

Came As A Soldier, Stayed As A Builder

Oscar Agaton Selstrom Came To The Burnt Lake Country From Sweden

This is another in a series of articles on pioneers of Red Deer and district. The articles are being contributed by the Archives Committee in the completion of its Centennial project.

OSCAR AGATON SELSTROM

Oscar Agaton Selstrom was born in 1873 in Wilhelmstad, Sweden. Before coming to Canada, he had trained as a soldier and came to Canada in 1899 to join the Scandinavian regiment which was going to fight in the Boer War. He came to Burnt Lake to visit his friend Mattson and also found that the regiment had gone shortly before he arrived in this country.

Oscar could not speak English so he stayed and worked for Mattson's and also attended Burnt Lake School. At the age of 26, he learned to read and write in English. He took a homestead in Burnt Lake district on NE 1/4 Sec. 26 Township 37 Range 1 W5 in 1903, and then went to British Columbia and worked on the spiral tunnel and the Kicking Horse Pass railroad.

Oscar and Bertha Selstrom settled on their homestead in 1904 after their marriage. They worked together clearing land and raising a few cattle and chickens for food. Oscar worked for the ACR railroad while it was being built between Red Deer and Rocky Mountain House. He was timber inspector for the government and travelled thousands of miles by railroad and buggy to check timber which was going into railroad ties. He had a stamp by which he marked the grades of the ties and many times could have walked away a richer man from some camps if he would have passed all the timber. But Oscar was conscientious and told contractors that if they produced good ties they would get good grades.

INSPECTOR

Many times he travelled to Edmonton or Calgary with his own team on timber inspection trips. The farm was being operated by Bertha Selstrom and

the boys. Hugo, the oldest, did field work with the help of his younger brothers, who were going to school. Oscar was hired as government engineer for this area and was responsible for building the first road to Rocky Mountain House. Mr. Bob Speedie was time-keeper, Olaf Holmgren was straw boss.

As near as can be remembered a little more than \$600 was allotted by the government to start work on this road. They dug ditches, drained muskegs and corduroyed the soft spots then put straw on the corduroy so the horses could pull the dump wagon and cover this with dirt to make the road passable. Compare this with our road building methods of today!

Many stories have been told about Oscar's strength. It seems one day Oscar was walking down the street in Sylvan Lake when he noticed a small man trying to load a barrel of apples in his wagon without success. Oscar walked over, picked up the barrel of apples, put them in the wagon

and said to the man: "That is how you load apples," to which the man replied: "Thank you."

ROAD BUILDER

Oscar became road foreman for the Golden West Municipality and built roads all over this district; most of his help was supplied by farmers paying off their taxes.

Like all true pioneers, he raised a fine family of eight. These were Hugo, Olga, Roy, Gordon, Ann, Carl, Ruth and Levina, all of whom are living.

Oscar Selstrom was interested in politics and would spend time discussing government issues with his friends. He supported Liberals in his early years in Alberta. After Social Credit was installed, he finally supported this party and was a member of Social Credit.

When Mr. Selstrom first came here, he borrowed a muzzle loader one day and went to a slough hunting. He spotted what he thought was an otter and he double-loaded the muzzle loader and fired.

However, loaded with too much powder, the old gun blew up and knocked Oscar down in the water. He regained his feet, waded into the slough and retrieved his prize kill . . . and the ruined gun. With his valuable fur he went to see a friend. The animal was merely a muskrat, worth very little. Oscar said his sore shoulder reminded him of his prize kill for a long time after.

Oscar was a man of ability, had a friendly personality, the ability to handle men and the knowledge and ability to accomplish a job. He seldom lost his temper but they say he could lose it on occasion, though not for long. He lived on his old homestead until his death in December, 1948, when he was 75. Bertha Selstrom sold the farm, moved to Benalto and had three happy years until she died in June, 1951, aged 75.

(This story has been told to me by various members of the family — Fred M. Freschette.)

TED SAWYER AND FAMILY

Ted and Millie Sawyer from Lacombe acquired the SE¼ Sec. 1-38-1-W5 in June 1974, arriving here with their family of three children. **Terry**, the oldest girl, was twelve; **Kathy** was coming eleven; and **Jeff**, the youngest and the only boy, was nine. Incidentally, Jeff was named after his great-grandfather, Marion Jefferson Sawyer.

