

## Thomas Alexander Robertson (1928-2010)

Thomas Alexander Robertson was born in Grande Prairie, AB on September 6, 1928. The first inklings of the great fur trader he would become came in the late 1930s when he began hunting and trapping with his friends. Alex's first job was working after school in the fur warehouse at the Hudson Bay Company post in Grande Prairie. His superiors noticed Alex's eye for fur, even then. The HBC ensured that Alex received training at their fur school in Montreal, QC, and subsequently sent him to their posts all over Northern Canada as a relief manager. In this province Alex was based out of Prince Albert for 22 years, but worked at Stony Rapids, Patuanak, Stanley Mission, Pelican Narrows, La Loche, Ile a la Crosse, among others. In the end, he would choose Northern Saskatchewan as his home.

In 1967, Alex Robertson quit his job with the HBC in Prince Albert so he could start his own business. Robertson packed his '59 Oldsmobile station wagon with his wife and children, and drove north. Alex had been to La Ronge before on buying trips for the HBC, and thought it was strategically located. La Ronge was the hub of northern Saskatchewan, and he knew the quality and quantity of fur produced by the local trapper. Just as he was about to quit his job in PA, a timely opportunity to buy La Ronge Grocery from Stan Kowalski presented itself, and he took it. La Ronge Grocery was a very small store—less than 1000 square feet—with a few rooms behind where the family lived. The store had electricity but no sewer or running water. This was a big change from the three storey brick house, with all the modern amenities, where they lived in Prince Albert.

For more than 40 years, Alex ran Robertson Trading before ill health forced him to retire. During those years there were many ups and downs, but one thing was constant: Alex Robertson loved and respected Aboriginal people. Over the years, even during his HBC days, most of Alex's customers were Aboriginal people. He loved their culture, their lifestyle, and their sense of humour. He had a great rapport with the people he met. He knew the names of all of his customers, and usually those of their extended families. He spoke enough of the local dialect to do business with customers who spoke only Cree. Alex also loved the children who came into the store. He joked and teased with his customers' children, and always let them have a piece of fruit before they left. Alex had a great appreciation for traditional Aboriginal artwork and leathercraft. He amassed a large collection, both in his HBC days and through purchases made at Robertson Trading. He loved the colour and ingenuity displayed in the work of local artists. Robertson Trading is partly a museum to his vast collection. Whether the fur market was up or down, Alex Robertson bought fur—he hoped that if he stuck by the trappers, that they would stick by him. He always dealt fairly with the men and women with whom he did business. Robertson Trading's customers loved Alex, and they felt a loss when he retired. In his retirement he sometimes came to the store to reminisce with the trappers about the old days. When he passed away in 2010, his funeral was standing-room-only. He is buried in the La Ronge Cemetery.

## A Brief History of the Library

The first La Ronge Public Library was located in the Old Gateway School located on the Urban Reserve in downtown La Ronge. The public library moved into the space next to the Town of La Ronge office in 1984. At that time, it was an improvement on where it had been but still

considered too small for the size of community that it served. Through the years many different incarnations of the joint Air Ronge and La Ronge library boards, friends of the library and library staff have worked hard to come up with a vision and the funding to create a larger space. Through facilitation by the Town of La Ronge, a grant from the Saskatchewan Government provided the major funding needed to bring in the rest. Rosemary Loeffler, who was the library administrator at the time, worked with the architect and project managers to try to make the transition as painless as possible. Today people are surprised to think that the area that is now the circulation desk, public computer stations and the administrator's office used to be the entire library.

COMPARE THESE STATISTICS FROM THE YEAR OF OUR FOUNDING TO SEE HOW WE'VE GROWN!

	1963	2016
Population	686	*9107
Hours Open Per Week	10	48
Adult Borrowers	69	2912
Child Borrowers	396	653
Total Borrowers	465	3565
Total Volumes	1450	20985
Circulation Total	8129	22022
Town Contribution	\$200.00	\$95,000.00

\*includes La Ronge, Air Ronge, LLRIB, Napatak, Wadin Bay, and other Surrounding Communities