

PEACE RIVER COUNTRY LAND SETTLEMENT DIGITIZATION PROJECT

**A Project of the Peace River Country Historical
Society, the Grande Prairie Regional College, and
the South Peace Regional Archives**

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Introduction composed by David W. Leonard

Time Frame

Part I of the database extends from the earliest squatters of the 1880s up to the end of 1914. This period was chosen because by the end of 1914, the railway had reached the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake, a joint trend, hence, travel to the Peace River Country from Edmonton would be much easier, especially if the travellers were bringing in all the equipment and supplies to start a farm. Also, by this time, it was evident that the war in Europe would be a lengthy one, and, so, many young men who had thought about homesteading in the Peace River Country were being pressured to join the military or engage in wartime production. With the war, many more immigrants from eastern Europe were settling in the region.

Geographic Scope

The boundaries of the Peace River Country are subjective. For the purpose of this database, it is taken to mean all the land from which the water flows into the Peace River. To the east the boundary was chosen as Range 18 west of the 5th Meridian, meaning that the land around McLennan is within the scope of this study, as the North Heart River flows into the Peace, but that around High Prairie is outside as the South Heart River flows into Lesser Slave Lake, and the Athabasca River. See image 01.

Homesteading

Most of the applications for land in the Peace River Country were for homesteads under the Dominion Lands Act (**ctrl** + click [07-Dominion Lands Act 001.gif](#)). By this Act, once areas of Crown land had been surveyed and officially declared available for settlement, individuals could apply for a quarter-section of their choice but no more than one as a homestead (**ctrl** + click [12-Homestead Application.gif](#)). Applicants had to be the male heads of households (albeit but one person) and at least 18 years of age. In the absence of an adult male, an adult female could become eligible. After a successful filing, the homesteader was required to occupy his or her quarter within six months, clear and break five acres of it, undertake some cultivation, construct a habitable dwelling, and live on the land for six months a year for at least three years. Once this was completed to the satisfaction of a Homestead Inspector, and verified by three witnesses, the homesteader could apply for a patent (legal title) to this quarter, provided that he or she had become a Canadian citizen (**ctrl** + click [13-Patent Application 001.gif](#), [14-Patent Application 002.gif](#), [15-Acknowledgement Of Patent.gif](#)). The application for patent had to be made within five years of the acceptance of the application to homestead, unless the homesteader could justify a time extension for reasons such as illness (**ctrl** + click [16-Delay Statement.gif](#), [17-Report & Recommendation.gif](#)). Once the application for patent was accepted, legal title was invariably granted. This was, for the most part, how the Canadian West had been settled since the Dominion Lands Act had first come into effect in 1873.

With no evidence of compliance with the provisions, homestead entries could be, and usually were, cancelled; or, if the homesteader found it too difficult to meet the

conditions, he or she could declare an official abandonment and receive credit for any improvements that had been made (*ctrl + click* [18-Declaration Of Abandonment.gif](#)). The homesteader was then eligible to file for a different quarter. In actuality, the government appeared to be relatively lenient with its rules and willing to allow lengthy time extensions, as long as the homesteader appeared to be making progress. Nonetheless, as this database reveals, approximately 50% of the homestead applications made in the Peace River Country between 1910 and 1914 were either cancelled or abandoned for various reasons. This was in keeping with the general pattern in western Canada.

The Dominion Land Surveys

The first settlement wave in the Peace River Country had been delayed for several reasons, primarily because of the remoteness of the region and the difficulty farmers would encounter in trying to locate there. This was why the government had been hesitant about subdividing townships and throwing the land open for homesteading in the first place. However, in the spring of 1909, the Canadian Northern Railway began pushing its "Peace River Line" towards Onoway and in the direction of Grande Prairie. It was, therefore, decided to subdivide the open grasslands of this prairie into quarter-sections and open a land office at Grouard. When 20 full and 15 partial townships were completed by the fall, the stage was set for the first land rush, which began the following spring.

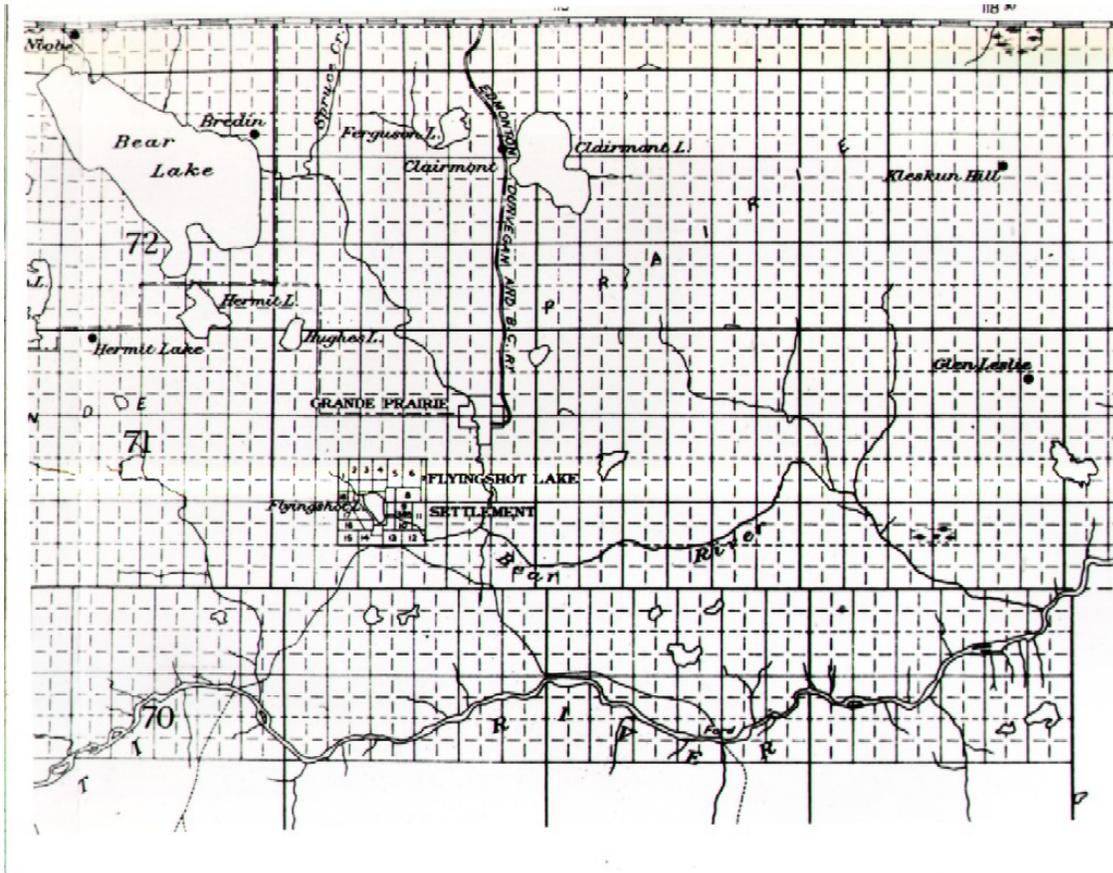
These first homesteaders were not the first farmers in the Peace River Country, for pockets of agricultural settlement had evolved years earlier along the banks of the Peace River. Anticipating further settlement inland, the government had begun base line surveys of the region as early as 1882, but, with no serious railway proposals then afloat, the surveys were curtailed. It was not until the Klondike gold rush that the first genuine prospect of a settlement wave began to loom. Shortly after Treaty 8 was concluded during 1899-1900, Reserve land for the region's First Nations was plotted east of Peace River Crossing, north of Dunvegan, and at Sturgeon Lake. In 1901-02, C.C. Fairchild marked out a 38km sq concession southwest of the Crossing for a colonization scheme initiated by the ill-fated and fraudulent Peace River Colonization & Land Development Company. With the demise of this company, the government decided that, henceforth, Crown land in the region would not be turned over to such initiatives, but instead, set aside exclusively for individual settlers, with certain tracts earmarked for timber and grazing leases.

During 1904-06, the 6th Meridian was corrected, and the 19th to 23rd Base Lines completed by Arthur St. Cyr, James Wallace and Henry Selby. During 1906-08, settlements at Fort Vermilion, North Vermilion, Boyer River, Shaftesbury, Peace River Crossing, Spirit River and Flyingshot Lake were marked out by Selby, Jean-Baptiste St. Cyr and Herbert Holcroft. These were to accommodate the squatters who had already taken up land at these locations. Jean-Baptiste St. Cyr and Holcroft also made a start at township subdivision in the vicinity of Dunvegan, Spirit River, Flyingshot Lake, Griffin Creek and present day Reno. Finally, in the spring of 1909, Walter MacFarlane was contracted to subdivide Grande Prairie. When the first land rush ensued the following

spring, more township surveys quickly followed, including those on the Pouce Coupe, Spirit River and Fairview prairies, and west of Lake Kimiwan. By the end of 1910, the grid outline of what would effectively become the settled areas of the Alberta portion of the Peace River Country was in place. The British Columbia portion would be undertaken in 1912 ([ctrl + click 04-Peace River Surveyed 1910.gif](#)).

Township Subdivision and Land Settlement

As was standard practice in western Canada, once the base lines and meridians had been established in the Peace River Country, and settlements surveyed where warranted, townships and quarter-sections were then plotted. This was begun in 1908 by Jean-Baptiste St. Cyr, and continued in earnest by Walter MacFarlane the following year. In this process, each six mile square township was surveyed into 36 sections, with each section subdivided into four quarters of 160 acres apiece. Between each section westerly and two sections northerly, 66' allowances were allocated so that each quarter would have access to a public road. Sections 11 and 29 of each township were then set aside as "school lands," meaning that future rural governments would be able to dispose of these and redirect the profits towards the establishment and maintenance of schools in the township. Unlike on the southern prairies, however, in what had been known as Rupert's Land, Sections 8 and 26 were not set aside for the Hudson's Bay Company. Nor was any land set aside for the Canadian Pacific Railway or any other railway companies.



Divisions of sections and quarters, Flyingshot Lake and Bear Lake.

The first applications for land in the Peace River Country were in the form of occupancy declarations made by parties who had lived in the region prior to the initial signing of Treaty 8 in June, 1899. Such people could later claim title to their holdings as free grants of upward to 160 acres apiece, provided that they continued to reside on this land. Those people of Aboriginal ancestry who had accepted Half-breed land scrip rather than money scrip or reserve land as Treaty Indians could claim 240 acres. Later, occupancy declarations would be made by squatters occupying and improving land prior to its survey. By virtue of this, such people had the right of pre-emption of the quarter-section or settlement plots on which they dwelled (Section 10). Beginning in the spring of 1906, their declarations were taken by the Dominion Land Surveyors working in their districts and forwarded to Ottawa.

