

## **The Homesteads of Early Swedish Settlers in Manitoba**

**Written by Elaine Nordstrom Tosberg**

I will try to give you an idea of what the early settlers faced when they came to Manitoba and settled.

Being one of the younger of my generation, I didn't have the opportunity to know and remember my grandparents and to hear their stories. Many times, I thought about what their life must have been like and why they would have decided to come to Canada after first settling in Minnesota when they emigrated from Sweden.

In 2004, I ordered the homestead records of my grandparents Lars Nelson, Lars Nordstrom and Peter Lind from the Archives of Manitoba. As many of the early settlers were not fluent in English and certainly not written English, John Caldwell, a sub-agent to the Dept. of the Interior, who resided at Sprague, wrote much of the correspondence that went back and forth and the homesteader then signed it. There were many settlers of Swedish descent who crossed the border from Roseau County to the Sprague area in search of a new life and an opportunity to own the land that they lived on.

Lars Nelson, my great grandfather, made application for a homestead in May 1905. Lars' declaration stated that he had "squatted" upon the land, the SW 1/4 of sec. 2 Twp. 1, Range 14E, since April 1904 and that his wife, Brita, and six children had joined him in July of the same year. They had not gone far after crossing the Canada/US border. I am thinking his 6 children were his daughter, Betsy, her husband Lars Nordstrom and their four children; Samuel, Louis, Julia and John. The 1906 census indicates they all lived at this same small residence but by this time there was another child, Elmer.

The home they had built was a 14' x 24' frame house with slabs for a roof valued at \$65. The stable was 14' x 16' made of logs with a slab roof valued at \$25. There was no fence but he did have one cow. Lars Nelson was born in 1832 so was already up in years. I am certain that his son-in-law, Lars Nordstrom, helped with clearing the land and cutting timber for building. One of Lars' sons, Nels Nelson, had come to the Sprague area in 1898 and surely helped his father as well. In the declaration, Lars stated that should he be granted entry for a homestead, he agreed to allow Sprague Lumber Co. or other persons to cut and take away all the timber except from 25 acres that he wanted for his use and benefit. An entry fee of \$10.00 was required.

One and a half years later, in 1907, the Dept of the Interior at Winnipeg wrote that they had submitted his entry to Ottawa for consideration upon receipt, but had heard nothing back. They could no longer hold his money and they were returning it. Should Winnipeg get permission to grant him entry, he would have to re-pay the amount. Shortly thereafter, Lars received a letter granting him entry and requesting the \$10.00 entry fee.

Lars and Betsy Nordstrom continued living with her aging parents on the homestead to help them. By 1911, the census indicates that 10 people were living at the residence. Brita had passed away in 1910 but Nels, the son, was now there and Betsy and Lars had another child, Beda.

In June 1911, Lars Nelson wrote to the Minister of the Interior applying for his patent for the homestead. In response, the Dept. sent out forms to be completed. The completed form would be a sworn statement from Lars indicating the work done each year including the acreage cleared, the acreage cropped, a description of the buildings, how much of the 160 acres was hay land and how much was swamp land. Lars declared that the house was 22' x 24' valued at \$300. The stable was 16' x 26' valued at \$100. and there was 80 rods of fencing. There was 5 acres cleared but no crops yet and also they had cleared 5 acres for hay meadow. The homestead was all bush and slow to clear. On the declaration, Lars indicated his special circumstances were, "Lack of means, the land was bush and stones, and he and been sick for the last 5 months and was unable to work". Gust Nelson and Erick Erickson each completed sworn statements as well to verify the information that Lars had submitted to the Dept.

The Dept. of the Interior in Ottawa replied that Lars would be in a position to make application for patent when he had increased the breaking area to 15 acres and had cropped 10 acres. Sub-agent, Caldwell at Sprague, wrote in a letter that the 10 acres of bush cleared in township 1 was equivalent to more than 100 acres on the prairies. He also wrote that Lars had worked hard stumping and grubbing what he had cleared and was entitled to his patent.

The Dept. of the Interior in Winnipeg again submitted the application for patent to Ottawa along with Mr. Caldwell's letter and Lars' Certificate of Naturalization. More letters went back and forth between Winnipeg and Ottawa. On November 17, 1911 a letter was received from the Dept. of the Interior stating that the application for patent had received the commissioner's approval and the patent would be issued in due course.

I do not know if an actual patent was issued or what they look like. In the homestead file, there is a copy of his application dated May 1905 with a "patented land" stamp applied. Lars passed away on November 29, 1911 just two weeks after the commissioner's approval.

A great deal of hard work and hardship was experienced by these early settlers to obtain land in their new country. Most of the Sprague area had not been developed at all and there were virtually no roads.

The homestead files for my grandfathers, Lars Nordstrom and Peter Lind are similar in content with a few of their own twists.

Peter Lind acquired a second homestead, Sec. 5 Twp 2 which had been "squatted upon" by Peter Dahlstrom and his family. Dahlstrom died in 1905 and Peter married the widow, Mary Dahlstrom. Together they raised Mary's three children as well as the four which they had together; namely Axel, Leonard, Jennie and Lewis. Mary, my grandmother, died in 1914 and the eldest Dahlstrom boy, Arthur, in 1916. Mary had made application for the homestead before her death and the son, Arthur, had requested the land be reserved for him while he was in active service with the 78th Overseas Battalion. After Arthur's death, Peter Lind made entry and was granted patent.