The children were all born in Lacombe and went to kindergarten and school there. They now attend the River Glen School in Red Deer, going in by bus.

The Sawyers all settled into their new life of farming with some cattle, turkeys, cats, and a good dog, Bozo, who looks after "the ranch" while the family goes about its business.

WILLIAM AND ELSIE SCHREUDER

In 1967, Bill and Elsie moved from California to an acreage on NE 15-38-1-5, in the Burnt Lake district. They bought this property from Mr. R. O. Long, who in turn had bought it from Mr. Francis Stanley Swainson had subdivided the 20 acres on this quarter. It was a tremendous change for the Schreuders from sunny California, both having a job as accountants in an office, to the 40° below weather of Alberta. But during their prior vacations they fell in love with the district and decided that this would be a good place to raise hogs.

They built their farrowing barn in 1967 and the weaner barn in 1969. They sold weaners until 1971 when they built a feeder barn. Bill and Elsie experienced the all time low prices in 1970 and 1971 as far as hog prices were concerned, but they battled it out. Due to lack of labor and land, they had to sell their operation in 1973.

They have the fondest memories of the district, the hospitality, the Christmas concerts, and the fine community spirit.

Presently, 1976, they are living east of Lacombe, and are raising cattle. Bill and Elsie have a family of two, a son **Trevor** born in 1967 and a daughter **Lee** born in 1969.

THE SELAND FAMILY

Mr. and Mrs. Olav Seland lived for 23 years on NW 27-37-1-5. Olav Seland was born in Norway and came to New York, U.S.A. as a young man, and there learned the carpenter trade, specializing in the laying and finishing of hardwood floors. Later, with his wife and two sons, he moved to Saskatchewan and took up a homestead near Merango.

After a few years there the family moved to Drumheller, Alberta where he resided until June, 1932 when they moved to the Burnt Lake district and purchased the quarter section which was then leased by F. K. Johnson. Mr. Johnson's lease expired that fall.

Olav and his sons hastily erected a small frame house on a knoll not far from the road and then left the family there while he and the boys went back to Drumheller to work at his trade to obtain much needed cash.

After Mr. Johnson's crop was cut he offered to move the house to a more suitable location, saying that in the spring there was quite a lot of water between the present location and the road. He made a deal to do the moving in return for having his crop stooked.

The road was not gravelled in those days, and once when one of the boys and his wife came from Drumheller to visit us, they had to make the last few miles carrying shoes and stockings and slugging through the mud. I

don't remember just how they managed to get the car there later.

Some incidents remembered by Mrs. Seland are quoted as "I slew a skunk by knocking it on the head with the back of a rake. But when Olav went to bury it, it wasn't there! I'll dare say it had a terrible headache!" Also "the time Agnes came home from school and said the Johnsons were hiding a cow. I asked why they were hiding it?, but when the matter was explained, they were "skinning" the cow." She had never been out of the city before.

The younger children, Agnes, Leona and Ralph attended the Pine Hill School. Later Agnes took nurses training in the Portland Sanatorium and Hospital, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. where she obtained her R.N. B.Sc. degrees. She is married to Gentry Warren and they reside in San Diego, California. **Leona** married Eugene Wettstein of Stettler and they reside in Lacombe. They have three grown-up children. **Ralph** received his B.A. degree at Andrews University, Michigan and taught for some years at Canadian Union College. He and his family reside south of Sylvan Lake on a farm.

In the fall of 1955 Mr. and Mrs. Seland sold the farm and after spending that winter in Victoria, British Columbia, went to live in Drumheller where Olav died in July, 1962 at the age of 84 years. Mrs. Seland, now Mrs. Fred Pearson, lives in Lacombe.

OSCAR SELSTROM

Oscar Augaton Selstrom was born at Vilhelmina, Sweden, December 12, 1874. On his arrival in Canada in 1899 he made his home with the M. Mattson family. His inability to speak English was such a handicap that he immediately enrolled as a pupil in the Swan Lake School, whose teacher at the time was Mr. Egelton. Oscar soon was speaking fluent English, and over the years this benefited his neighbors as well as himself. He was often



Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Selstrom — 1935 or '36.



Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Selstrom with Hugo and Olga 1908 — Rocking horse gift to Hugo from godmothers Mrs. Erickson and Mrs. Mattson.

able to aid them in business and other transactions that required the knowledge of English.

His first job in Canada was blasting rock for the railroad on the Spiral Tunnel at Field, British Columbia. In 1901 Oscar returned to Burnt Lake and on June 23, 1904 was married to Bertha Erickson. They moved out to his homestead on NE 26-37-1-5. In order to get established, they worked for a short time for Erik Johanson, and Oscar also worked as a carpenter in the area.

His next job was as timber inspector for the Dominion Government, inspecting ties and timber. Following this, he became a road surveyor with the Alberta Department of Public Works. The years went by and as the family was growing up, the Selstroms went into cattle raising and later into mixed farming.

Oscar and Bertha had four sons and four daughters — **Hugo, Olga, Roy, Gordon, Anna, Ruth, Carl, and Levina**. Oscar died December 28, 1948 and Bertha followed June 15, 1953. Both are buried in the Burnt Lake Cemetery. Of the family, Hugo and his wife Mary are retired and live at Sylvan Lake. Olga married Gus Mannerfeldt of the Centerville district. Roy was born February 19, 1910. He left school at the age of 15 years and worked for different farmers in different parts of Alberta during the summers and did a lot of work in lumber mills at Rocky Mountain House in the winters. He finally rented the Braton farm at Evarts and farmed there until it was sold to Peter Stewart. Roy now lives at Benalto. He has one son Craig and a daughter Patricia. He also has a granddaughter Mandy. Gordon Alexander was born June 7, 1913. He went to school at Burnt Lake

and was very well liked for his easy going manners and sense of humor — often the teacher's pet. He loved the outdoors, hunting and trapping, and was a lover of animals. He helped farmers and neighbors at busy times and worked in lumber camps during the winters. During the war he joined the R.C. ENG. After his discharge he bought land at Caroline, Alberta and began improvements but due to failing health he was hospitalized and passed away July, 1974, due to a heart attack. Anne writes of herself. "I was born and grew up and went to school in Burnt Lake. Tom Leithead was working for the municipality and we met in 1940. He enlisted and went overseas. He returned September 2, 1943 and we were married in December of that year. This was the beginning of our career as farmers. Though I loved every minute of the life on the farm we had many ups and downs as we lived beside a creek which went on the rampage in the spring when there was too much snow and rain. At one time we moved out for a week and stayed with our neighbors Hal and Patsy Craig. With their four young ones and four of our own there was much excitement and many games of King Petro were played. In 1957 we left the farm and my husband went back to construction work. We bought a house in Calgary as the company head office is there. We have had the pleasure of seeing and exploring many interesting places from border to border in both British Columbia and Alberta as the contracts are sometimes even in more remote areas — it's really an education in its own. We have two sons and two daughters. Thomas William (Bill) has a diploma in Mech. Tech., B.S.C., M.M. Eng., and works for

Imperial Oil as design consultant. At the time he and his wife Marion and daughter Alison are residing in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Our second son Garry Robert has a B. Sc. in Forestry, graduating from the University of Missoula, Montana, U.S.A. He is chief forester for Revelstoke Mills in Alberta. His wife Christine and two boys Jason and Calvin live in Calgary. Our eldest daughter Marilyn Anne graduated from Forest Lawn High School and works as supervisor in loans in the Royal Bank of Canada. She married Constable Dwight Scheurman of the Calgary City Police. Our youngest daughter Margaret Isabel (Peggy) also graduated from Forest Lawn High School and took one year at Mount Royal College in Child Psychology and Training. She is employed at Forest Lawn Treasury Branch. Peggy married Ron Barrett of Calgary, a student at the University of Calgary, studying to be a teacher."