When homesteading proper was begun in the spring of 1910, the Land Agent at Grouard, Peter Tomkins, began to accept previously verified occupancy declarations along with regular homestead applications. He also took claims by those seeking to apply Half-breed, Military or South African scrip, and also those who sought to purchase land on fractional quarters adjacent to their homestead or scrip land. This included land in the surveyed settlements of the region as well as the quarter-sections in the surveyed townships. In May 1910, due to a veritable land rush on Grande Prairie, Tomkins made an excursion through the region, taking applications and adjudicating cases where more than one party had applied for a particular quarter-section or settlement plot. Subsequent applications, however, were to be made at Grouard. Then, in July 1911, the government opened a Dominion Land Office at Grande Prairie, which handled applications for land south of Dunvegan, including, in the spring of 1912, land on the Pouce Coupe Prairie of British Columbia. Land north of the Peace River continued to be administered from Grouard with a sub-agency opened at Shaftesbury in 1912. This included the area around Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope in British Columbia. In early 1915, the Dominion Land Office at Grouard was transferred to Peace River. Shortly thereafter, sub-agencies were opened at Pouce Coupe and Fort St. John.

The Dominion Lands Act Amendments of 1908

One of the reasons the Peace River Country was so attractive at this time was the fact that, with so much land thrown open for settlement at once, there was plenty of room in which to develop expanded farms. At the time, it was recognized throughout North America that the traditional 160-acre homestead was no longer large enough to accommodate a family of any size. In 1908, therefore, several amendments were passed to the Dominion Lands Act, which encouraged the development of larger family farms. The amended Act stipulated that homesteaders could now undertake their residency requirements on land adjoining the homesteads which was occupied by any other family member, and not just a parent, as was previously the case (Section 18). It was also now possible (Section 9.3) for a homesteader to file for land as a proxy on behalf of another adult family member (and not just a son as before) and to reserve land for a 17-year-old family member. A homesteader could now abandon an entry in favour of a family member (Section 13.3). If their homestead quarters were obstructed by rivers, sloughs or other such impediments, farmers could now expand their holdings by having added "from adjoining land, a sufficient area to make up, but not exceed, one

hundred and sixty acres” (Section 9.1). It was also now possible for homesteaders to purchase fractional quarters (portions of land that were not complete quarters) at a price not less than \$3 per acre, provided that such land was available and adjacent to their homesteads (Section 32).

South African Scrip

In addition to the amendments to the Dominion Lands Act, 1908 also saw the passing of the Volunteer Bounty Act. By it, every Canadian veteran of the Boer War was offered two quarters of Crown land in western Canada provided that they performed the regular homestead duties on them (*ctrl + click*, [08-Volunteer Bounty Act001.gif](#)). Although few such veterans wished to take up this offer, they were allowed to sell their entitlement to others who did through registered land agents (*ctrl + click* [25-South African Scrip Transfer Document.gif](#).) Many of the first settlers in the Peace River Country, therefore, were able to begin their farms on the basis of two quarters, and, in some cases, even more, as their spouses could also purchase scrip. These scrip holdings could be supplemented by regular homesteads on adjoining quarters. Half-breed money scrip was also still available for farmers to purchase and expand their holdings, along with some Military Bounty scrip that had been presented to veterans of the Rebellions of 1870 and 1885 in Manitoba and the North West Territories. On the southern prairies, where most of the arable land was taken up, it was not as easy to find several good quarters adjoining each other to create expanded farms as it was in the Peace River Country.

Soldiers Settlement Board

While World War I was still in progress, the Dominion government, realising there would be an unemployment problem once the war was over, set up a Soldiers Settlement Board to help veterans get started in farming. Each veteran was offered two quarters of surveyed Crown land in the West, with the time-frame for completion of homestead duties greatly extended. Soldiers who had already begun to homestead were offered the same opportunity, with an extra quarter of land thrown in in addition to their homestead quarter. Vast lands in the Peace River Country were settled via the SSB.

The Land Records for the Peace River Country

The Peace River Country is considered by many to be an appendage of the great central plain of North America. It is also the last region on the continent to have been thrown open for agricultural settlement on a broad scale. Between May 1910 and December 1914, nearly 6,500 applications for land were taken at the Dominion Land Offices at Grouard and Grande Prairie. During these years, the farming frontier of North America was extended to its most northerly extremity. The files in this database deal with these and earlier non-First Nation settlers who attempted to establish farms in the region in advance of the arrival of the railway, which occurred in 1916. The first dispensations of Crown land in the region had been made by Treaty 8 and Half-breed Scrip Commissioners in the summer of 1899. As well as concluding Treaty with the First Nations and distributing scrip to other people of Aboriginal descent, the

Commissioners verified the declarations of those Euro-Canadians who had, by this time, occupied and improved parcels of land. Provided that they remained on the land, these early settlers would subsequently be given title to their holdings as free grants to the extent of 160 acres apiece. Following the Treaty signing, reserves were surveyed for the First Nations, while certain holders of land scrip staked their claims to the extent of 240 acres apiece. When the Dominion Land Surveyors began to subdivide settlements and mark out quarter-sections, they, too, verified the declarations of people who were then occupying and had improved parcels of land as squatters. These squatters were given the right of pre-emption of the quarter-sections or settlement lots they occupied provided that they filed for title within three months of the land being declared open for settlement. Finally, in the spring of 1910, 20 full and 15 partial townships recently surveyed on the Grande Prairie were declared open for settlement by homesteaders or scrip holders.

When filing for Crown land, the homesteaders or scrip holders (or their surrogates) filled out application forms at the Dominion Land Offices at Grouard, or, after June 1911, Grande Prairie (**ctrl** + click [12-Homestead Application.gif](#)). There was also a Sub-agency at Shaftesbury. Occasional occupancy declarations continued to be taken by Dominion Land Surveyors in the field as more land was subdivided (**ctrl** + click [09-Occupancy Declaration001.gif](#), [10-Occupancy Declaration 002.gif](#), [11-Occupancy Declaration 003.gif](#)). These application forms and subsequent documents were then forwarded to the Dominion Lands Branch of the Department of the Interior in Ottawa. Here, they were collated and filed according to land location. As the process of determining entitlement continued, other documents were added to the files until a land patent was either granted to the applicant or denied.

To gain title, an official application for title was made by the applicant (**ctrl** + click [13-Patent Application 001.gif](#), [14-Patent Application 002.gif](#)). Upon approval of this by the Dominion Land Agent in the area and the Dominion Lands Branch, title would be confirmed. If it was denied for some reason, the applicant was either instructed to fulfill the homestead duties by a certain date or advised that the application was cancelled. If it was cancelled, another applicant could then file for the same quarter-section or settlement lot. If this was done, the same procedure would be followed, and similar documentation would be added to the same file. In 1930, when Alberta and Saskatchewan gained control of their Crown land, and British Columbia was given jurisdiction over its Peace River Block, the files were split into three groups and transferred to the custody of these provinces. Those files pertaining to the Peace River Country are now held by the Provincial Archives of Alberta and the British Columbia Archives & Records Service. Here, they are available for consultation on microfilm. Each record in this database contains the land file number at the top which should be used as reference when consulting the files.

The first agricultural settlers in the Peace River Country were unique in that they traveled to the region in such large numbers with all the equipment and supplies needed to start a farm, and they did so without the benefit of a railway. Instead, they undertook a 400-600km trek northwest from Edmonton over primitive trails that often took over a

month to traverse. In the spring of 1909, a railway had seemed an immediate certainty, yet neither the Canadian Northern nor the Grand Trunk Pacific chose to follow through on their much publicized intent to intersect the Pine Pass. Not until the spring of 1916 would the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway finally reach Grande Prairie, and its counterpart, the Canada Central, Peace River. In the meantime, the open parklands of the Peace River Country were essentially “settled” by farmers (**ctrl + click** [04-Peace River Surveyed 1910.gif](#)). By understanding the settlement patterns of these people at this time, greater understanding can be achieved about northern Alberta overall, and also the process of Crown land disposition in early twentieth century Alberta. Furthermore, many people will be able to access personal information on their ancestors they might not have known about. Likewise, anyone interested in a particular quarter-section of land on which a claim was made prior to 1915 will be able to discover information on all individuals who had filed for it.

This project covers all land settled between townships 70 and 85, from Range 18 west of the 5th Meridian to Range 25 west of the 6th Meridian – **or** – all the land which flowed into the Peace River and was settled up to 1915 by farmers. This includes the region from as far south as the Goose Lake to as far north as Fort St. John and Peace River (Town) and from as far east as Lake Winagami to as far west as Hudson’s Hope (see map on inside front cover). This is, in effect, the upper Peace River Country, which is bordered by the Wapiti River to the south, the Rocky Mountains to the west, the Clear and Whitemud Hills to the north, and the Athabasca drainage system to the east. The project, however, also includes the pre-survey squatters and the few homestead entries that were made at this time for land in the vicinity of Fort Vermilion (**ctrl + click** [01-Proposed Project Area.gif](#)).

Information in the Land Files

The information contained on this database was gathered primarily from the Land Files held by the Provincial Archives of Alberta and the British Columbia Archives and Records Service. It was supplemented by information gathered from various local histories and other primary sources. Checks were also made against the national census of 1901, the prairie census of 1906, and the National Archives’ database on Western Land Grants, all of which are available online via the National Archives’ website. If any points of detail were found to contradict information in the Land Files, reliance was usually made on the Land Files, information which was obtained directly from the applicants for land.

When verifying information, it was found that several personal names had changed spelling over the years, and that the ages of people in the Peace River Country presented to the census takers of 1901 and 1906 were often different than those presented to the surveyors or the land agents. All researchers of this database, therefore, should recognize that the information contained in it is not necessarily accurate information but only what was recorded on documents in the Land Files, and, to a lesser extent, the supplementary sources.

Among the points of information which have been gleaned from the Land Files are:

- The name and gender of the applicant
- Whether the applicant filed him/herself or through a proxy
- The location of the land applied for, including all quarter-sections involved
- Whether the applicant used Half-breed, Military Bounty or South African scrip, and, if so, the identity of the original scrip holder
- Where the applicant was born
- Whether the applicant was a British subject or became a naturalized Canadian
- The stated location of the applicant's residence before filing was made
- The stated occupation or profession of the applicant before filing was made
- The age of the applicant when filing was made
- Whether or not the applicant was married when filing was made
- If the applicant was married when filing was made, the age of the spouse
- Whether the applicant had children when filing was made, and, if so, how many
- The date of filing
- When, and if, the applicant first occupied the land, or if s/he lived on adjacent land
- Whether or not the land was eventually proven up
- At what point in time the land was either proven up, cancelled or abandoned
- If the land was officially abandoned, when and why
- The age of the applicant when application was made for patent
- Whether the applicant was married when application was made for patent
- Whether the applicant had any children when application was made for patent, and, if so, how many and what their ages were
- Whether or not the applicant's family was with him/her when the land was first occupied
- Whether or not the applicant's family joined him/her while the land was being proven up
- The nature of the applicant's first dwelling on the land (tent, caboose, cabin, barn, lean-to□.)
- At what point in time clearing and the construction of other buildings was undertaken
- Whether or not the applicant took other employment while proving up the land, and, if so, the nature of this employment and where it was undertaken
- Whether the applicant enlisted for service in World War I as the land was being proven up
- Whether the applicant died, became ill, or went insane while the land was being proven up
- The identity of the beneficiary of the land if it was proven up but the applicant was deceased
- Other recorded information on file.

