

Family History in Homestead and Land Records

If your ancestors or relatives settled on land in Western Canada between 1870 and 1930, you may find some interesting family historical information in homestead records. You will not likely find much basic genealogical information except the name, age and birthplace of the applicant. You may also find if the applicant was married and had children at the time of the application and if he was a British subject or naturalized. You may also learn about how he fulfilled his requirements to receive title to his homestead property, the size and value of his dwelling, how much land he cleared and cropped, and how many horses, cows, pigs, etc. that he owned. Sometimes some financial information will be found. The available records may range from one to over one hundred pages per homesteader.

Your family lore may mention a homestead. One has to be careful that it refers to an actual free land grant and does not just refer to an early property location which may have been acquired by other means.

The Dominion Land Acts of 1872, 1879, 1883 and 1908 stipulated what land would be available for free homestead land grants, or for purchase. To be eligible for a free land grant of 160 acres, the applicant normally had to be male, 21 years of age or older, the sole head of a family and a British subject. Some requirements were relaxed in the 1908 act. He could not previously have received a free land grant. After a successful application for entry filing with a registration fee of \$10.00, the homesteader was required to occupy his land within six months and to live on the land for six months a year for three years. He had to construct a habitable building worth at least \$300.00 and to clear and cultivate at least 30 acres and to grow crops on at least 20 acres.

The documents that you may find in the homestead records are:

- 1) Application for entry for a homestead, a pre-emption or purchase.
- 2) Receipt or acknowledgment of the registration fee and application.
- 3) Application for grant of patent, with sworn statements of two supporters.
- 4) Inspector's reports and letters.
- 5) Notification of grant of land patent.

Other records that you may find include:

- 1) Declaration of abandonment.
- 2) Patent transfers.
- 3) Sworn statements in support of pre-emption.
- 4) South African Volunteer Bounty Scrip.
- 5) Métis Scrip.
- 6) Letters requesting/granting extension of time.
- 7) Miscellaneous documents.

So how can you find those records?

First go to the Western Land Grants Database at:

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/western-land-grants/index-e.html> and

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/western-land-grants/001007-100.01-e.php>

Use the surname search unless you know the land description. You may have to be inventive with spelling and given names to find your person's entry. Remember this database only lists land grants, and will have no entries for homesteads that never received a land patent. If you find

your names, check and record the land location and the reference information. From the meridian location, you can determine which provincial records to search for more information. To help find your records, here are some links.

For Manitoba see:

http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/genealogy/gen_text/land_rec.html

For Saskatchewan see:

<http://www.saskhomesteads.com/search.asp>

For Alberta go to the AGS index site first:

<http://abgensoc.ca/homestead/index.htm>

<http://abgensoc.ca/homestead/search.php>

In all cases you will eventually have to go to or contact the respective provincial archives to view the microfilms of the records.

The following web pages will be of interest to anyone wishing to explore Canadian history relating to land grants and homesteading. The Canadian Land Acts were based on and modified the regulations of the USA Homestead Act of 1862..

Rupert's Land Act 1868, re the transfer of HBC lands to the Crown and to Canada:

http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/rpl_1868.html

The Manitoba Act 1870 – re HBC lands, Métis claims, military land grants.

http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/ma_1870.html

The Dominion Lands Act 1872, Online starting at:

http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/PageView/9_08050_5/0181?id=66f1118b66f17fac

Finding Aid: Prairie Land Records - on Dave Obee's Family History Page.

<http://www.daveobee.com/columns/dominion.htm>

The Volunteer Bounty Act 1908 and South African Scrip.

<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/south-african-war/001002-130-e.html#land>

A very good reference on the Manitoba Historical Society webpage.

<http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/landsettlement.shtml>

Lobstick - Homesteading in Peace River and general information.

<http://www.lobstick.com/> and link to

<http://www.lobstick.com/PEACE%20COUNTRY%20LAND%20SETTLEMEN%20PROJECT/Homesteading.htm>

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