally. We next visited the School where I taught; Joan taught in the Convent which we visited next. We were welcomed by the Mother Superior who showed us around the rooms and then the magnificent Notre Dame D'Auvergne Church. Thank you Sisters! Ponteix Town Hall was the next stop. We were met by the Mayor Shawn Larochelle. We were offered refreshments and I was presented with a massive 2-volume *History of Ponteix* and other gifts. Thank you Shawn!

The 2nd week began with a trip to Cabri to be met by the Mayor David Gossard in the village centre by a splendid maze. All the schoolchildren were there and they sang for us *Ca-na-da*. I was asked to raise the flag, after that we had a tour of their small but very well-stocked library, and interesting Museum. Thank you all at Cabri for having us.

The following day we were off to Gravelbourg. We went into the Town Hall to be met by the Acting Mayor Michael Vezina who talked with us for a while and then offered us lunch and presented us with some fine gifts. I was then summoned to 'go below'! It turned out to be the local Radio Station and I was then donned with headphones and a microphone and 'interrogated' about the flag. I was a bit nervous but I think I managed. I never got to hear it – perhaps not a bad thing!

The fantastic Our Lady of the Assumption Co-Cathedral was our next visit. It amazes me that such fine buildings as this can be in rather remote small towns in the Prairies when they can match any of the many ancient churches of Europe. Thank you Gravelbourg for letting us enjoy your town.

In the evening we went to meet the Royal Purple in the Hodgeville Community Center. They'd invited us to join them for an informal chat with refreshments – with a marvelous set of mini-Flag cakes! Thank you Louise and all the other ladies for giving us a very pleasant end to another day.

The biggest of the big days (they were all *big!*) was the visit to the Legislature and Government House. First we were given a guided tour of the Legislature by Chelsey Vargo Wilson. After lunch, we entered the Speaker's Gallery. We were accompanied by former MLA Yogi Huyghebaert , ex-Snowbird Leader, and David Carter, former Speaker of the Alberta Legislature. We'd been invited to observe the day's Assembly Session by the Premier Brad Wall, himself. This really was a unique experience. The most surprising and amazing part of the Session for me was Brad's lengthy address to the members about the flag and its origins and meanings. I have never in my life experienced such a eulogy, and it was repeated again twice in support by MLA Trent Wotherspoon and then by MLA David Marit.

Later, after the Session was over, Brad Wall came down into the Legislature foyer and presented me with the most amazing gift I could ever have imagined. It is a shadow box bearing a very neatly-folded full-size Saskatchewan Flag, the box itself in the shape of the Province. Attached was a brass plaque inscribed on behalf of Brad for my designing of the flag. This box is now on display on a wall of our living room. Everyone who visits us gets to see it – whether they like it or not!! This and some other gifts will be passing down our family for generations to come.

The next and very privileged venue was Government House to meet the Lieutenant Governor, Vaughn Solomon Schofield, and have tea and cookies with her in her sitting room. She was very warm and welcoming and started by showing us some of the rooms. The Banquet Room was the most stunning of those we saw --- a place where many famous dignitaries had dined over the years. She concluded our visit by presenting me with one of her prestigious magnificent medallions and her personal pin.

The next morning we met the Mayor of Regina, Michael Fougere, in the City Hall. In his office we chatted about the flag and the beautiful view from his office, high up in the City Hall, of Wascana Park and Lake. He presented me with a book, signed by him, of photographs of Wascana Lake through the seasons.

This privileged event was followed by another one --- a visit to the RCMP Depot and Museum. Our guide, a lady RCMP Sergeant gave us a talk in the Chapel followed by a parade by the cadets. We had lunch in the RCMP Mess followed by a walk around the Museum. This brought us to the end of 2 days of very exciting and memorable events in Regina.

The next day was based mostly at 'home', Hodgeville. The morning saw us drive a short distance from the Skool Inn to the Hodgeville Hutterite Colony. There we were greeted by lots of smiling faces of ladies and children. The men were out working in the fields.

We were then taken to the Hutterite school. We were surprised by the children's high levels of achievements particularly in writing and art. They learn 3 different forms of the German alphabet that have been used over the centuries. We heard the children recite, then they sang for us with great enthusiasm. I was then presented with a piece of rock about 6" long!?! This piece of rock had been painted on by one of the schoolteachers, Diane Nybo from Hodgeville. She had created the most detailed and fabulous copy of the Saskatchewan Flag flying in a bright blue sky. She had heard from someone that I was interested in geology and collected rock specimens. I can now claim that this specimen is the only one of its kind in the world! Thank you Diane for this wonderful souvenir. We were invited to have lunch with everyone and when we'd finished the young men and women sang for us --- it was beautiful. Then we toured their ultra-modern cow barn where almost everything was automated by computer, from feeding and milking to cleaning up afterwards. We said our goodbyes and thanked them for inviting us to see their interesting and happy Colony.

The afternoon brought a very sad moment. It was the funeral of Donny Gross in Herbert. He's mentioned in the paragraph on the second day of our visit when we went to Swift Current Museum. We went to see Donny that day in a home where he had a room. He'd been desperate to see me apparently as I'd taught him the Hodgeville all those years ago. He gave Gail, my wife Joan and myself samples of his embroidery. At the end of this short visit I gave him a hug and we left. 3 days later he died. It was a great for honour for me to be asked to speak at Donny's funeral. He'd been loved by all his family and by everyone who knew him and he had the most amazing memory in spite of his unfortunate affliction he lived with all his life. Everybody misses you Donny.

Tuesday May 24th was a Swift Current day. It started at the Golf Club where we'd been invited to lunch by the City Council. This was followed by a gift of a flight in a 4-seater Cessna 182. Thank you Mark for that great experience.

Following the flight we'd been invited by Jean McKendry to visit the Swift Current Library. Jean is the Chinook Regional Library Manager and Director and she showed us the library collection and then served us tea and cookies. She presented us with a pair of cushion covers in the Saskatchewan plaid design. Thank you Jean.

The final *Grand Tour* was 2 days in Saskatoon. It began at the City Hall where the Mayor, Donald Atchison, welcomed us to his office. He told us about the scientific achievements that had and were taking place in Saskatoon, achievements which were of world importance, then we had an enjoyable long

chat about many things. Donald then presented us with City pins and gave me a very interesting book of photographs covering the history of Saskatoon over the decades. The City has a fine Mayor.

The next stop was the Convent Home where we met the designer of the Saskatchewan Jubilee Flag, Sister Emelda. She was not well but did manage to pose for the cameras. Gail had now arranged the meetings with all the SK flag designers.

Saskatoon Western Development Museum came next. This has one of the best heritage collections we'd ever seen and we're very grateful for the opportunity to see those collections. Many thanks to all the staff.

The next day, not much further down the road, saw us arrive at Wanuskewin. Thank you Andrew for welcoming us and for arranging the tour of the First Nation's site and the chance to see the dance and drumming performance. We also had a good look at the prestigious archaeological dig nearby. This dig is of world importance having revealed the oldest First Nation artefacts – c.6,000yrs old.

We finished the day by driving to Rosetown, the home of the SUV loaned to Gail for the 3-week tour. We covered about 1700 miles. Thanks go to Blair Gehl who arranged the loan for us. We met him and the Mayor while having supper. Then the four of us went back to Hodgeville to conclude another superb 2-days of memorable events.

Herbert had invited us to their town the next day and we started with a visit to the school. We were greeted by the Principal, Arron Kohlman and led into the hall where all the students were seated. I gave a flag presentation followed by questions and answers. The interest and enthusiasm of those students was amazing. Many of them had created their own versions of the flag and asked me to sign them --- they were brilliant and it took quite some time for me to sign so many. It was a real privilege for me. Arron then presented us with Herbert School pens.

After lunch in the Chinese restaurant we went to the Museum to do a cake-cutting, beautifully iced with 2 flags. The Mayor, Doreen Schroeder welcomed us then I did another questions and answers session about the story of the flag and signed a flag for Doug Osmond, a Town Councillor. We finished with a tour around the Museum. Its artefacts are focused mainly on the railway which was a major part of Herbert's history. Sadly all the trains now just pass straight through. We discovered later that we'd been given a year's subscription to the Herbert Herald. Our thanks go to all those involved for that splendid gift, it will be a continuous reminder of those magic days we had.

Our final episode in this marvelous saga took us to Assiniboia. We were struck when we arrived by the architecturally outstanding buildings we saw --- the town's Community Centre and the Art Gallery. The Community Centre was stunning --- very spacious, finely decorated and very modern. The quality of the

building was one of the highest of all the community centres we'd visited, including the UK.

We walked just across the road to the Art Gallery, owned and run by Bill Shurniak. Bill had invited us to lunch and then a walk around the Gallery. All the art-work, sculptures and other artefacts had been collected from all around the world by Bill himself. It is a splendidly eclectic collection displayed in a very warm and relaxing atmosphere in every room in a very fine building. This is a place that must be greatly appreciated by the people of Assiniboia. Thank you Bill.

Finally we drove to the Museum. This was an excellent collection of heritage items, crammed to filling point, and extremely well displayed. I found everything fascinating. Another piece of Assiniboia for the people to be proud of.

The end to this day was a sad one for us because it was the last place of our *Grand Tour*, and I want to finish by giving an brief overview of the whole trip and its effect on us. The comments will show how much we shall cherish this visit to Saskatchewan and carry the memories with us for the rest of our lives.

Firstly, the 'kids': so lively, so interested and so friendly. The adults likewise, showing us how proud they are of their Province and of their own towns and cities, and how happy they are to be in Saskatchewan itself. I understand it's a Province whose population is growing in some places, but sadly declining in others but overall there appears to be an increase in the general population and that says a lot!

I'm amazed at the way people relished the flag when its design and its meanings were revealed to them, and that is the part of our visit that makes me very proud and humbled to have achieved that, albeit after almost 50 years. We have made more friends in Saskatchewan than one could think possible, and to all of them and the rest of you --- a giant *Thank You!* I hope we'll be back soon.

To conclude: I mustn't forget to mention George Tsougrianis and Craig Chaplin of SWTV. They'd been making a documentary of our tour and they followed us everywhere on most days, rather like a pair of lost dogs! (Not really, they're a super pair and great fun to be with, and we've been honoured by their presence).

Last, but by no means whatsoever least, we must thank Gail Hapanowicz and her husband Mirek. Without Gail this *Grand Tour* would never have happened. She organized everything --- every minute of it, and for that not only my family but everyone in Saskatchewan would not have gained the pleasure and joy that Gail brought us through her hard work. Thank you forever Gail and Mirek.

Anthony Drake
2nd July 2016