Of course, not all of the above details are included with each application for land. Where included, however, the details appear in the database with the following exceptions:

1. As the names of the original Military Bounty or South African scrip holders are not relevant to the settlement of the Peace River region, they are omitted. However, as some of the original Half-breed scrip holders were from the region,

- their identities have been included when disclosed.
2. Details about land clearing and the construction of farm buildings have also been omitted, for all proven up lands had to be cleared and provided with dwellings and barns or stables at some point before patent. The information was perfunctory, and the details of the buildings and their construction were not provided.
 3. Also omitted are the testimonies provided by witnesses as to a homesteader's residency and achievements. These declarations by neighbours are only replicas of the land patent applications the homesteaders were required to complete (see Appendix I).

Should anyone wish to check into such details, they may do so by consulting the land files themselves at the Provincial Archives of Alberta or the British Columbia Archives and Records Service. Specific points of information may be requested from the reference services of these institutions, or photocopies of documents may be obtained at a fee. In all cases, the relevant file numbers should be cited. These are included at the top of each record in this database

Glossary

Abandonment. When a homesteader sought to abandon his holding, s/he could file an official declaration of abandonment (*ctrl + click* [18-Declaration Of Abandonment.gif](#)). If accepted, he or she would be eligible to file for another homestead and could receive credit for improvements that had been made on the first attempt (*identified on the database as "ABN"*).

Applicant. The individual who officially filed for a parcel of public land. In generic terms, he or she was usually referred to as a "homesteader" (*ctrl + click* [13-Patent Application001.gif](#), also [14-Patent Application002.gif](#)).

Base Line. When the Dominion Land Survey was begun in western Canada in the 1870's, lines called "base lines" were surveyed every 24 miles north from the 49th Parallel, intersecting the vertically surveyed meridians. From these, township and range lines were subsequently plotted.

British Subject. Any citizen from any country which recognized King Edward VII or King George V as its sovereign. All British subjects were eligible to receive title to scrip or homestead land in western Canada. Any citizen of a foreign country, however, was required to become a naturalized Canadian in order to receive title, although foreigners were allowed to apply for public land prior to naturalization (*identified on the database as "Br"*).

Canadian Northern Railway. A conglomeration of railways controlled by the firm of Mackenzie and Mann. After reaching Edmonton in 1905, it stated its intention to intersect the Peace River Country on its way through the Pine Pass to the Pacific coast. When it began to build its "Peace River Line" towards Sangudo in 1909, with provincial

government bond guarantees, the federal government was certain that a railway was finally on its way to the Peace River region. However, bond guarantees offered by the British Columbia government persuaded the Canadian Northern Railway to concentrate on a line straight west from Edmonton instead, paralleling the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway to Jasper. While the Grand Trunk Pacific went northwest towards Prince Rupert, the Canadian Northern went southwest to Vancouver and never did approach the Peace River Country. Its promise to do so; however, encouraged the government to establish a Peace River Land Office at Grouard and open the Peace region for homesteading (*identified on the database as "CNO"*).

Cancellation. Should an applicant fail to fulfill the required duties in order to gain title to a parcel of Crown land, and he or she did not seek an official abandonment, the application could be, and usually was, cancelled by the Department of the Interior. This was usually done on the advice of the local Land Agent (*identified on the database as "CAN"*).

Declaration. See Declaration of Delay or Occupancy Declaration.

Declaration of Delay. Should a homesteader find it difficult to prove up his or her land, an application could be made stating the reasons for an extension in the time required to do so (*ctrl + click [16-Delay Statement.gif](#)*).

Died. Means the applicant died while proving up his/her land. In such cases, the occupancy rights usually reverted to the next of kin. With no known next of kin, the land was usually turned over to a trust company to administer.

Disability. If a homesteader was disabled while proving up his or her land, extra time was usually allowed in which to fulfill the duties.



Garnet Truax and Jack Carter depart for the Grande Prairie, 1910. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Dominion Land Office. See Dominion Land Agency.

Dominion Land Survey. The official government survey headed by the Surveyor General and administered from within the Department of the Interior in Ottawa.

Dominion Lands Act. First passed in 1870, and subject to many amendments over the years, this legislation was administered by the Department of the Interior. It governed the distribution of Crown land in the North West Territories to 1905 and, from 1905 to 1930, in Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Peace River Block of British Columbia. The Act, as amended in 1908, facilitated the land settlement of the Peace River Country covered by this project (*ctrl + click* [07-Dominion Lands Act 001.gif](#)).

Dominion Land Agency. The jurisdiction covered by a particular Dominion Land Office. In 1910, the entire Peace River Country of Alberta was covered by the Peace River Land Agency, headquartered in Grouard. In 1911, a Grande Prairie Land Agency was created, headquartered in Grande Prairie, which was responsible for the Spirit River area and, in 1912, for the Pouce Coupe Prairie area of British Columbia. The rest of the region was covered by the Land Office in Grouard, including the area around Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope. In 1915, the Peace River Land Office at Grouard was transferred to Peace River.



OPENING OF DOM. LANDS OFFICE GRANDE PRAIRIE ALTA

Open for business: the Grande Prairie land office, 1911 (*South Peace Regional Archives*)

Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway. Owned by J.D. McCarthur, the railway by 1916 was completed from Edmonton's Dunvegan Yards to McLennan, Spirit River and Grande Prairie. A subsidiary, the Central Canada Railway, extended to Peace River (*identified on the database as "EDBC"*).

Entry. An official filing for a parcel of Crown land made at a Dominion Land Office.

Extension. Additional time occasionally granted to homesteaders in which to fulfill their homestead duties (*ctrl + click [17-Report & Recommendation.gif](#)*).

Fiat. A statement acknowledging that official title to a parcel of land had been granted to a particular party.

File Number. The seven digit number applied to each file created by the Department of the Interior for each parcel of Crown land in western Canada for which application was made for title by private citizens, usually through the homesteading process. Should an entry be cancelled, the same file was used for the next, or subsequent, applicants for the same parcels of land (*ctrl + click [11-Occupancy Declaration 003.gif](#)*).



Hopefuls: opening day at the Grande Prairie Land Office, 1911. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Filing. An official application allowing homesteading to begin on a particular quarter-section of surveyed Crown land, usually made at a Dominion Land Office.

Forest Reserve. See Timber Reserve.

Forfeiture. See Cancellation.

Fractional Purchase. By an amendment to the Dominion Lands Act in 1908, a homesteader had the right to purchase portions of a quarter-section of land adjoining his or her homestead or scrip land at a rate not less than \$3 per acre provided that the adjoining quarter did not constitute a full quarter, having been reduced by the presence of an impediment such as a lake or a river. The homesteader had the right of pre-emption over such land, although title would be granted only upon the successful fulfillment of duties on the homestead or scrip quarter. Hence, the term “time sales” applied to such transactions. Other homesteaders on other land adjoining the fractional quarter also had the right of pre-emption over portions of it, in which case the land in question would be surveyed into two or three parcels. These quarters were called fractional quarters (*identified on the database as “FRP”*).



Cutting oats on the Bezanson farm: the dream of most homesteaders was the grain-growing, independent life of the yeoman farmer. Settlers fought frost, rains, labour shortages, railway companies and poor markets, but when the yield was this plentiful, everyone was smiling. (*South Peace Regional Archives*)

Free Grant. As per the Dominion Lands Act, anyone who lived on a parcel of land, and had made improvements on it prior to the initial signing of Treaty 8 in 1899, had the right to claim title to the portion he or she had occupied and improved at the time of the signing. Declarations as to occupation and improvement were presented to and verified by the Treaty and Scrip Commissioners in 1899 and 1900 and by subsequent Dominion Land Surveyors upon further verification by neighbours of the claimants (*identified on the database as “FRG”*).

Grazing Lease. As specified by the Dominion Lands Act, tracts of open grassland not considered very suitable for farming were surveyed and set aside as grazing leases for those farmers or ranchers in the area who might want to graze large herds of cattle or horses. These were usually marshy lands near large lakes or occasionally hilly lands

along riverbanks.

Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. Chartered in 1904, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (a subsidiary of the Grand Trunk) promised to extend its line northwest from Edmonton and reach the Pacific coast through the Pine River Pass. Coupled with similarly stated objectives by the Canadian Northern and other railways, this generated great interest in the Peace River Country as an agricultural land close to a coastal outlet. Interest fell off in 1910 when both the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific decided to pass through the Yellowhead Pass instead, with the Canadian Northern heading down to Vancouver and the Grand Trunk Pacific over to Prince Rupert (*identified on the database as "GTP"*).



Before the railways, many settlers, like the Millers in the winter of 1912, braved the Edson Trail to the Grande Prairie District. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Half-breed Scrip. When Treaty 8 was presented in 1899, the government undertook to achieve a settlement composed of both full-blooded Aboriginal people of the Treaty area and those people of mixed blood whose ancestors had also occupied the area for generations. As, by this time, so many people in the area did not know whether or not they had any traces of European ancestry, all people who could demonstrate some degree of Aboriginal ancestry to claim status as either Treaty Indians or Half-breeds, which were the legal terms used at the time. Those choosing to be identified as Half-breeds were presented with scrip certificates granting them either 240 acres of Crown land (land scrip), or a valuation of \$240 (money scrip), which they could later use towards the purchase of Crown land anywhere. Most Native people who chose scrip opted for money scrip, and most of this was soon sold to land speculators. Some of it would later be used to acquire land in the Peace River Country.



First homes in many events turned out to be made of canvas. Elias and Mary Smith on their homestead, Beaverlodge District. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Homestead. By terms of the Dominion Lands Act, once Crown land in western Canada had been surveyed and subdivided into quarter-sections and advertised as available for settlement, individuals could make application for parcels of it. Each male head of a household, albeit but one person, was eligible for one quarter-section, although, in the absence of a male, a female head of a household was eligible. Once the application was approved, the individual was required to clear at least 10 acres of it, undertake some cultivation, have a habitable dwelling and some farm buildings, and live on the land for six months a year for three years. After three years from the date of application, the applicant could file for title to the land, and indeed, was required to file for title within five years of the date of application. Upon verification by a Homestead Inspector that the duties had been fulfilled, title was invariably granted, although, by this time, the applicant must have become a British Subject. Applications for time extensions could, and often were, made for reasons such as illness or military service (*identified on the database as "HSD"*).

