

Chasing ghosts

by BRIAN LOCKHART

Several years ago, I was invited to attend a family party on a rural property to document the event for a newspaper article.

The party was held to recognize the family's anniversary of arriving on Canadian soil from the Netherlands in the 1950s.

They had moved into their newly built house the previous year. It was a nice property surrounded by trees with a long driveway.

I was speaking to the home owner and asked him about the work it took building his new house on a treed lot.

He explained they had cleared the lot using chainsaws. After cutting down the trees to make room for the house and a yard, they had to reduce the trees to single logs which were then placed on the back of a flatbed truck using a crane.

Once loaded up, the truck pulled onto the paved road and made an easy journey to the saw mill some 50 miles away.

The homeowner made some money back by selling the hardwood to the mill.

"That must have been a tough job doing all that yourself?" I asked him.

He admitted it was a hard job with a lot of "back-breaking" work to get all those trees cut and the land cleared.

Now imagine the same scenario of clearing that land and building the house in a different way.

You don't get to use a chainsaw - you have to use a hand-held axe. Instead of loading those heavy logs on a flatbed truck with a crane, you use your own muscle power and it is a pair of oxen that pull the cart "onto a muddy pathway, not a road.

Even then you won't sell those logs. You'll use them to build the home you will live in because there are no places to buy building supplies and there are no tradesmen you can hire to help you do the job.

That was the reality for the early settlers in the region.

And that was only the start of a very difficult situation. Once you have your home built, you will have to have enough food stored to survive the winter.

When the spring rolls around, it starts all over again but an even tougher task is ahead. You have to clear a lot of land, rocks, trees, and tree stumps to make the land suitable for farming.

Early immigrants arrived in the Region with hopes and dreams of a new life. Whether they realized how difficult it would really be is hard to say.

I'm sure there was more than one early young pioneer wife who thought it may have been a mistake leaving her small village in Ireland to sign up for life in the backwoods of a new colony.

Everything ahead of them had to be carved out of a wild, open area with no support behind them at all. You couldn't find a doctor if you needed one because there weren't any.

If you got sick, the best you could do was hope some home remedy worked. If the bull in your pasture got the better of you one day

and left you with a pile of broken bones, your chances of survival would be slim to none, and you spent your last couple of days in the cabin waiting for the end.

It was a tough life.

Considering our towns and cities in North America were essentially built from scratch, it is important to remember the early pioneers who paved the way and provided the foundation of what is a rather cushy modern life.

Many of those early pioneers are now only remembered in the form of a name and a date etched into granite or limestone in scattered pioneer cemeteries, while others are simply lost in time or buried in forgotten and unmarked graves in the back-40 of some farm pasture.

While many families eventually moved on to greener pastures, in some areas those pioneer names are still around and, in some cases, the family farm has been passed down through the generations.

It is important to remember these early pioneers and the legacy they have left behind.

That legacy continues to our current day and will be passed down to the generations still to come.