

SWEDES OF RIVERLAND DISTRICT/LAC DU BONNET

In the early 1900s, Swedish settlers moved to an area opposite the village of Lac du Bonnet. This district became known as Riverland and was located on the east bank of the Winnipeg River. Here the Dominion Lands Office screened, validated and directed these Scandinavian homesteaders. It is in this district that Swedes first settled and worked their 160-acre homesteads, often taking seasonal work at the brickworks, sawmill, trapping, hunting and fishing or on construction gangs.

School and Church

In March 1911 a one-room school building was erected on land donated by Swedish immigrant Gus Anderson, named Riverland School #1557. Naima Erickson was its first teacher, teaching grades one to eight. The village of Lac du Bonnet was also the site of the Swedish Lutheran Congregation in 1914.

Homesteaders arrival

Erik Frank Pearson arrived in Canada in 1915 and started farming in Riverland in 1917. He belonged to the Swedish Organizations in the Lac Du Bonnet area. He was secretary in the Swedish Union in Canada and served as an administrator for the society, which was trying to raise money for a home for the aged. He was a member of the local Vasa Order and active in the Lutheran Church, of which he donated the land for this church. For 22 years Erik Pearson was a representative for the *Svenska Canada Tidningen* (Swedish Canada News; changed to *Canada-tidningen* in 1931) in Lac du Bonnet until his death in 1938.

John Alfred and Kristina Welin came to Canada in 1905 and in 1916 bought a farm in Riverland. The Welins, Lindquists, Ongmans, Gillies and other Swedish families formed a Branch of the Vasa Order - a Sick Benefit society. They also formed an Old Timers group, who held meetings and a party when a member reached his or her 70th birthday, presenting them with an arm or rocking chair. The log home (picture attached) was built by Hans Erickson, a Norwegian immigrant, in the Lac du Bonnet area and is now home of the Lac du Bonnet and District museum.

Progression Continued

In 1919 the Riverland Recreation Association Hall was built by volunteer Swedes from the area and from also from Brookfield. The community pooled together their resources, with donated land, materials, and labour. The end result was a hall with a dance floor, loft, stage and kitchen.

Progression Continued

The Swedes in Riverland were so progressive that they built their own telephone line, the Swedish Riverland Telephone Company. It existed from 1922 through 1942 and came from the WERCo (Winnipeg Electric Railway Company) dock through Riverland as far north as Silver Lodge. Fifteen Subscribers originated, that paid a three-year rent in 1926. By 1942 only nine subscribers remained.

The Vasa Order of America Lodge #385 was named *Viking* in Lac du Bonnet instituting on Sept. 5, 1920.

This Swedish community was close in faith, work, and play. Neighborhood get-togethers and community events were a very important factor to their unity.

(Excerpts from *The Logs and Lines from the Winnipeg River, A History from the Lac du Bonnet Area*; and *Lac du Bonnet & District Historical Society*)