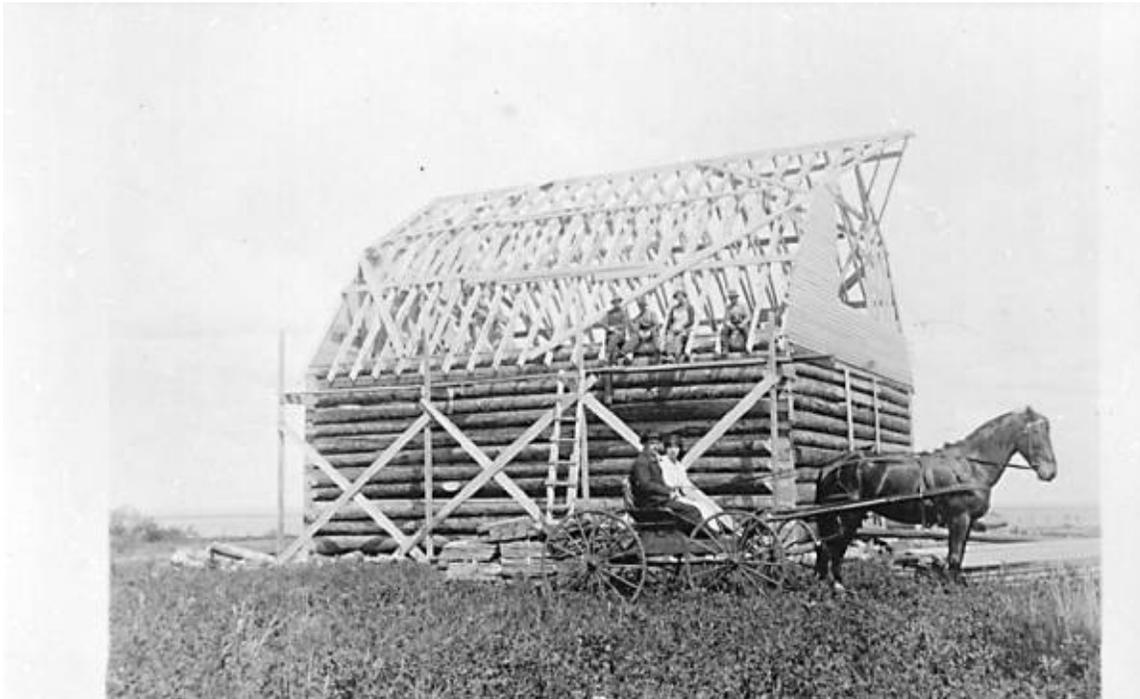
Homestead Files. See Land Files.

Homestead Inspector. Each Dominion Land Office had a Homestead Inspector who was usually the Land Agent assigned to the district.

Homesteader. More generically, people seeking to acquire land with the use of South African scrip were also referred to as homesteaders as they were also required to perform homestead duties. See South African Scrip.

Hudson's Bay Company Land. As part of its settlement with the Dominion of Canada in 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company received vast tracts of land around its various trading posts in the West. Also, in what was Rupert's Land (all the land from which the rivers drained into Hudson Bay) they received sections 8 and 26 in every fifth surveyed township, while, in all other townships, all of section 8 and three-quarters of section 26 were so designated. Since the Peace River Country did not constitute part of Rupert's Land, it was not subject to this provision.

Improvements. Activities such as clearing land, cultivating land, sinking wells, erecting dwellings and other buildings, all of which went towards making land habitable and commercially viable for farming, were considered "improvements" ([ctrl + click 13-Patent Application 001.gif](#) and [14-Patent Application 002.gif](#)).

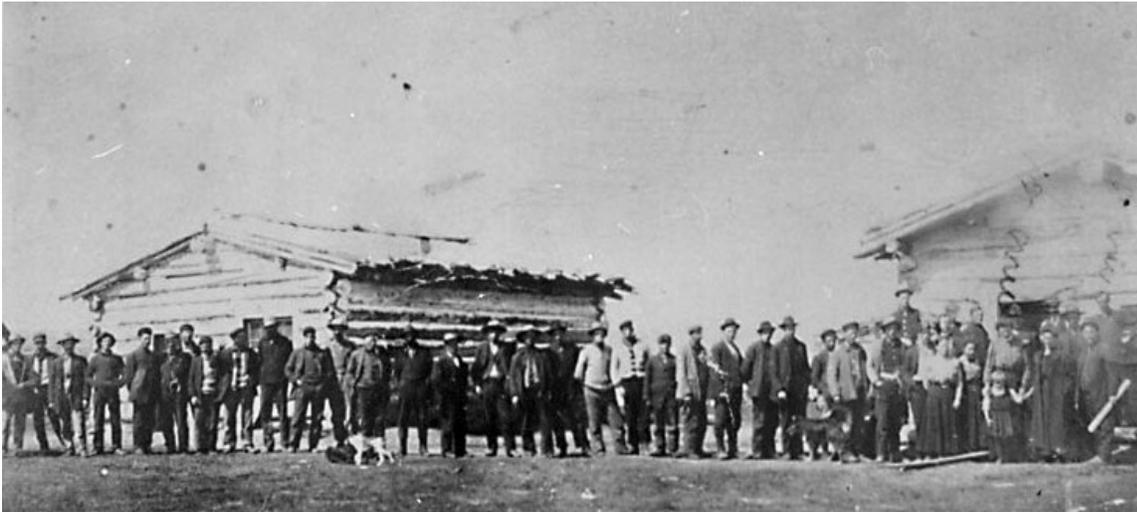


The Constable family passes a barn-raising crew, Bear Lake, 1913. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Indian. An individual of Aboriginal ancestry. Those who, or whose parents or ancestors, had agreed to the terms of Treaty 8 in Northwestern Canada were considered Treaty Indians, and had access to reserve land surveyed on their behalf. Treaty Indians were not eligible for land as homesteaders.

Indian Reserves. Areas of land surveyed and set aside for the exclusive use of Treaty Indians as per terms of Treaty 8 in Northwestern Canada. Some of this land was set apart from large parcels of reserve land as land to be held in severalty (**identified on the**

database as "IR").



Homesteaders about to file at Lake Saskatoon, May 1910. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Land Agent. An individual assigned by the Department of the Interior to manage a Dominion Land Office, officially known as a Dominion Land Agent. Land Agents also frequently served as Homestead Inspectors.

Land Files. Commonly referred to as Homestead Files. Files created by the Department of the Interior to deal with each application for Crown land in the North-West Territories (until 1905), or (after 1905) Alberta, Saskatchewan or the Peace River Block of British Columbia. Each file held all documents relating to a particular parcel of land, usually either a quarter-section or a settlement lot. Most documents were received from the various Dominion Land Offices throughout the West, and files were created as soon as the documents came in. All documents relating to a particular parcel were placed on the same file, regardless of how many applicants there would be for it, until title was eventually granted. Files were arranged sequentially according to a seven-digit file plan and were generated and numbered in chronological order as the applications came in. In 1930, control of Crown land was transferred to Alberta, Saskatchewan and (for the Peace River Block) British Columbia, so the files were transferred to these provinces. The files are now held by the respective provincial archives in these provinces, and, in Alberta and British Columbia, they have been microfilmed (for examples of the types of documents in the files, see [ctrl + click 09-Occupancy Declaration 001.gif](#), [10-Occupancy Declaration 002.gif](#), [11-Occupancy Declaration 003.gif](#), [12-Homestead Application.gif](#), [13-Patent Application 001.gif](#), [14-Patent Application 002.gif](#), [15-Acknowledgement Of Patent.gif](#), [25-South African Scrip Transfer Document.gif](#), [23-Land Patent Register.gif](#), [19-Land Location Register Sheet.gif](#), [26-Statement Of Service WWI.gif](#)).

Land Registers. Registers created by the Department of the Interior containing information on each surveyed quarter-section of Crown land in Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Peace River Block of British Columbia up to 1930. The entries are according to legal land description and indicate the name of the applicant, the nature of the

application, the date of the application, and the date on which title was granted. If an applicant was denied title, a line was drawn through the entry (*ctrl + click [19-Land Location Register Sheet.gif](#)*). In 1930, the registers were transferred to Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia along with the land files. In Alberta and British Columbia, they have been microfilmed.

Legal Subdivision. As a township was subdivided into sections and quarter-sections, so too could a quarter-section be subdivided into 16 subdivisions. This was usually the case with fractional quarters where homesteaders on adjoining quarters sought to purchase portions of land as fractional purchases (*identified on the database as "LSD"*).

Lot. Portions of land subdivided within a settlement to accommodate the needs of residents who were there in advance of the Dominion Land Survey or who were anticipated to soon arrive. The settlement lots did not conform to the standard grid pattern of the land survey. See Settlements (*identified on the database as "LT"*).

Meridians. When the Dominion Land Survey was begun in the 1870's, meridians were surveyed every four degrees west of 97°28' Longitude (near Lake Winnipeg). These intersected the horizontal base lines and were used by subsequent Dominion Land Surveyors to determine township and range lines.

Military Bounty Scrip. To encourage recruitment to quell the Riel Rebellion of 1870 in Manitoba, the government offered enlistees scrip certificates for 160 acres of Crown land in the West without the need to perform homestead duties. Similar offers were made to certain enlistees with the North West Mounted Police, and to those volunteering to quell the North West Rebellion of 1885, the latter scrip being for 320 acres. In most cases this scrip could be assigned (sold) to other parties (*identified on the database as "MBS"*).

Minor. An individual under the age of 18.

Naturalized. The process of becoming a British Subject. Those who were not British Subjects could not receive title to land as homesteaders or scrip holders. Foreigners, therefore, usually set out to apply for naturalization shortly after their applications for homesteads or land with scrip were filed. In some cases, delays in the naturalization process resulted in delays in gaining title to land (*identified on the database as "Na"*).

Occupancy Declaration. A written statement in which the occupant of a parcel of land declared that he or she had lived on and made improvements on the parcel for a given period of time prior to its survey. After testimony by neighbours and verification by a Dominion Land Surveyor, Land Agent or other government official, the occupant was given the right to pre-empt the settlement lot or a quarter-section he or she had occupied for homesteading purposes, provided that he or she still occupied it when land in the district was declared open for settlement, and had filed an official application to homestead within three months of such declaration. If the parcel was occupied and improved prior to the initial signing of Treaty 8 in 1899, and this could be verified, the occupant was eligible to apply for the lot or quarter-section as a free grant, provided that

he or she still occupied it, and officially filed for it within three months of when land in the district was declared open for settlement. If granted as a free grant, homestead duties were not required (**ctrl + click** [09-Occupancy Declaration 001.gif](#), [10-Occupancy Declaration 002.gif](#) , [11-Occupancy Declaration 003.gif](#)).

Original Settlers. When Treaty 8 was concluded during 1899-1900, Reserve land was to be provided to all people who had accepted terms as Treaty Indians. For others having some Aboriginal ancestry, settlement was offered through Half-breed scrip. Euro-Canadians in the Treaty area who had occupied and improved land prior to the initial Treaty signing could also claim title to such to the extent of 160 acres apiece. These people were known as original settlers.



Charles Wellington Connor on the Edson Trail. The harrowing journey north through the muskeg, foothills and forests was made by thousands chasing the dream of independent farming in what promoters dubbed “the last, best West”. High-cut boots became the quintessential mark of the Canadian man to the outside world. (*South Peace Regional Archives*)

Outside Employment. By the Dominion Lands Act (**ctrl + click** [07-Dominion Lands Act001.gif](#)), Section 16, all homesteaders had to occupy their quarter-sections, or reside adjacent to them with family members, for six months each year for three years to fulfill their homestead duties. While some remained on or near their land until it was proved up, others had to take occasional outside employment to gain funds to sustain themselves or their families. This was usually during the winter or fall, when harvest

crews were needed on the southern prairies, and even in areas of the Peace River Country. It was required that all outside employment be confirmed with the Dominion Land Agent and also reported on the subsequent application for title.

