Have you ever moved to a new home? What did you think when you first saw it? Petro Dvarich came with his parents from Ukraine, in eastern Europe, in the late 1800s. They stayed with friends who had said that Petro and his family would make a good life on the Prairies.

Petro describes his first sight of his new home: “I could not believe my eyes; the house was a pigsty, the stable but a crude shelter, both covered with sod. Our hearts sank with what we saw. We turned to our [friends] and began to scold them.”

Six months later, he wrote in his journal: “My parents were very satisfied with the harvest. My father now felt like a wealthy man and would not return to the old country for anything.”
Alberta’s Story

Many settlers came from different parts of the world to live in Alberta. In this chapter, you will find out how they cleared and farmed the land. You will learn how they began new communities in many parts of the province. You will find out how this was a time of huge change for Alberta.

Inquiring Minds

Here are some questions to guide your inquiry for this chapter:

• How did settlers shape Alberta?
• How did the land and resources affect ways of life?

Look for the answers as you read. If you want to learn more, look further.

How can I find out more about Alberta’s story during this time? I will
• look at old photos
• interview historians and elders
• read journals and diaries
Who Were the Settlers?

Imagine this!

It is the late 1800s. The railway you read about in Chapter 6 is ready to bring new people to Alberta. There are settlements here already and lots of land. This land is good for ranching and for farming. Imagine you work for the government of Canada. It is your job to find a way to bring more people to live in the West. What would you do? How would you persuade people to come?

By looking at the photo and reading the caption, I can tell ranchers are part of Alberta’s story. They still are today!

Ranching was already important in southern Alberta. Some ranches raised horses to sell. Eaglesplume, shown here in 1893, was one of the most famous horses born at the Quorn Ranch, a British ranch near Sheep Creek.

Planning for Settlement

You learned in Chapter 6 how the government cleared the way for more settlers to come to Alberta. Now the government needed a plan to encourage more people to move here. In Europe, there were farmers who could not find land. In the United States, much of the land had already been settled. There were Americans looking for land that was still open. How could the government of Canada attract such people to come to the West?
Why Come to Alberta?

The government decided to offer free land to some of the people who agreed to **immigrate** to the West. They sent posters to be displayed in different parts of the world, telling people about the land in Canada’s West. They put up posters in the United States, where people were looking for land. They put up posters all over Europe, in countries such as Ukraine, Poland, and Germany. People there had been farmers for generations. If these people came to Canada, they would bring their farming skills with them.

In some European countries, there were people who could not afford to buy land. Some wanted more land for their children to farm. Some were not allowed to own land in their own country. Imagine how they felt when they saw posters advertising free land in Canada’s West!

![Ukrainian settler, Redwater, 1912](image)

The government knew that immigrants from eastern Europe would work hard to make a better life for their families.

**Skill Smart**

Why do you think the government described the climate as “fresh” and “bracing” on its posters instead of “cold” and “snowy”? How do you think the settlers would describe their first winter? Write down your thoughts in a paragraph.
Analyzing Advertisements

Here is a poster that was used to advertise for settlers. We need to ask questions before we do what advertisements suggest.

Practise the Skill

1. What facts can you see in this poster? What information is true? How do you know?
2. What does the advertisement suggest about Western Canada? Does it give a complete picture of what it was really like at that time?
3. Is there any information about the land or the weather that the government might not have wanted people to know? Why?
4. How can you use what you’ve learned here to analyze advertisements you see around you?
A New Life in Alberta

As part of its plan, the government divided the Prairies into townships. Each township was then divided into 36 sections of land. Each settler received a quarter section (160 acres or 65 ha) called a homestead. In return for the free land, settlers had to agree to live on it for three years, to build a house there, and to prepare the land for farming. All that the settlers had to pay was a $10 registration fee.

A homestead was the quarter section of land that the government granted to settlers who were willing to live on the land and farm it. Homesteaders were the people who lived on the homestead.

Settlers who came to farm these lands were called homesteaders. A quarter section was only enough land to grow crops to feed a family. Settlers could buy more land for $3 an acre. That gave them a chance to develop large farms and grow enough crops to sell. By the mid-1890s, thousands of settlers were coming to Alberta.
What Do Stories Tell About How Settlers Came?

Sarah Ellen Roberts’ family came from the United States in 1906 as part of a huge wave of immigrants from that country. They homesteaded about 100 km east of Stettler. This is how she described the journey from Stettler.

