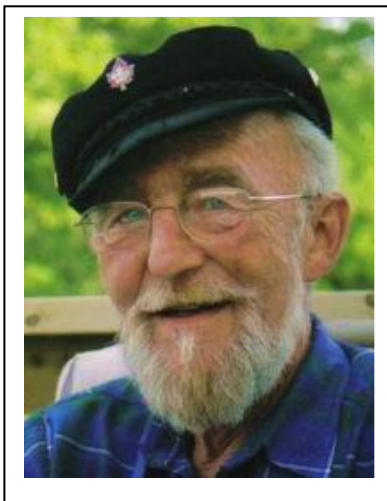


# The Family Historian

## Patrick Wohler

Column #75

### Western Land Grants



Tracing our western Canadian ancestors is becoming a little easier. Certainly the 1906 Census of Western Canada is a marvelous resource if your ancestor was there for the census, but the homesteading records are really what we need.

The centenary, in 2005, of the creation of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta has fueled interest in these homesteading records and their genealogical societies have been working in cooperation with their provincial archives to make the records more accessible.

Once an area had been surveyed and declared open for homesteading, an individual could apply for a quarter section (160 acres) of their choice and pay a filing fee of \$10.00. The homesteader then had to 'prove up' his claim by occupying it for at least three years and making certain improvements. These included building a house and barn, fencing, and getting the land under cultivation.

At that point the homesteader could apply for a patent, or title, to the land. An inspector would go out to ensure that the 'proving up'

had in fact been done and then a patent would be issued.

The paperwork generated by this process is what is of interest to the Family History researcher. A numbered file was opened for each quarter section as it was homesteaded and all paperwork connected to it was added to the file until a patent was issued. Some of the files would include wills, liens, etc. much as you would find in an Ontario Land Record File. At a minimum it would include the Application to Homestead, the Application for Patent, Inspector's Report, and the notice that a patent had been issued.

The Application for Patent included the name, age, occupation, post office, nationality, residency information, wife/children (no names), breaking/cropping, livestock, fencing. While this is certainly of interest, the researcher should go beyond this to the Application to Homestead. That document has more biographical information including the applicant's name, age, birthplace, last residence, prior occupation, number of adults and children in the household.

What the genealogical societies have been doing is creating indexes to these files. The Alberta project, which involved 685 reels of microfilm, covers the years 1870 to 1930, when the province took over the granting of land. It is almost 100% complete and is now available online at: <http://abgensoc.ca/homestead/>. The index will give you the full name of the applicant, a full legal description of the section, and the number for the file that contains all the information.

If you want a copy of the file, contact the Alberta Genealogical Society at: [homestead1@abgensoc.ca](mailto:homestead1@abgensoc.ca) or by snail mail at: Research Services Committee, Alberta Genealogical Society, 116, 10440-108 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5H 3Z9. Naturally there is a fee for these copies, but they haven't yet advertised what it is.

The Saskatchewan database is an index to the 360,000 people who took up homesteads. It can be searched by name, which is what most of us would be doing, or by land location. The results of the search provide a file number, the name, and the geographical co-ordinates of the homestead.

By clicking on the file number, you will be taken to a page that explains the process for obtaining a copy of the homestead file. This can be anywhere from 2 to 200 pages and the cost is \$0.50 per page.

The file contains some information on the settler including nationality, place of origin, family makeup (usually without names); record of improvements made and correspondence about the homestead.

This was a joint project of the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society and the Saskatchewan Archives Board. The latter holds all the original homestead files but microfilm copies are also available through the Family History Centre in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Not all settlers obtained their land from the Federal Government. The government, in fact, granted enormous amounts of land in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, to the Canadian Pacific Railway and they, in turn, sold it to settlers. The records of these sales can be found in the CPR Land Sales Catalogue.

It includes the name of the purchaser, legal description of the land, number of acres, and cost per acre. This catalogue is at the Glenbow Archives and can be searched online at:

<http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/archivesCPRSearch.aspx>.

I welcome comments, queries, and suggestions at: [p\\_wohler@hotmail.com](mailto:p_wohler@hotmail.com)

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