Patent. The official title to a parcel of land (*identified on the database as "PAT"*).

Peace River Block. A 3,000,000 acre block of land in Northeastern British Columbia owned by the Crown in right of the federal government until 1930 when it was transferred to the custody of British Columbia. This was the result of an agreement concluded in the 1870's, whereby British Columbia had agreed to provide certain arable lands to the proposed Canadian Pacific Railway near the rail line, but later found it was unable to do so because of the mountainous terrain or because such land was in private hands. As a result, the Canadian government agreed to provide the CPR with an extra 3,000,000 acres of Crown land on the southern prairies in addition to what it had already agreed to provide. In return, British Columbia agreed that 3,000,000 acres of arable land in the Northeastern portion of the province belonged to the federal government. A 3,000,000 acre block was first surveyed in 1906, but this proved inadequate, and it was not until 1912 that an acceptable survey was made. That same year, quarter-sections were subdivided and homesteading begun (*control + click 01-ProposedProjectArea.gif*).

Pre-emption. The right of an individual to have a parcel of land reserved for a period of time in order that s/he could later make an official application to acquire the land by various means such as homesteading or with the use of scrip. Squatters, whose occupancy declarations were verified by Dominion Land Surveyors or other government officials, had the legal right to claim such pre-emption of the land they occupied and had improved.

Proving Up. The process of fulfilling homestead duties such as clearing land, cultivating land, erecting dwellings and farm buildings, and residing on the land, or next to it.

Proxy. An individual given the right to file for a piece of Crown land on behalf of another individual, usually a family member. For homesteading prior to 1908, this could only be done by a parent, but, after 1908, the proxy could be any adult family member. The applicants usually filed a statement indicating the authority of someone else to file on their behalf.

Purchased Homestead. As a result of the amendments to the Dominion Lands Act of 1908, homesteaders occupying land next to a quarter-section which was not a complete quarter-section, due to the presence of a lake, river or some other such impediment, could obtain all or part of this fractional quarter by purchasing it for a fee of not more than \$3 per acre. *See Fractional Purchase.*

Quarter-section. 160 acres, which was the standard size for homesteads in the United States as well as Canada. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was considered

the right size to maintain a small family. By the early 20th century, however, when grain prices did not rise at the same rate as inflation, this was recognized to be too small, which resulted in large numbers of foreclosures on original homesteads.



As in Upper Canada, oxen were popular as first ground-breakers; less temperamental and prone to panic than horses when the ploughshares caught on snags. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Range. Every six miles west of Longitude 97°28' (near Lake Winnipeg) range lines running north and south were marked out, intersecting the east-west township lines. On land earmarked for agricultural settlement, six-mile square townships were surveyed within each range and township line (*identified on the database as "R"*).

Repatriation. A number of homesteaders had been born as British Subjects but had become citizens of a non-British country, usually the United States. In these cases, to gain title to land as a homesteader or a scrip holder, the individuals had to become naturalized. When naturalized, such individuals were referred to as having been repatriated (*identified on the database as "Re". See Naturalized*).

Residency. Among the title requirements of homesteaders to the land they occupied was the provision they reside on the land for six months a year for three years. By an amendment to the Dominion Lands Act in 1908, residency could be performed by residing on an adjacent piece of land occupied by a relative, and not just a parent as before.

River Lots. The standard pattern of settlement in early Lower Canada, as most "habitants" sought to work land along the St. Lawrence River. This pattern was later

adopted by settlers along the Red River in Manitoba. The disruption of the river lot pattern in 1869 by government surveyors, who were intent upon introducing a standard grid pattern of survey, is considered to be one of the contributing factors of the Red River Rebellion of 1870. As a result, when grid surveys were later introduced to the North West Territories, efforts were made first of all, to accommodate squatters already living in spread out communities by having these surveyed into lots encompassing the land the settlers actually occupied. Many of these communities, like Edmonton, were along rivers, and, so, the lots were known as river lots. This was also the case with the Shaftesbury Settlement, although other communities in the Peace River Country such as Spirit River and Fort Vermilion had many of their lots away from the river or creek (*identified on the database as "LT", (ctrl + click [04-Peace River Surveyed 1910.gif](#) , [1914 survey Dunvegan and Spirit River.jpg](#)).*

Rural Municipality. The form of local rural government prevailing in Alberta prior to World War I. When this was first allowed in the Peace River Country in 1914, the settled areas of the more heavily settled districts of the region were incorporated as the Rural Municipalities of Grande Prairie, Spirit River, Fairview and Peace (river).

School Land. Throughout western Canada, including the Peace River Country, whenever townships were surveyed, Sections 11 and 29 were set aside for the use of future rural governments in order to obtain funds with which to establish and maintain schools. Occasionally, when squatters had inadvertently occupied such land in advance of the survey, other areas within the township were selected instead (*identified on the database as "SL"*).

Section. When 36-mile square townships were marked out between surveyed range and township lines on land earmarked for agricultural settlement, they were subdivided into 36 sections apiece, each section being further subdivided into four quarter-sections of 160 acres, which was the size of a homestead.

Settlements. Prior to the township survey of the Peace River Country, the government sought to grant land to those people who had already settled in the area and who had not become Treaty Indians. As had been the case with the southern prairies, surveyors were sent out with instructions to negotiate with these people and determine what land they actually occupied and had improved. As a result, where people had congregated in spread-out communities, lots were subdivided to meet the needs of these people and other anticipated settlers. In the Peace River Country, prior to the Dominion Land surveys of 1909, settlements were surveyed at Fort Vermilion, North Vermilion, Boyer River, Shaftesbury, Peace River Crossing, Spirit River and Flyingshot Lake, with small pockets marked out at other locations.

Soldiers Settlement Board. During World War I, the federal government attempted to place returned war veterans on agricultural land. To facilitate this, the Soldiers Settlement Board was set up. On occasion, when individuals undertaking homestead duties joined the military service, they were allowed subsequently, to take their homestead quarters through the Board. This gave them a longer period of time in which to complete the duties required to gain title (*identified on the database as "SSB"*).

South African Scrip. In 1908, through the Military Bounty Act, each Canadian veteran of the Boer War was offered two quarter-sections of Crown land in the West provided that s/he performed regular homestead duties on it. Although few of these veterans chose to take up this offer, provision was made for them to sell their entitlement to others who did through registered land agents. This added to the appeal of the Peace River Country, for, after the surveys of 1909-10, there was more room here to establish enlarged farms than in any other area of the southern prairies. An individual could not use more than two scrip allocations (giving him/her four quarters) although they could be supplemented by an additional quarter through homesteading. A homesteader's spouse, however, could also purchase and apply up to two scrip applications, making the family farm as large as nine quarters or more if a fractional purchase was involved (*identified on the database as "SAS", (ctrl + click [24-South African Scrip Certificate.gif](#), [08-Volunteer Bounty Act 001.gif](#)).*



Answering the call. Lake Saskatoon Volunteers, 1914. (South Peace Regional Archives)

Squatter. An individual who occupied and had made improvements on a portion of Crown land in advance of its survey. If an official Occupancy Declaration was completed by the squatter, verified by neighbours, and confirmed by a Dominion Land Surveyor or other government official, the squatter had the right to pre-empt the land so occupied for homesteading purposes, provided that he or she continued to occupy the land, and an official application to homestead was completed within three months of the district being declared open for settlement (*ctrl + click [09-Occupancy Declaration](#)*

[001.gif](#), [10-Occupancy Declaration002.gif](#) ; [11-Occupancy Declaration 003.gif](#)).

Substitute. By the Dominion Lands Act, an individual could appoint a substitute, usually an adult family member, to file for land on his or her behalf as a proxy at a Dominion Land Office. (*See Proxy*).

Survey. *See Dominion Land Survey*

Timber Berth. *See Timber Reserve*

Timber Reserve. Land set aside when surveyed to be used exclusively to allow the forests on it to remain intact for subsequent settlers who required lumber to erect dwellings or other buildings or for the use of lumber companies (*identified on the database as "TR"*).

Time Sale. By an amendment to the Dominion Lands Act in 1908, a homesteader could acquire part of an adjacent quarter that was not a complete quarter by purchasing it at a rate not less than \$3 per acre. In order for this fractional purchase to be completed; however, the homesteader was required to fulfill his or her homestead duties, in which case these sales were called time sales. (*See Fractional Purchase*).

Township. A six mile square portion of land surveyed between vertical range lines and horizontal township lines containing 36 sections with each section subdivided into four quarters of 160 acres apiece (*identified on the database as "TP"*).

Townsite. Although colonization companies were not allowed in the Peace River Country after 1907, individuals or corporations could acquire, through homesteading, free grant, scrip or purchase from private owners, land to be subdivided into townsites for future urban development. During 1910-14, unsuccessful townsites were subdivided at Dunvegan and Bezanson, while successful townsites were subdivided at Grande Prairie, Lake Saskatoon, Spirit River, Waterhole and Peace River (*ctrl + click*, [1914 survey Dunvegan and Spirit River.jpg](#)).

Transfer. Occasionally an applicant for land at a particular location could have his or her application transferred to a different location if compelling reasons warranted this. This occurred when the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway entered the area and chose land being worked by various homesteaders. Also, a number of settlers who had earlier filed for land in what would become the Cypress Hills Forest Reserve were given quarters in the Peace River Country as compensation.

Treaty 8. That Treaty, initially signed in 1899 and made valid by further adhesions in 1900, which included all the land in the Peace River Country. With its signing, the government concluded that all Crown land in the treaty area could be made available for settlement by any individual having government authorization, apart from that land that had been set aside as Reserves for the First Nations in the region.

Voluntary Bounty Act. *See South African Scrip*

The Fields on the Database pages

The records in this database contain 55 fields, only some of which were used by each applicant for land (*ctrl* + *click* [22-Data Input Form.gif](#)). These fields are:

* Indicates that additional comments may be contained in a supplementary field.

- 1. Land File Number.** This is the number assigned to each land file created by the Dominion Lands Branch on each parcel of Crown land in western Canada for which an application for entitlement was made, usually through the homesteading process. The file was created as soon as the Branch began to receive documents on the land. The initial documents were sent in by the various Dominion Land Agents scattered throughout the West. Each file pertained to an individual parcel of land, which was usually a quarter-section, but sometimes was a settlement lot. One file, therefore, could contain documents relating to several applicants, depending on abandonments or cancellations. The files were created at random, assigned a seven digit number, and arranged numerically.
- 2. Nature of Claim.** The applicant could file for the land through homesteading (HSD), as a free grant (FRG), as a fractional purchase (FRP), or with various form of scrip such as South African Scrip (SAS), Half-breed Scrip (HBS) or Military Bounty Scrip (MBS).
- 3. Applicant's Name.** The name of the applicant, including first and last names, and middle initials if they were known. Several names were changed over the years, in which case the name used on the application form is used here. The name used is the one provided by the applicant. Therefore, if William Campbell Smith chose to identify himself as "Bill," the name to be entered to access his file(s) is "Smith, Bill C." ***Should the name you wish to gain information on does not come up, it is best to spell out the last name only and follow this with an asterisk (*), then click.*** This will give you all individuals with this last name from which you can pick out the one of interest; instead, you can also go to the alphabetical name list.
- 4. Quarter(s)*.** The quarter-section, either NE, NW, SE or SW, of a particular section of land on which the applicant filed. In some cases, particularly with the use of South African Scrip, the applicant filed for two quarters on one application. Of course, the same applicant may well have filed for other quarters under other terms on different applications.