The End of the Fences

We had not gone far before fences became almost unknown and the trail wound over what seemed to be a vast, endless prairie. Occasionally, the trail wound down into and up out of great ravines, which are called coulees. The trail itself was usually a pair of bare tracks worn by the wheels of wagons, but between these tracks grew buffalo grass. This grass must have been well named, for in many places we saw, stretching across the prairie, the deep paths in the sod that had been worn long ago, by the buffalo.... I am sure we saw many hundreds of buffalo skeletons and skulls, bleached white by years of sun and rain.

Left: Spruce Coulee, Innisfail, before 1905. Coulees were difficult for settlers to cross. Right: Homesteader with wagonload at Wainwright, 1910.
Settlers who came from countries such as Ukraine, Poland, Germany, and Russia made a long trip by ship from Europe to Canada. A Polish immigrant describes his family’s experience of coming to Alberta from Poland in 1903.

The Journey by Ship

There were many children travelling on the two-for-the-price-of-one adult fare. Two people had to share one bunk and one meal. There were four of us and only two plates. It was crowded on the deck; there were always many people waiting to sit down if anyone dared to leave their place. The only time we were able to get an individual meal was when someone was seasick and unable to come to the dining area.

Settlers got off the boat in Halifax, Nova Scotia, or Montréal, Québec. Then they had to take a train all the way across Canada to Alberta. Look at a map of Canada to see how many of today’s provinces they would pass through.
Where Did Communities Start?

Many American immigrants came to Alberta in the early 1900s. They helped to change Alberta’s farming history. A community of Mormons, a religious group from the United States, settled around Cardston. They knew how to irrigate the dry land in that part of Alberta. They helped to turn southern Alberta into a rich farming area. After the Mormons came, southern Alberta was able to grow sugar beets. It became an important crop for Alberta.

Some Francophones also came from the United States. They had moved there from Québec. When they found all the land had already been bought, some came to Alberta. Plamondon was settled by Canadiens who came from Michigan.

Other groups came from the United States as well. A group of black settlers came from Oklahoma, hoping to escape unfair treatment there. They settled in Amber Valley. Look for it on a map. Is it anywhere near where you live?

Bobbie Crump and family, Edmonton, 1918
As Ukrainians settled into their communities, they began building thatched cottages like those in Ukraine. They were called bydas [boo-dahs].

What about settlers who came from farther away? Imagine what it would be like to move halfway around the world to a place you didn’t know, where people spoke different languages. Have you ever had an experience like that?

People often went to areas where others from their homeland had settled. That helped them adjust to their new life. In this way, they built up new communities.

Some people also looked for land that was similar to the land back home. That’s what many people from Ukraine did. They settled in the parkland region. It wasn’t as good for farming as the grasslands, but it reminded them of home. Many settled in Edna (later named Star), Mundare, and Vegreville.

Churches were often at the centre of a community. They were places for people to pray, but they also helped keep traditions, language, and culture alive.

**An Immigrant Farmhand**

One Polish settler told about his early days in Alberta:

Getting started in Alberta was tough for me. Not knowing a word of English, I had to take any job that the farmers offered me. That usually meant clearing land of bushes, trees, stumps, and rocks for one dollar a day plus room and board. My bedroom was sometimes an unheated shack.
How Was the Land Changed?

After they arrived in Alberta, some settlers went and chose the land they wanted. Others went to areas that had already been marked out for them. They trusted to luck that they would get good land. Many did not. Some of the land was very dry, and some very rocky. In northern Alberta, some land was swampy. In the south, there were coulees.

Settlers found that oxen were better than horses for pulling plows over rocky ground, because they were less likely to fall on the rocks.

Francophone settlers lined up to register their land, Edmonton, 1909.

You’re On Your Own

What would you do if you found yourself in this situation, as described by one settler?

So there you are and the land guide says, “You are on your land now.” No roads or anything else. “Now there you are, boy. Get busy and build your house, put in your garden and look after your horses and you will do all right,” and he went away.

Settlers found that oxen were better than horses for pulling plows over rocky ground, because they were less likely to fall on the rocks.
What Were Some Perspectives on the Land?

Do you remember reading about perspectives in Chapter 6? You learned how the Aboriginal peoples and the government had different perspectives about owning land. The settlers, too, brought new perspectives.

