

## William Arthur (Bert) Allen

- William Arthur Allen (well-known as Bert) was born at home in Chesterton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England on May 22, 1902.
- His parents were English-Irish working class Methodists.
- He was the eldest of five, but long survived his four sisters.
- As a teenager during the First World War, Bert found employment as a mechanic's helper in coal mines and attended night school for three years.
- The limited prospects of such an unstable, unsafe and low-wage job compelled Bert to enact change in his life.
- Attracted by the Canadian government's advertising of the prairie west, Bert left everything familiar and immigrated to Canada.
- He sailed from Liverpool in 1924 with 20 pounds sterling in his pocket.
- To be near a maternal branch of his family, Bert worked on a soldiers' settlement farm near Brandon, Manitoba.
- This is where he met his future wife, a music teacher named Kathleen Kerr, whom he called his "Prairie sweetheart".
- After hearing much about the Red Lake gold rush, Bert and a few friends ventured north in 1927.
- Air travel costs were prohibitive, so they booked passage on the first passenger boat to leave Hudson for Gold Pines after break-up.
- Bert vividly recalled the difficulties encountered when they reached Hudson in April 1928, "we ate what and where we could and slept on the station floor until the middle of May when the ice went out."
- They arrived in Gold Pines on "The Piper", where plans changed.
- Bert and his friends were hired to help take three canoe loads of freight to Woman Lake for Harry Vickers. This led them to work at Jackson-Manion Mine.
- One year later, the mine closed and Bert was again unemployed. At this point they elected to search for work at Red Lake in May.
- They flew with Western Canada Airways to Gold Pines and came to Red Lake from there on a Northern Transportation boat.
- Bert and his friends were hired at the Howey Mine by assistant manager Archie Lawrence.
- Bert joined the surface staff as hoistman on the surface dragline.
- He shared a nearby cabin with Fred Crook, from England, and James Seawright, from Ireland.
- The mine and mill were scheduled to begin production weeks before but underground water created problems when it gained on inefficient pumps. Bert got a major pump operating at 95% capacity. The characteristically gruff manager Horace Greeley Young was relieved and delighted, and promoted Bert to shift boss with a substantial raise.
- Bert was later shift foreman for 11 years.
- The following year Bert joined the mill crew and "was in on the beginning of production" he recalled.
- A highlight of his mining career was assisting Irvin Haley in pouring the first gold brick at the Howey Mine.
- Bert and Gustaf Hemming, a Swedish émigré, staked claims in 1931 close to what, to his surprise, later became Campbell Red Lake Gold Mine.
- He was the first passenger flown by pilot David W. "Scottie" Moir for Starratt Airways from Red Lake to Winnipeg in 1932.
- Bert's sister, Bertha, and her husband, Edward Hinds, and their family also lived at Red Lake in the 1930s, where Ed worked in the Howey crusher plant.
- Bert hired Emery Chartrand and Gideon B. Clarke to build him a log home near those of Nelson Spiers and Otto May, the Shearns and McDougalls.
- With the house set up, Bert finally acknowledged his gnawing loneliness. He realized his future must include his girlfriend in Manitoba.
- One day as he stood at his kitchen window in Red Lake, Bert exclaimed to himself, "I am going to marry Kathleen." He wrote a proposal letter, she accepted and they wed in Manitoba in 1933.
- As women usually left Red Lake to give birth in larger centres, the Allens' daughter Lois was born in Kenora in 1936.

- When son Keith was born in 1939, Kathleen remained at home, with Dr. Thomas Goodison and nurse Teena Smith in attendance.
- Unlike most of his contemporaries, Bert assisted at what became a difficult birth. Upon delivery, Keith was silent and, thought the Allens, stillborn. To their shock and then grateful amazement, Goodison quickly tipped his foot to the hot woodstove which brought the baby - and a great cry - to life.
- When the Allens moved to a larger home in 1940, Gordon and Winnifred Shearn, from England, bought their cabin.
- The collapse of the shaft pillar and the subsequent closure of the Howey Mine in 1941 forced the Allens' reluctant departure from Red Lake.
- The Allens' daughter Margaret was born after they left Red Lake.
- Bert joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and was posted overseas as a sergeant in 1942. Within a day, the ship he was on was under attack by enemy submarines. Nearly four years later, Bert returned to the safety of Canada and his family.
- He spent the next 21 years until retirement as engineers' chief at the Ontario Training Centre.
- The Allens eventually became the proud grandparents of four.
- In his later years, Bert's life was saddened by the deaths of two grandchildren, but also enriched by the births of two great-granddaughters.
- In 1994 he received a 50-year medal from the Royal Canadian Legion.
- An unshakeable faith in God was Bert's guide through life.
- His fine singing voice – he had the rare gift of perfect pitch – remained in fine form as he sang for over 70 years in United Church choirs until his late 90s.
- Bert was also an accomplished soloist.
- Bert said, "I would rather wear out than rust out."
- He was a devoted volunteer of the Red Cross and the Get Heart Smart program, where he advised on heart health and helped operate testing equipment.
- He spent two decades in executive roles in the Lion's Club and Kiwanis Club and, in his 90s, was president of his seniors' building association.
- Bert was a talented watercolour and acrylic painter. A veteran student of art courses, he was past-president of the Central Ontario Art Association.
- In 1967 he joined a group anxious to start the first art gallery in Brampton (now Peel Museum & Gallery), and helped organize its first juried art show.
- Bert had the hands and mind of an artist, and transferred this passion onto the countless youngsters he taught in the children's art classes he pioneered at the gallery.
- Until his ninth decade, Bert took numerous creative writing courses., and completed his memoirs in 1989.
- Kathleen died that same year from cancer in her 80th year after nearly 56 years of marriage.
- At his 100th birthday, Bert still vividly recalled the assistance he gave in the pouring of Red Lake's first gold brick in 1930.
- The last resident of Red Lake from 1929, Bert died on November 28, 2002 in Brampton, Ontario, six months after a large celebration feted the diminutive centenarian.
- Bert was deeply moved to have accomplished the rare milestone of living in two centuries, and the not insignificant fact that he lived over 100 years in exceptionally good health.
- A lifelong devotion to healthy living afforded Bert a life of both quantity and quality. Even past his centenary, he remained mobile and unbent from age, intellectually rigorous, and admirably independent.
- He was both old world and old school, a perfect British gentleman with impeccable manners, a fastidiously neat appearance, and fierce dignity.
- Bert never wavered from a disciplined daily routine including answering mail on the day of receipt, exercise and taking cod liver oil tablets. He employed a steely, frank philosophy about senior apathy: "once we start sitting down watching the idiot box, we're just waiting for the undertaker to come."
- In over six decades since leaving Red Lake, Bert remained close to several Red Lake friends, visited occasionally, and helped record local history.
- He rarely spoke in honeyed tones, but his love for Red Lake was an exception.
- Bert often said, "I have many happy memories of the interesting events of the early days of Red Lake, but it is the people I like to think of the most".