To access these, click on to field 3. When the "Find and Replace" box comes up, click the "Next" field; OR, you can go to the alphabetical name list.

- 5. Township.** The township containing the quarter-section(s) for which application was made.

- 6. Range.** The range containing the quarter-section(s) for which application was made.
- 7. Meridian.** The Meridian west of which was located the range in which application was made.
- 8. Number of Quarters Applied For*.** This refers only to the number of quarter-sections the applicant filed for with this specific application. If he or she filed for other quarter(s) under other terms, information on these would appear in other files. Check the alphabetical name list.
- 9. Number of Quarters Proved Up*.** This refers only to the number of quarter-sections the applicant was granted title to on this specific application, if title was indeed granted. For other quarter(s) for which the applicant might have filed for and proved up, check the alphabetical name list.
- 10. Female?** A woman was not allowed to file for a homestead unless she was the head of a household (albeit but one person), and if the husband was alive, he was recognized as the head of the household. Therefore, the number of women applying for land was comparatively small. Married women were, however, allowed to apply for land with the use of scrip, and many did so with the use of South African Scrip to add to the size of the family farm.
- 11. First Residence.** All applicants were required to indicate the country of their birth and the "subdivision" of this country. Many chose to identify only a county or state within this country, but some also identified a community as well. Various local histories often identified where an individual was born.
- 12. Later Residence.** Most people lived in various locations before coming to the Peace River Country. This field is used to disclose where else an individual might have lived for a period of time, excluding places where he or she might have just passed through.
- 13. Most Recent Residence.** This refers to the last place where the applicant lived before coming to the Peace River Country providing it is different from the places indicated in 11 or 12. It can also refer to a locality in the Peace River Country if the applicant lived at this location an appreciable extent of time before filing for the land in question. It excludes, however, places where the applicant may have just passed through on his or her way to the Peace River Country. For example, virtually all of the applicants passed through Edmonton, but only a few of them lived and worked there an appreciable extent of time before traveling to the Peace River Country to take up land.
- 14. British Subject by Birth When Applying?** Whether or not the applicant was a British Subject (a citizen of any country in the British Empire). An applicant was

required to become a British Subject before title could be granted.

15. British Subject by Birth, Naturalized or Repatriated when Proving Up? If the applicant was not a British Subject when applying, he or she was required to become one through the process of naturalization before title to the land would be granted. In cases of citizens of either Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who had not been naturalized by the outbreak of World War I, title to their land was withheld during the duration of the war. Some applicant's had been naturalized before filing for land, some applied for naturalization after they had filed. If the applicant had been born a British Subject but had later become a citizen of another country (usually the United States), he or she was required to become a British Subject again through the process of naturalization before title to the land would be granted. Such individuals were referred to as repatriated Canadians. **Identified in this database as either "Br", "Na", or "Re".**

16. Stated Occupation When Applying*. When applying for Crown land, the applicant was required to state his or her occupation or profession at the time. The answers varied extremely and were very subjective. For example, "clerks," "secretaries," and "office workers," often did the same work. "Labourers" could be "farm workers," "railway workers," "factory hands" or "miners," and sometimes they described themselves as such, or simply as "labourers." It is expected that applicants were often inclined to describe themselves as "farmers" to give strength to their applications for homesteads. The occupations indicated on this database are whatever the applicants described them as being.

17. Date on Land* Year and month in which the applicant moved onto the land as a resident. This had to be within six months of the date of application for homesteading, although more time was granted to foreigners who had to bring in their families. Some applicants indicated a specific day, but many did not. Many also resided next to their homestead with a relative, in which case no date was given.

18. Date of Filing*. The date on which the applicant officially filed for the land in question, usually at the Dominion Land Office in Grouard or Grande Prairie. If the applicant was a squatter, however, the date used here is the date when a Dominion Land Surveyor or other government official confirmed the applicant's occupancy declaration. Likewise, if a quarter was reserved for a 17-year-old applicant, the date used here is the date on which reservation was made. It might be noted that the date entered for filing on the Dominion Lands Branch's official land registers is, on occasion, incorrectly indicated as the date on which the application form was received in Ottawa. Also, Dominion Land Agents would occasionally wait a day or two before stamping the application form with the official government stamp before forwarding it to Ottawa.

- 19. Patented, Cancelled or Abandoned*.** If the application was patented, the applicant was granted title to the land in question. If the applicant did not fulfill the proper duties, his or her application could be, and usually, was cancelled. An applicant could, however, file an official abandonment statement (**ctrl + click [18-Declaration Of Abandonment.gif](#)**), in which case he or she was allowed to file for a different quarter and could claim credit for any improvements that had been made.
- 20. Date Patented*.** The date on which title to the land was granted.
- 21. Months Taken To Gain Title.** The time (in months and fractions of months) from when the applicant filed for the land in question (including when occupancy declarations were taken or when land was reserved for minors) to when title was granted to the land. By Section 26 of the Dominion Lands Act, a homesteader had to fulfill his or her homestead duties within five years of officially filing. Extensions were granted for various reasons, however, and the time frame indicated here should not be considered as the time required to prove up the land, for many other factors came into play. An applicant, for example, was allowed six months to move onto the land and even more time if s/he had to move his or her family in from a different country. While proving up the land, many applicants would take periods of time off (upwards to six months of a year) from employment. Some applicants undertook military service during World War I, in which case the time served was not charged. Some of those undertaking military service subsequently took their land through the Soldiers Settlement Board, in which case extensive periods of time were allowed before title could be claimed. Also, many foreign homesteaders were late in filing for naturalization, in which cases there were delays in granting title. Citizens of Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire had title to their land withheld during the duration of World War I.
- 22. Date of Abandonment*.** The date on which a homesteader officially abandoned all claim to the homestead quarter by completing an abandonment statement at a Dominion Land Office (**ctrl + click [18-Declaration Of Abandonment.gif](#)**). If approved, the abandonment statement allowed the homesteader to file for a different quarter, and credit was given for any improvements that had been made with the initial application.
- 23. Why Abandoned?** The reason(s) why a homestead was being abandoned, as stated by the prospective homesteader on the abandonment statement.
- 24. Age of Applicant When Filing.** An applicant had to be at least 18 years of age in order to file for Crown land. However, by an amendment to the Dominion Lands Act passed in 1908 (**ctrl + click [12-Homestead Application.gif](#)**) an application could be made to have a quarter-section reserved for a 17-year-old provided this was done by a parent.

25. Married When Filing? All applicants for homestead had to indicate the ages of the adults in their families, in which case marital status was deduced.

26. Age of Spouse. See 25.

27. Number of Offspring. All applicants had to indicate the number of people in their families and their ages, in which case the number of offspring was deduced. By the time filing was made, many of the offspring were no longer children.

28. Married When Land Patented? All applicants for title were required to indicate their marital status. Some indicated that they had been widowed, but, since this was not required, and some chose not to, widowed status has not been indicated here.

29. Family on Land at Outset?* All applicants for title were required to indicate whether or not their families were living with them on the land in question, and when they had moved onto it.

30. Family Joined While Proving Up Land?* See 29.

31. First Dwelling. This refers to the nature of the dwelling the applicant lived in when first occupying the land. It should be noted that the applicant was not required to enter this information, but many volunteered it, probably to give strength to their claim that they had, in fact, occupied the land by a particular time. Most who volunteered this information indicated their first dwelling as a tent. However, the applicants were required to indicate the nature of their first actual dwelling. Since this was almost always a small log house, a field was not created for this information.



First Dwelling: Garnet Truax and Donald Cranston cabin off Beaverlodge River, c. 1910. (South Peace Regional Archives)

- 32. Squatter?*** Whether or not the applicant had occupied the land in advance of its legal survey, and this had been verified by a government official (usually a Dominion Land Surveyor) by completing an occupancy declaration (**ctrl** + click [09-Occupancy Declaration 001.gif](#), [10-Occupancy Declaration 002.gif](#), [11-Occupancy Declaration 003.gif](#)).
- 33. Filed by Proxy?** As a result of an amendment to the Dominion Lands Act in 1908, Section 9, a filing for land at a Dominion Land Office could be made by any adult on behalf of another adult family member, not just a parent, as was previously the case.
- 34. Proxy Name.** See 33.
- 35. Proxy Relationship.** See 33.
- 36. Otherwise Employed While Proving Up Land?** By terms of the Dominion Lands Act, Section 13, a homesteader was required to reside on his or her holding six months a year for three years while proving up the land. To obtain an income during these years, many homesteaders sought work at places away from their homesteads, especially during winter or harvest time when ample work was available. When undertaking such work, the homesteader was required to inform the Dominion Land Agent and also to report the nature of the work and where it took place on his or her subsequent application for title.
- 37. How Otherwise Employed While Proving Up Land.** See 36.
- 38. In Military Service While Proving Up Land?*** When performing military service during World War I, a homesteader was granted an equal amount of extra time afterwards to fulfill his or her homestead duties. Many who undertook such service were later allowed to take their land through the Soldiers Settlement Board whereby extensive was allowed before application for title had to be made

Abbreviations

ABN = Abandonment
ACR = Acre
ADA = Anglican Diocese of Athabasca
BC = British Columbia
BCARS = British Columbia Archives and Records Service
BCH = Baptist Church of Canada
BR = Boyer River Settlement
Br = British Subject by Birth
CA = Canada
CAN = Cancellation
CNO = Canadian Northern Railway
CU = Carcajou
DLS = Dominion Land Survey
DU = Dunvegan
E = East
EDBC = Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway
F = File Number
FL = Flyingshot Lake Settlement
FRG = Free Grant
FRP = Fractional Purchase
FV = Fort Vermilion Settlement
GL = Grazing Lease
GTP = Grand Trunk Pacific Railway
HBC = Hudson's Bay Company
HBS = Half-breed Scrip
HSD = Homestead
IR = Indian Reserve
LSD = Legal Subdivision
LT = Lot or River Lot
M = Meridian
MA = Manitoba
MBS = Military Bounty Scrip
MCH = Methodist Church of Canada
MI = Minor
N = North
n = No
Na = Naturalized Canadian
NE = Northeast
NB = New Brunswick
NF = Newfoundland
NS = Nova Scotia
NT = Northwest Territories
NV = North Vermilion Settlement
NW = Northwest

