

ANNA & RENE OE

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Celebrating 100 years in Canada

Anna Oe's face lights up with pride as she remembers what it was like for her parents when they first came to this area.

The faded brown and white pictures speak volumes not just of her Ukrainian heritage but of the life her parents were able to create in their new home.

"My dad came to this area to homestead in 1916, on the first local train which only went as far as Clairmont," says Oe, who was four when she moved to the Peace Country with her family.

Oe's father, Michael Hawryluk, immigrated to Manitoba with his mother in 1889 from Austria. Like many Ukrainian settlers they were trying to find a better home for themselves.

They were among more than 100,000 Ukrainians who came to Canada between 1891 and 1914. This year many of them and their families are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first Ukrainian immigrants to Canada.

Today there are about 600,000 Canadians of Ukrainian origin in Canada, says local historian Jerry Petryshyn. In Alberta they make up a little over eight per cent of the population.

Most immigrants first settled in Manitoba or Saskatchewan until the farmlands of Alberta became more accessible.

"From the first world war until 1930 there was a steady stream of Ukrainians to the Peace River Country," Petryshyn adds.

The promise of good farmland drew many Ukrainians to this area after they faced the reali-

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ty they would have to abandon their native land to survive. "Land was important to my father," says Oe.

The land her father worked so hard to clear and farm has now passed on to the third generation member of the family. Located just north of Bezanson, her father started with 160 acres and eventually doubled the size of the farm.

"It was hard to get land in Austria. When my aunt was telling me what they had in Austria and it was only about four acres and they had cows and everything on it."

Farming suited the Ukrainian lifestyle. Breads and wheat products are a staple part of the Ukrainian diet and culture. Eager to find something that could offer them a familiar way of life, Ukrainians eagerly sought out land that was well-suited to farming. The land did not always come easy.

Many Ukrainian settlers were not prepared for the harsh climates or thick underbrush that first had to be cleared before the land could be worked.

"What I remember is mostly bush with some open spaces. I guess it was a lot of hard work," says Oe.

Like most early settlers, Oe's father did most of the work on the land using brute strength.

"My father used a walking plow with a team of oxen. That first year he dug the family garden with a spade and built a house for the family."

For his first couple of crops he didn't have a granary so he built a sheet of ice and put a roof over it to keep the snow out.

"Later on he bought horses and then a tractor, but I don't remember ever seeing him run the tractor."

Although times were often tough in the new country and money scarce, Oe says her parents never regretted their decision to move here.

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[Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada • Fri, Feb 28, 1992 Page 19](#)