

Part of Alberta's Roots



Did you know that Alberta's agricultural history actually started with very large ranches? Cattle were brought by early European settlers who came to Alberta. However, most of these cattle were used for beef.

After the Canadian Pacific Railway was finished in 1885, smaller farms started to spring up all over Alberta. The government decided that more settlement in the West would mean more food for all people living in Canada. It also knew that the people who settled in the West would buy goods made by people who were already living in the East.

In 1896, the government of Canada broke up the large ranches to provide more land for settlement. As settlers started to build homesteads and farms, Alberta's rural ways of life took shape. An early **homestead** was an area of land which a family claimed by building a home and farming the land.

Many current Alberta communities had their beginnings along train tracks and crossroads. Many of Alberta towns that were started before 1940 were planned by different railway companies. These towns were laid out so that rural homesteaders and farmers would be close to a centre where they could bring their crops and other agricultural products.

Some people thought that these Alberta communities all looked the same.

“Prairie towns all look alike: identical grain elevators, identical banks, identical railway stations, a main street that is called Main Street and a road along the tracks called Railway Avenue—when you’ve seen one, as they say, you’ve seen ‘em all.... The towns do not reflect the people who live in them.”

H. Roberston. *Grass Roots*. Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1973.



Photograph used with permission from the Agri-Environmental Partnership. www.pulse.ab.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1yDKMqKdtys%3D&tabid=36

A mix of urban and rural communities makes up much of Alberta's landscapes. What title would you give to this photograph?

Did you know that some Edmonton and Calgary communities were named after dairy farmers?

The Hawkwood neighbourhood in Calgary was named for a dairy farming family who came to Alberta from England in 1913.

In Edmonton, 111th Street was once a country road between two sections of land. It separated two farms that were located north of present-day 71st Avenue. The Rife Dairy Farm was east of the road. The Calder Dairy Farm was west of the road.

The Wilson family lived in a farm house at 109th Street and 66th Avenue in Edmonton from 1925 until 1991. The farm house still stands, and is listed on the Alberta Community Development Historical Building inventory. Mr. Wilson operated Wilson's Dairy on this site from 1925 until 1939.

Agriculture in Alberta. The History of Agriculture in Alberta. Government of Alberta, Agriculture and Rural Development. [www.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex2](http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex2) and "Town Layout." *Atlas of Alberta Railways.* University of Alberta Press, 2005. <http://railways.library.ualberta.ca/Chapters-6-1/>

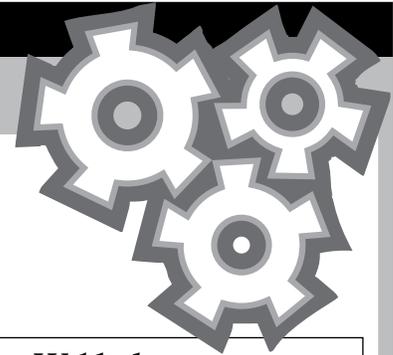
Researcher's Corner

Researching Community Roots

Do you know of any connections your community has to farming and the dairy industry? What are they? If you do not know about your community's dairy roots, how could you find out?

Do you know of agricultural pioneers who have influenced the growth of your community? Who are they? What did they do?

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Go to **Weblinks** on www.moo2you.ca to select and explore photographs of homesteading on the Provincial Archives of Alberta website, *Photographs – If Only They Could Speak*, at <http://culture.alberta.ca/paa/eventsandexhibits/education/ifonlytheycouldspeak/default.aspx>.

Or use the search function to search "farms" or "dairy" to find photographs.

Find out about the rural roots of one Alberta community and the student reporters who investigated them. Go to the *Spirit River Rural Roots: The Changing Family Farm* website at www.galileo.org/projects/rural_roots/spirit_river/.