NWT = North West Territories
ON = Ontario
PA = Paddle River
PAA = Provincial Archives of Alberta
PAT = Patent
PI = Prince Edward Island
PQ = Quebec
PR = Peace River Landing Settlement
PRCH = Presbyterian Church of Canada
PRE = Pre-emption
PT = Part of a Lot or Quarter-section
QS = Quarters-section
R = Range
RCDA = Roman Catholic Diocese of Athabasca
Re = Repatriated Canadian
RY = Railway
S = South
SA = Saskatchewan
SAS = South African Scrip
SAV = South African Volunteer
SE = Southeast
SEC = Section
SH = Shaftesbury Settlement
SL = School Land
SQ = Squatter
SR = Spirit River Settlement
SSB = Soldiers Settlement Board
ST = Sturgeon Lake
SW = Southwest
TP = Township
TR = Timber Reserve
TR8 = Treaty 8
TS = Time Sale
UK = United Kingdom
W = West
WW1 = World War I
US = United States
X = Cancelled or Abandoned
x = No
y = Yes
YK = Yukon Territory

Part I – to 1914

Undertaken with the sponsorship of the Grande Prairie Regional College, with assistance of the Monkman Homestead Preservation Society and a generous grant from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation

Part I of this illustrated database contains information taken from the Canadian Department of the Interior land files held by the Provincial Archives of Alberta and the British Columbia Archives and Records Service, relating to 6,489 applications for Crown land in the Peace River Country of Alberta and British Columbia up to the end of 1914. David W. Leonard compiled the research, supplemented by local historical information provided by Lynda Boyd of the Monkman Homestead Preservation Society). Beverley Whalen of the Monkman Society recorded the research on this database devised by Evans Forsythe and Chris Levoir of Grande Prairie Regional College. Neither the researchers nor the editors can guarantee the accuracy of this information, only that it is recorded on documents in the land files or is in local histories or other sources. On the land files, the information was invariably supplied by the land applicants themselves. This project was undertaken with a generous grant provided by the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and important assistance from the Heritage Resource Management Branch of the Alberta Department of Community Development.



The Grande Prairie from Richmond Hill, looking NNE, October, 1992. (David W. Leonard)



The Edson Trail behind them, the Lea Miller Family heads for Rolla, March, 1912. (South Peace Regional Archives)

The Settlement Wave of 1910-14

The settlers who came to the Peace River Country during 1910-14 did so for a variety of reasons. One was the excessive publicity about the fertility of the region ever since government explorers had portrayed it as a “veritable garden of Eden” during the 1870’s. Another was the apparent probability that a railroad would shortly be extended there. In the spring of 1909, Premier Rutherford of Alberta announced a program of lucrative bond guarantees to major railway companies. With this in place, it seemed certain that two or more lines would soon enter the region. Without one, a market economy would have been impossible. A special appeal was the prospect that at least one line would intersect the Pine Pass and extend straight west to the Pacific Ocean. This would have put the Peace River Country closer to a coastal outlet than any other wheat growing region in western Canada.

Another attraction was the fact that, with so much land surveyed and thrown open for homesteading at once, group settlement was possible. Thus, members of a particular ethnic or religious community could take up holdings in the same area, an undertaking which, by now, was more difficult on the more densely occupied southern prairies. The settlement of groups, or even large families, was given further encouragement by a new provision in the Dominion Lands Act which allowed homesteaders to undertake their residency requirements on land occupied by other family members, and not just their parents, near their homesteads (Section 18). It was also now possible for a homesteader to file for land as a proxy on behalf of a family member and to reserve a quarter-section on behalf of a seventeen year old family

member (Section 9.3). In addition, a homesteader could now officially abandon an entry in favour of a family member (Section 13.3.).

The greatest attraction, however, may have stemmed from the fact that, by 1910, in the United States as well as Canada, the traditional quarter-section homestead was no longer large enough to sustain a family of any size. Due to overproduction, grain prices had not risen appreciably in recent years, so farmers on the southern prairies were either foreclosing or selling out to land companies or equally cramped neighbours. Many of these small farmers now sought new holdings in areas where they would be able to build bigger farms. One of the vehicles making this possible in western Canada was South African scrip. By the Volunteer Bounty Act of 1908, all Canadian volunteers of the Boer War were given the right to two quarter-sections of Crown land in the West provided that they performed the regular homestead duties on them (*ctrl + click*, [24-South African Scrip Certificate.gif](#)). Few such veterans wished to take up this offer, but they were allowed to sell their entitlement to others who did through registered land agents (*ctrl + click* [25-South African Scrip Transfer Document.gif](#)). Many of the first settlers in the Peace River region, therefore, were able to begin their new farms on the basis of two quarters, and, in some cases, even more, as their spouses could also purchase scrip. These scrip holdings could be supplemented by regular homesteads on adjoining quarters.

The settlers of 1910-14 could enlarge their farms in other ways as well. For example, if the homestead quarter was obstructed by a lake, slough, or other such impediment, the homesteader could “have added to his homestead, from adjoining land, a sufficient area to make up, but not exceed, one hundred and sixty acres” (Section 9.1). It was also now possible for a homesteader to purchase fractional quarters (portions of land which were not complete quarters) at a price not less than three dollars per acre if such were available and adjacent to their homesteads (Section 32). Half-breed money scrip was still available for settlers, along with some Military Bounty scrip that had earlier been presented to veterans of the Manitoba and North West Rebellions of 1870 and 1885. Up to the end of 1912, over half of the farms begun in the Peace River region would be in excess of one quarter-section, and, in some cases, they would be as large as eight.

A Critical Period

This project discloses information on individuals who filed for land between June 1899, when occupancy declarations were first accepted, and 31 December 1914, which was just after the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway had reached the site of High Prairie. Because travel to the region, with all the equipment and supplies needed to start a farm, was becoming much easier than before, the end of 1914 can be seen as something of a watershed. It was also during this time that the earlier unforeseen scope of World War I was becoming apparent. Also, during this time, the earlier unforeseen scope of World War I was becoming apparent. This began to draw many people of military age throughout Canada, Great Britain and the British Empire into military service and possibly away from thoughts of a new life on a northern Canadian prairie homestead.

More important, however, is the fact that, with the homestead entries of 1914, the basic pattern of agricultural settlement in the Peace River region was established (*ctrl + click* [06-Settled Areas Peace River 1914.gif](#)). From this point on, further settlement would build out from the frontiers already in place or fill in gaps within the existing framework. A slight degree of urbanization had now begun as both Peace River and Grande Prairie were incorporated as villages in 1914 with both having active boards of trade. Hamlets with 20 or more families also existed at Lake Saskatoon, Spirit River and Waterhole, while the surrounding countryside was dotted with a number of stores, post offices, schools and churches. Rural government had also just been implemented in the form of the Rural Municipalities of Grande Prairie, Bear Lake, Spirit River, Fairview and Peace (river), while several local agricultural societies had been incorporated.

By the end of 1914, North-west Mounted Police barracks were in place at Grande Prairie, Sturgeon Lake, Lake Saskatoon, Spirit River, Peace River and Fort St. John, while several Justices-of-the-Peace had been appointed, and Supreme Court Justices Noel and Dubuc had begun to make regular excursions to the region. Communications had improved to such a degree that the telegraph stretched as far west as Lake Saskatoon, and both Grande Prairie and Peace River were publishing newspapers. In short, by the end of 1914, the Peace River Country was much like the rest of the Canadian prairies and a vastly different place than it had been the previous year.

Locations and Identities

Altogether, up to the end of 1914, there were 6,489 applications for land in the Peace River Country (the files generated to deal with these by the Dominion Lands Branch include the documents placed throughout this guide by hyperlinks, which can be seen by the use of “*cntrl + click*”). For the pre-survey occupants, the information on file is somewhat sparse, for these applicants were required to prove little beyond the fact that they had already occupied and made improvements upon the land. Information is also sparse in the files for those purchasing fractional quarters and those utilizing Half-breed scrip. Here again, no homesteading duties were necessary. For the homesteaders proper, however, and those wishing to apply Military Bounty or South African scrip, the government required much more personal information. In these cases (about 96% of the whole), the documents disclose many important details.

Methodology

The land files for this project are held by the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) and the British Columbia Archives and Records Service (BCARS). Research of them was conducted at these institutions. The analysis of the files held by BCARS proved relatively easy as all of these were in hard copy (they have since been microfilmed) and held together in one series (GR 436-Series I). There are about 800 of these files, and, in general, they are in chronological order and have now been microfilmed. On the other hand, those files held by PAA (Accession# 70.313) total about 5,900, and are on 16mm microfilm, some of these are of poor quality as the records were filmed in 1957 by the Alberta Department of Lands and Forests with

apparent undue care. Also, the Alberta files (nearly 85% of the whole) are not held together as one series but are interspersed with the rest of the land files for the entire province.

To access the Alberta files, it was necessary to first examine the microfilmed land location registers for the area to determine which quarter-sections in the region were filed on before 1915 (Accession# 74.32/241, 284-388, **ctrl + click** [19-Land Location Register Sheet.gif](#) , [20-File Number Register Sheet 001.gif](#) -- for a sample page). With all of these quarter-sections listed, the file number registers for the area then had to be consulted to discover the seven digit reference numbers for each of these files (Accession# 74.32/24 and 82.170/206 & 207; **ctrl+ click** [21-File Number Register Sheet 002.gif](#)). Each file number was then recorded onto a specifically designed data input form on which all of the other information would be entered (**ctrl + click** [20-File Number Register Sheet 001.gif](#) [21-File Number Register Sheet 002.gif](#), **ctrl + click** [22-Data Input Form.gif](#)). As a check, every quarter-section in these file number registers was reviewed to ensure that all the land applied for prior to 1915 (every file up to #3300000) was covered. The approximately 5,900 input forms were then sorted according to file number. The Peace River Country files on microfilm were then examined one-by-one in numerical order with all of the non-Peace River Country files in between bypassed.

As the files were examined, the relevant data in them was recorded onto the data input forms. Each file pertains to one quarter-section of land. Due to cancellations and abandonments, therefore, many of the files hold information on more than one applicant. Also, as many applicants wound up filing more than once, information on such people is frequently held in two or more files. Each completed form (and each record in this database), however, contains information on one separate application for land, whether proven up, cancelled or abandoned. Since what constituted a single farm often encompassed several quarter-sections, the details with respect to individual farms will have to be calculated by reviewing all of the entries filed by a particular applicant, and, in some cases, those of his wife and children and possibly other family members. *For statistical purposes, an abandonment, and a re-filing for a different quarter (or, indeed the same quarter) are considered as two separate applications.* However, if, as sometimes happened, an applicant filed for a quarter-section as a homesteader, and then chose to officially abandon it in order to obtain it with scrip, this was not recorded as an abandonment.

Approximately 4% of the files were found to be either missing or misidentified or documents in them lost, not completed, damaged, or had deteriorated. In a few cases, the recorded information was obliterated because of the inferior microfilming process in 1957. Therefore, after the input forms were filled out, local histories and other information sources in various libraries and archives were checked to verify data and gain information that was missing or not included on the files. Ultimately, however, a small portion of the information sought (perhaps 3%) could not be recovered. In almost all of these cases, this applied to abandoned or cancelled applications and not to those that were eventually proven up.

