

Genealogy: Homestead patents of our pioneers

BY MEDICINE HAT NEWS ON FEBRUARY 6, 2016.

Your grandparents or even great grandparents may have been pioneer homesteaders in our local area.

Have you ever wondered about the files left behind by these early pioneers? Records pertaining to these homestead applications are on file, and are available, on microfilm at the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA).

The federal government passed the Dominion Lands Act in 1872. This allowed much of western Canada, known then as the Northwest Territories, to be surveyed. The land was divided by lines, running south to north, called meridians. The first meridian line runs just west of the city of Winnipeg. The Alberta- Saskatchewan border is located on the fourth meridian, therefore our local legal land locations are noted as west of the 4th (w of 4).

Every homestead had a legal land description attached to it. This enabled the pioneers to locate the survey stakes, which identified the designated land they had filed for at the Dominion land offices. My grandparents homesteaded in the Burdett area in 1909. Their legal land description was NW 34-08-12 w of 4. These numbers refer to section 34, township 08, range 12 west of the 4th meridian.

The requirement for an individual making application for a land grant was defined by these rules. At least 10 acres of land had to be cleared and cultivated, a house was to be built, as well as other farm buildings. The applicant had to live on the land for six months a year for three years, and if all these requirements were met, they could then submit an application for title, (letters patent). This allowed the homesteader to qualify for a second quarter section, called a pre-emption, which expanded their land holdings to 320 acres.

A declaration, signed, dated and stamped by a sub agent of the Dominion Land Office, recommending the application for patent, stating that all requirements have been completed, is included in this file.

Information on these homestead files can be valuable, especially if you are looking for personal information about your ancestor. There are 15 questions the applicant is required to answer. These give us insight into our ancestor's life.

Questions include: Full name and age, country of birth, whether a British subject by birth, date of naturalization or repatriation. As well as the date when homestead entry was given, date of when home was built, and the date the home was first occupied, etc.

On my grandfather's file the number of acres broke and cropped over a three-year period are given, as well as the increase in number of farm animals. The house is listed as a 14-by-18-ft. wood construction valued at \$300. Included also are barns, grain bins, water well, and length of fence on the property. It is very hard to imagine that eight family members lived together in that size of a house. Also listed in the 1909 file were: four oxen, one horse and one cow, plus much more interesting information.

The Alberta Genealogical Society (AGS) has created databases to help you locate these homestead application files. These databases are available through their website at <http://abgensoc.ca/homestead/index.htm>. You can then search the databases by name or land location, find the microfilm reel number and file number. With these numbers you can then locate your Ancestor's Homestead File at the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) in Edmonton.

You can also order by mail, a homestead search through the Archives Store at <http://sales.ccs.alberta.ca/paa/services/homesteadSearch.aspx>. For a \$25 fee when you provide the legal land description, you will receive copies of the homestead application file held on microfilm at the PAA.

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