

Reg Atkinson, *Penticton Museum* Founder



Reg Atkinson speaking to two youngsters
sometime in the late 1950's

The Atkinson name is associated with the Penticton Museum for one very good reason; it grew out of the vision of one man, Reg Atkinson. While a multitude of visitors and residents contributed to the Penticton Museum over the years, it was Reg Atkinson who started it all.

In 1910, Reg's family moved from Vancouver, where he was born, to Penticton. Reg and his brothers spent their days roaming the hills and valleys of their new home. Reg took an intense interest in the natural and human history of their new home. He collected fossils, interesting stones and anything resembling an aboriginal arrowhead or tool. Whatever he found, he brought home. Reg's childhood friends were the children of early settlers and local first people's families. These friendships fostered Reg's long-lasting passion for local history.

In 1914, the First World War began and like many young men, Reg joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In 1917, Reg was severely wounded at Passchendaele. While convalescing in a military hospital, Reg added to his existing collection of military articles by trading and

bartering for cap badges, shoulder flashes, patches and other bits and pieces of militaria. Back home, he added these items to his growing collection of historical artifacts stored in his basement.

By 1954, Reg's collection was well known to the community, and the city of Penticton gave him permission to display it in the SS Sicamous, the fabled steam-driven paddle wheeler. The Penticton Museum was born. Reg was very proud and his wife, Catherine Daisy Gillam, was happy to get her basement back. Visitors and donations flooded into the new museum.

In 1965, the City of Penticton opened the current museum and library on 785 Main Street. Reg's collection was transferred to the new site, and he was made curator. Failing health forced Reg to step aside from his curatorial duties, but he stayed busy writing numerous historical articles. In 1967, he published Penticton Pioneers in Story and Picture, his best-known work. Reg was a devoted family man, and when the long hand of war once again reached out and took his son away from him during the Second World War, it must have been a staggering blow.

Reg Atkinson was a rare individual who was willing to put a significant part of his life's work into posterity. He built a better future for the community by collecting and preserving the tangible artifacts of the past, the better to understand the future. The people of Penticton are fortunate to have the benefit of his foresight and hard work. Reg Atkinson died on November 10th, 1973, but his collection still delights and informs thousands every year.

Dennis Oomen, Manager/Curator
Penticton Museum & Archives



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