When all the data was recorded, calculations were made on each form concerning the length of time from when each successful applicant filed for his or her land to when title was granted. This should *NOT* be seen as the length of time an applicant took to prove up his or her land, for many other factors affected this. Some applicants, for example, undertook military service in World War I, and were given time off to do this. Other applicants from Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who had not yet become Canadian citizens, were not allowed land entitlement during the duration of the war. Still others, who were not British subjects, ended up filing late for naturalization and so had to wait until they were naturalized until they could gain title. Many applicants had to take employment away from their land to finance their homesteads and were allowed to do so for six months in every year until title was granted.

With the completion of the data entry forms, local histories and other information sources were consulted to verify certain details and provide additional information that had not been included on the land files. For example, a homesteader might have indicated that s/he came from Indiana but did not indicate which community. Local histories often disclose this. Unfortunately, however, information on only about 15% of the successful land settlers up to 1914 is included in the local histories and not all of this information is trustworthy, for it was often taken from distant memory. Whenever information in the local histories conflicted with that in the land files, reliance was made on the land files, the documents filled out by the land agents in direct contact with the applicants.

Further verification was made from other primary sources, such as the *Grande Prairie Herald*, a detailed index which is held by the Grande Prairie Public Library, and the Loggie collection of Peace River Country biographies held by the Glenbow-Alberta Archives. Use was also made of the 1901 national and 1906 western prairie census, as well as the Western Land Grants database held by the National Archives. It was discovered that personal names often had varying spellings, particularly with immigrants from Eastern Europe. In cases such as this, reliance was made on the land file, for here the applicants were required to sign their names, even though some did so with an "x". Also, it should be noted that, among the pre-1910 applicants for land, many indicated different ages for themselves when applying for land than they did when speaking to the census takers in 1901 or 1906.

After as much verification as possible, information from the data entry forms was entered onto the database which was specifically designed by the Grande Prairie Regional College to run on Microsoft Access. When this was completed, each database record was checked against the original data entry form, and information was reviewed by two professional historians of the Peace River region. Following this verification, information on the database was migrated to Microsoft Excel, with both versions copied onto CD-ROMs. The program has also been published on the *Lobstick* website where individual records can be consulted, although the overall database cannot be manipulated. Online access to the records is by the name of the applicant or

by the legal description of the land. Researchers should remember that the information on individuals in these database records pertains only to details disclosed up to the time when land title was either granted or denied.

Research Team

The information from the land files was retrieved by Dr. David W. Leonard, who gleaned and reviewed it between 1996 and 2003. He made his data entry forms available to the Monkman Homestead Preservation Society in 2002 in order that the Society might enter the data onto a database especially devised by Chris Levoir of Grande Prairie Regional College. With a generous grant from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the information was entered onto the database during 2002-03. As this was being done, Lynda Boyd of the Society checked the information against biographies in the various local histories of the region, while Dr. Leonard checked various archival sources, all of which resulted in additional information being entered onto a number of the records. Dr. Leonard also checked certain entries against the 1901 national and the 1906 prairie census, as well as the National Archives' Western Land Grants database. When data entry was completed in February 2003, verification was undertaken by Dr. Leonard and Dr. Campbell Ross of Grande Prairie Regional College. After corrections were made, the whole was presented to *Lobstick* for publication in both on-line and CD-ROM format. After a review by the editor, Dr. Scott McAlpine, the database went on-line, and in 2006, Dr. Duff Crerar, new Managing Editor of *Lobstick*, completed the CD-ROM edition.

Part II

From 1915 to 1930

Undertaken by the Peace Country Historical Society and the South Peace Regional Archives, with a generous grant from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and the sponsored partnership of:

**The Grande Prairie Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society
The County of Grande Prairie
The MD of Fairview
The MD of Peace
The MD of Saddle Hills
Northern Sunrise County
Northern Lights County
Birch Hills County
The MD of Spirit River
The MD of Greenview
The MD of Smoky River
Clear Hills County**

This project is an extension of Part I in that it covers those who filed for Crown land in the Peace River Country of Alberta between 1 January, 1915 and 31 December, 1930. It is the intention of the parties undertaking this project to have it extended to the Peace River Block of British Columbia, as was the case with Part I (to 1914).

In all, over 26,000 applications were made for Crown land on the Alberta side of the Peace River Country between 1915 and 1930. The land files and registers are held on microfilm at the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

***As of 1 October 2017, basic information has been gleaned from all of the land registers, while approximately 50% of the files have been reviewed. Researchers should therefore be aware that half of the entries have been only partially completed.**

Land Settlement of the Peace River Country, 1915-1930

As World War I continued, the land settlement of the Peace River Country proceeded as before. The arrival of the railway in Grande Prairie and Peace River in 1916 gave further incentive to those wishing to settle in the Peace River Country. However, the war, and the growing war industry, resulted in many young men across Canada joining these causes rather than pursue homesteading. As the war continued, the government realized there would be an eventual unemployment problem at war's end, and so it set up a Soldier's Settlement Board to accommodate the veterans, including those who were returning from service before war's end. The Board selected vast tracts of

surveyed Crown land in the West, as new districts were opened up for farming, much of it in the Peace River Country. All war veterans were offered two quarters to be undertaken with the usual homesteading provisions, although the time frame for proving up was greatly extended. Also, all homesteaders who had already begun working their land prior to, or during, the war could defer their duties until after their service if they chose to enlist, and then be given an additional quarter as well.

Many pre-1915 homesteaders in the Peace Country therefore left their holdings to serve in the Canadian Army, others in the armies of Great Britain, the United States, and other countries. When they returned, their homesteads were waiting for them, along with another quarter of their choice, and they had ample time to prove up. There were also homesteaders who had earlier immigrated from enemy countries and had yet to prove up their land or even become naturalized. These “enemy aliens” were allowed to continue proving up their land, however they were forbidden from returning to their country of origin or from obtaining title to their homesteads once proven up until the war was over and they had become British subjects.

With land settlement continuing during the war, the government decided to relocate their ‘Peace River’ land office from Grouard to Peace River in 1916, where it would be closer to expanding farm lands. In 1921, a new Dominion Land Office was established in Pouce Coupe. During 1919-21, the Peace River region experienced a wave of settlement, as veterans returned in droves. New lands were opened up off the settled central prairies, with the Battle River Prairie (Manning district) greatly expanding. This was the case on the southern prairies of Canada as well, and also in the United States, Australia, and Argentina. The result was a glut on the international grain market, which saw grain prices slide. During the early 1920s, the Peace River Country experienced for the first time actual depopulation, as farm foreclosures mounted and homestead cancellations and abandonments actually exceeded the number of homestead applications. Grande Prairie saw its population drop from 1,500 to 1,200, and Peace River from 1,600 to 700.

With the success of the Locarno Pacts in Europe in the mid-1920s, new markets opened up for western Canadian grain, and the farms of the West again became productive. In the Peace River Country between 1926 and 1930, the farmers saw the twin bounties of high grain prices and bountiful yields. Homestead applications soared, and the region experienced its greatest period of rural expansion. The reputation of the region as a grain producer was also enhanced, when Herman Trelle from Lake Saskatoon became the world’s wheat champion at the International grain exposition in Chicago in 1926. In the meantime, the railway was extended west from Grande Prairie to Wembley in 1924, to Beaverlodge and Hythe in 1928, and to Dawson Creek in 1930. To the north, the railway crossed the Peace River in 1919 and went on to Grimshaw, Berwyn and Brownvale, reaching Fairview in 1928 and Hines Creek in 1930. Millions of acres of land off the rail lines were opened up for homesteading.

In 1930, both the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway, the Central Canada Railway, and other lines were sold by the Alberta government to the Canadian National

and the Canadian Pacific Railways, who operated them as a joint subsidiary called the Northern Alberta Railway. That same year, Alberta and Saskatchewan gained control of the Crown land and natural resources within their borders, as did British Columbia of its Peace River Block. Henceforth, homesteading and all forms of settlement of Crown land would be undertaken by the provincial governments. This was just in time for the Great Depression which saw continued bountiful crops but the price of #1 Northern wheat drop to as little as 32¢ a bushel. This meant that shipping grain out could be a losing proposition. As a result, more farmers began to rely on local grist mills and locally produced cattle, hogs, and garden vegetables, along with hunting, fishing, and even berry-picking for survival. People did not starve, but prosperity was a distant dream. To alleviate conditions in the region, the provincial government placed a ban on homesteading in the region to anyone who was not a native Albertan in 1931. It would last till 1938.

Land Records, 1930-57

When Alberta obtained control of its Crown land and natural resources in 1930, it set up a new Department of Lands & Mines. All records pertaining to the settlement of public land were then transferred to the new Administration Building in Edmonton, later called the Natural Resources Building. Rather than continue with the old seven-digit filing system for land settlement however, the Department decided to create a new system based on four digits which would later expand to six. They then closed off the old Ottawa files and separated out all for which title had been granted to a settler. The rest, which were still active, were integrated into the new system, with even the old file folders transferred over. The Department also created new file series for Timber Births, Grazing Leases, and General Lands. By this time, some of the land earlier intended, and surveyed, for homesteading was seen to be unfit for cultivation, and, so, whatever documentation had been created for homestead applicants was transferred to these file series.

In 1957, the new Department of Lands & Forests decided that the vast accumulation of documents was overly burdensome, and so it decided to microfilm all land files for which activity was complete, including the old Ottawa file system and the newly created systems for land settlement, timber births, grazing leases, and general lands. A new file system was set up based on land location. In 1970, all of the microfilmed files were transferred to the Provincial Archives, where they began to serve the public as an information source, as well as the new Department of Energy. Registers relating to land settlement were also transferred and subsequently microfilmed by the Archives.

Methodology

Through contract money provided by Alberta Culture, basic information on settlers on the Alberta side of the Peace River Country between 1915 and 1930, available on the land registers of the Department of the Interior, has now been entered. The contractor was Adele Goa who completed her work in 2008. This includes land location, name of applicant, nature of application, date of application, whether or not the application was successful, date of proving up (if successful), and the land file number. Also, in 2009 and 2012, under contract to the Department of Culture, Adele Goa reviewed the files on

8,000 of the applicants and was able to enter relevant data on them onto the database. During 2014-16, the relevant data was entered for the next 6,000 land applicants. The contractor is now examining the rest of the information on the remaining 12,350 applicants for land and enter this onto the database. The work is being reviewed by Dr. David Leonard, the overall project co-ordinator.

Research Team

In addition to Adele Goa and David Leonard, the Research Team includes Dr. Daryl Whyte, Professor of History at the Grande Prairie Regional College and former President of the Peace Country Historical Society. Daryl adapted the database devised by Chris Lavoie and Evans Forsythe (Part I) so that it would fit the new circumstance of the post 1914 land records. It also includes Mary Nutting of the South Regional Archives Society and former Director of the Archives. The website is hosted by the Archives, which manages the contract of Adele Goa. These individuals are assisted by counterparts such as Evans Forsythe, formerly of the Grande Prairie Regional College, and Alyssa Currie, the current Director of the South Peace Regional Archives.