Hazel adds her husband Carl's story. "Carl Selstrom, youngest and fourth son of Oscar and Bertha Selstrom was born February 26, 1919 along with twin sister Ruth, in the old log house on the homestead in the Burnt Lake district. Carl grew up and up to be six foot six inches tall. He took his schooling at the Burnt Lake school. Bert Cody taught Carl in his final year of school. The boys at school figured they had a good ball team with Bert pitching and Carl catching. This team worked fine together until Carl missed one of Bert's curves, and it knocked him cold. This ended Carl's baseball career. His favorite pastimes were hunting and trapping and playing his guitar. He farmed the home place and helped the neighbors with harvesting and haying. Carl took a short turn in the army but was discharged in 1942. On July 20, 1943 Carl married Hazel Middleton of Joffre, farming the home place for one year then moving to Benalto in 1944. They bought the grain cleaning business from Tom Leithead and Hugo Selstrom. Carl became very interested in cleaning registered grains, also commercial grain cleaning. He was in business for 30 years and made many friends from Alix west to Rocky Mountain House and Ponoka, south to Olds. Airplanes and flying interested Carl so in due time he took flying lessons and got his pilot's license and purchased a plane. He flew many years and had many exciting experiences. He went into crop spraying, doing this for five springs until his health wouldn't permit it. He also worked five summers for Alberta Hail Board as an adjuster. Carl died April 6, 1970 at 51 years of age of leukemia. Carl and Hazel have five girls; Jean born September 16, 1946. She took a secretarial course and married Wayne Gilbert. They have one daughter Kari. Wayne is an auto body mechanic. Jean works for United Mobile Homes. They own a home in Calgary. Beverly was born February 15, 1950. She took her schooling in Benalto and Sylvan Lake, finishing her education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. She married Jim White and they have one son Holden. Jim enjoys finishing antique furniture, and is finishing university in the fall. Jim and Bev have a home in Sylvan Lake. Bev teaches grade IV in Sylvan Lake. Carleen was born January 23, 1952 and took her schooling in Benalto and Red Deer School. She married Dick Huebner and have one son Drew. Dick is a dispensing optician and is manager of Hauck Opticians. They have a home in Red Deer. Susan was born November 28, 1955, and took all her schooling in Benalto and Sylvan Lake and works in

Red Deer. Kelly was born May 3, 1960 and lives at home taking grade XI at Sylvan Lake High School. She's interested in skiing, riding and training her horses. Hazel and Kelly still reside in Benalto where Hazel works as a bookkeeper for Loughheed's Fertilizer and Supply."

FRED E. SJOQUIST

Fred Sjoquist was born in Sweden and in 1901 came with his folks to the United States. Later, Fred travelled to Saskatchewan and in April 1913 came to Sylvan Lake to visit his aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Lars Petterson. He arrived in Blackfalds and walked on the C.N. Railway to Sylvan Lake. He stayed until 1914, finishing his schooling at Sylvan Dell. Fred stayed the winter of 1914-15 with Mr. Adrian Erickson. In the spring of 1915, together with Levi Erickson, Fred got badly burnt fighting a fire on the Larson quarter. After recuperating from the fire, he returned to Saskatchewan and worked on threshing crews until Christmas at which time he returned to the United States.

After "ramming" around the United States for 10-12 years, he didn't see anything as good as Burnt Lake so in 1928 came back, settling on the C.P.R. quarter of SW 15-38-1-5 where he farmed until 1962 when he sold it to Hartley Johanson.

This quarter was once the campgrounds for the Cree and they still came back every summer after Fred had settled on it. There was a heavy stand of spruce here and many logs have been taken out. Several neighbor's barns were built from logs sawed here.

Times were hard during the depression and Fred worked in the lumber camps at Rocky Mountain House in the winters to supplement his income.

Fred has always been an ardent fisherman and also enjoys the game of curling.

After he sold the farm, he bought an acreage north of Sylvan Lake where he lived for four years, then moved to Sylvan Lake and in September 1973 he became a guest of the Sylvan Lake Lodge.



Sawing lumber on Fred Sjoquist's farm. Andy Niemczyk, Frank Dallaire, Fred Sjoquist. Watching — Betty Cutler and Marion Dallaire.

MR. AND MRS. JONAS SMITH — by Lydia Bergstrom and Dwight Sawyer.

In 1899 a family of five arrived from Sweden who were to occupy one of the two rooms in our house while they were getting established on NE-16-38-1-W-5-M. Their name was Sjoberg, a name the English couldn't