For Immediate Release
April 20, 2004

EXPLORING THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Fort St. John, BC – For more than 100 years, Women’s Institutes have been active in rural and agricultural communities across Canada. In order to acknowledge this important facet of our cultural heritage, local Fort St. John resident Pamela den Ouden, with support from the Royal BC Museum’s Living Landscapes: Peace River-Northern Rockies initiative, is coordinating a research project that will collect oral histories and historic photographs from current and former Women’s Institute members throughout the Peace Region. The work will be undertaken over the next year by a research team comprised of faculty at Northern Lights College and the University of Northern British Columbia.

“The agricultural landscape of the Peace River region is not paralleled anywhere else in British Columbia, and by exploring the history of the region’s Women’s Institutes, we will provide a unique description of the opportunities and challenges farming families faced within this northern agricultural frontier,” says den Ouden. “By making this information available both within the region and on the Internet, we will provide an opportunity for students, researchers and other interested parties to explore the rich history of the Peace River region’s Women’s Institutes and to learn from their experiences.”

“Women’s Institutes have long been a key organization in rural and agricultural communities in the Peace River region since it was opened for settlement,” said Royal BC Museum CEO Pauline Rafferty. “We are pleased to support Pamela den Ouden and her team in this initiative because it promises not only to provide information on the lengthy history of this vibrant community institution, but also to open a unique window into the region’s history.”

Living Landscapes: Peace River-Northern Rockies is a research and public education project that explores stories that highlight the diverse human and natural history of northeastern British Columbia. Research and educational material obtained through this project will become available on the Royal BC Museum’s Living Landscapes website, and will provide regional perspectives for the new BC Gallery currently being developed at the Royal BC Museum.

The museum’s Living Landscapes program is entering its tenth year, with earlier work having occurred in the Thompson Okanagan, Columbia River Basin, and Upper Fraser Basin regions.

The Royal BC Museum, recently awarded Crown Corporation status, is a cultural, educational and historic institution that was founded in 1886. It is responsible for
collecting, displaying and researching the province’s human and natural history. The *Living Landscapes: Peace River-Northern Rockies* initiative is being generously supported by the Vancouver Foundation.

For more information on this initiative, please visit [http://livinglandscapes.bc.ca](http://livinglandscapes.bc.ca), or call *Living Landscapes* Manager Brian Apland at 250-387-2457, or Regional Coordinator Kathleen O’Neill at 250-787-1203.

-30-

**Media Contact:** Chris Higgins  
Media Relations Coordinator  
Royal BC Museum  
250-387-2101  
cahiggins@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca