



Place Names

McNeely's

McNeely's picnic site, on the south side of Akamina Parkway about 6.4 kilometres from the beginning of the road and near the top of the gorge on Cameron Creek, is an enticing area long used by visitors. While the name for the site is still in use, the origin of the name and even its spelling is slim with new information based solely on oral reports.

The unexpected arrival of Eugene McNeely's great grandson, Greg Pratt, at the Resource Conservation office in early September, 2015, provided one clue. He had come to report that the name "McNeally's" on the road sign indicating the site, was misspelled and wondered how this could be corrected to "McNeely's". As was later learned, not only is



McNeely's picnic site is one of only two such facilities on the Akamina Parkway. (Photo: Chris Morrison)

the sign incorrectly spelled but the official Gem Trek map of the park indicates the place with the spelling "McNeely's". Mr. Pratt explained that it was his family's history that his great grandfather, Eugene A. McNeely, had helped to build the Akamina Parkway. Unfortunately he had no documentation or other proof. A telephone interview with Arlene Williams, Eugene McNeely's granddaughter, who is one generation closer to the man, corroborated the story. She said Eugene was the only one of six brothers who did not go into

farming upon their move to Warner, Alberta from Canterbury, New Brunswick in 1915.¹ He worked for others and started his own construction company in Lethbridge known originally as McNeely and Sons and later changed to McNeely Brothers.²

After a thorough search requiring more than 20 hours which included Waterton Lakes National Park Archives, Library and Archives Canada records and *The Lethbridge Herald* of the day, one thing is clear: McNeely's participation in the construction of this road is not documented. But then neither is the name of anyone below the position of engineer. It is known that the McNeely Brothers Company was in business in 1920 and construction of the Akamina Parkway was begun in 1921 making the dates a fit.³ Eugene McNeely was said to have also worked on building the road from Fort Macleod to Lethbridge but no date could be given.⁴ But that's as far as the evidence takes us. Neither the 1921 census for Waterton⁵ nor the Pincher Creek and District Community History,⁶ nor the Fred Huddlestun history⁷ provide any indication of Eugene McNeely's presence in Waterton or participation in the road work.



McNeely Family showing nine of 13 children. Left to right, back row, Lu, Eva, Pearl; middle row, Roy, Mrs. McNeely (Emily with Alta on her knee, Fern, Eugene McNeely with Hattie on his knee, Claude; front, Hugh. (Photo: Greg Pratt)

While construction of the road was enthusiastically and regularly described in *The Lethbridge Herald* from the work's start up in 1921 to completion in 1928, the route itself was deemed more important than those working on it. Even as construction proceeded, the workmen's names and numbers were not mentioned. But according to Ken Goble, who notes the construction in his 1981 unpublished history, the road was built by various road crews who used campsites along the route. He writes: "...these usually took on the name of someone on the job."⁸ During the 1931-1932 season when relief crews worked on the highway, the McNeely site was used again as a camp if the label on a photo in the park archives is correct. It shows several tents, the type workmen would have used, erected on snowy ground.

The site itself is near perfect for a construction camp. It has easy access to Cameron Creek for water for drinking, cooking and washing purposes with open areas providing sunlight and flat terrain for tents. It is a logical place for a camp to be situated at a long-existing road junction with one from the Blakiston Valley to the north. That road wound along to the north side of Crandell Mountain and passed southward past Blue Lake (now called Crandell Lake). This route had been established in 1906 by those hauling equipment and supplies to the oil drilling areas in the Akamina Valley. Once the Akamina Parkway was completed and eventually improved, the Crandell Lake connector became a hiking trail.

In 1961 two picnic sites, which were unidentified by name in a newspaper report but are noted as being on the Akamina Parkway were established.⁹ It may be assumed that the two sites were McNeely's and Little Prairie since they were and remain the only two picnic sites on the parkway. The first official reference that could be found to the McNeely picnic site used the "McNealy" spelling. This was mentioned in a Resource Management monthly report which noted, "The improvements carried on at McNealy's [sic] and Little Prairie picnic sites such as installation of chemical toilets and park restrictions are excellent and long overdue."¹⁰

The link between the name for the picnic site and Eugene McNeely, the man, remains to be confirmed.



¹ Telephone interview by Chris Morrison with Arlene Williams, Sept. 7, 2015. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 3.

² McNeely history clippings taken from various local family history books, provided by Greg Pratt and including: Warner District Historical Society, *Wagons to Wings*,

(Lethbridge,: Ronald's Printing, 1985), no page numbers given. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 3.

³ Newspaper ad for McNeely Brothers Construction in *The Lethbridge Herald*, August 18, 1939, page 16 states: "...The new Greyhound Bus Depot is one of the jobs we have done in Lethbridge in the past 19 years." WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 3.

⁴ Telephone interview by Chris Morrison with Arlene Williams, Eugene McNeely's granddaughter, (daughter of Leona Fern McNeely, daughter of Eugene and Emily), Sept. 7, 2015. Box 130, Item 3.

⁵ Census for 1921 Alberta, district 8, sub. dist. 2, T1, R 30 W4; T3 R 28-30 W4 including Waterton Park Village, pages 1-13. Box 130, Item 3.

⁶ *Prairie Grass to mountain Pass History of the Pioneers of Pincher Creek and District*, ed. Farley Wuth, (Pincher Creek and District Historical Society, 2013).

⁷ Fred Huddleston, *A history of the settlement and building up of the area in S.W. Alberta bordering Waterton Park on the north from 1889*, publication information unknown.

⁸ Ken Goble, *Waterton Park History*, (unpublished manuscript, 1981), 7. WLNP Archives, Box 115, Item 8.

⁹ Bessie Annand, "Waterton Park is Summer Playground of Southern Alberta," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 27, 1960, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 3. Also, "Extended Campground Facilities Used by 31,580 This Summer," *Lethbridge Herald*, Aug. 14, 1961, 5. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 3.

¹⁰ Resource Conservation Management monthly report, July, 1977, WLNP Archives, Box 114, Item 23. The Annual Resource Conservation Report for that year referred to the work as a "face lift."