For thousands of years, the First Nations people had shaped their way of life to suit the land. They had lived with nature. Now the European settlers were clearing the land. They cut down trees and plowed the soil. They changed the land to suit their way of life.

Some Aboriginal people, too, adapted their way of life. Read the two accounts below.

**New Ways of Life**

After 1890, the Blackfoot unwillingly settled into the routine of farming and gardening. After being pressured by the government to sell large portions of their reserve, the band became the wealthiest in Canada and flourished as ranch and farmland was developed, along with coal mining.

*Russell Wright, Siksika First Nation*

I drove the horses, and my dad plowed. How many days did we have to do that? Our granaries were full of grain. Every year, we hauled three big loads of wheat down to St. Paul. My dad sold two loads, and with the third he made flour—enough to last all year.

*Charlie Blackman, Dene First Nation, Cold Lake*
Did you know the Ukrainians were the second-biggest group of settlers to come to Alberta, other than the British?

I had a great time when I visited the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village near Edmonton. The guides were dressed in clothes that Ukrainian immigrants would have worn, so I felt as though I had travelled back in a time machine. I saw how these settlers lived when they first arrived in Alberta.

I visited a byda [boo-dah]—a home like the ones the first Ukrainian settlers lived in. It was neat, but I don’t think I’d want to be there in a rainstorm!

The Ukrainians knew a lot about farming and coal mining, so they really made a big contribution to Alberta. My visit made me think about how hard the early settlers had to work to build their lives in Alberta.
What Kinds of Homes Did Settlers Build?

Have you ever seen new houses being built in your community? How long does it take? What kinds of machines are used? Building a house was the first thing settlers had to do, but they had no machinery and little help.

Some settlers built tiny shacks. If they could afford it, they bought lumber to build a frame house. If they had no money, they cut trees and built log houses. If there were no trees nearby, they cut brick-shaped blocks from the earth and built soddies. They lived in these houses until they could afford to build a proper home.

After they had built some kind of shelter, the settlers turned to clearing the land for planting. The land often made life especially hard for the new homesteaders.

To keep log cabins warm, people used old rags, sawdust, or flour to stuff the cracks. Some even used dried manure from the oxen.

Sodddies

Sodddies were warm in winter and cool in summer, but when it rained, they were very wet. Sometimes garter snakes poked their heads through the ceiling! The settlers learned to make doors that opened inwards. Otherwise, the door would not open against thick snow. How do you think they got out?
Hear the Settlers’ Voices!

Life was often very hard for the thousands of new settlers. Listen to the voices and look at the pictures on these two pages. Do you think it is useful to hear people’s stories in their own words? Why or why not?

A New Life in Alberta

Delayed by Flooding

When the first group [of Icelanders] arrived in Calgary, they hired Métis guides to lead them to Innisfail, and on west to the banks of the Red Deer River, swollen in the June floods. Here they camped for three weeks before being able to cross the raging waters on a raft they had built from the tall spruce trees, which grew on the banks of the river.

*Margaret Rasmussen tells about her parents’ move to Markerville.*

The Hungry Winters

Life was tough in those first years on the homestead. Sometimes food was scarce. Winter clothing was hard to come by. They had no overshoes or winter boots, so strips of gunny sack were rolled around their feet and tied with binder twine. One winter, the horses were so hungry that they came and stood on their hind legs and ate the straw thatch from the roof of the farmhouse.

*Alexander Szpak was a Ukrainian whose family settled on a homestead in northwestern Alberta.*
Sixteen Long Years

On June 1, 1909, Adolf Rachui and his family arrived in Leduc by train. Adolf filed on a homestead near Warburg, but abandoned it after eight months because “the land was of no value [for farming], being nearly all swamp and bush.”

Finally, Adolf learned of an abandoned homestead near Buck Lake. After working for several summers clearing some of the heavy timber for grain growing and building a house and barn, he moved his family and his belongings by horse and wagon through bush and swamp to finally settle in their own place. It was 1925, sixteen long years after the Rachui family stepped onto the train station platform in Leduc in eager anticipation of receiving free land.

Richard Stein, about his great-grandfather who came from Russia

Pests Everywhere!

Then there were the flies and mosquitoes, both of which were, at times, simply frightful. I have no words to tell what a terrible pest they were, for they swarmed into the tent by the thousands, and we had no protection against them.

Sarah Ellen Roberts, whose mother homesteaded about 105 km east of Stettler

Giving Up

Many of the homesteaders gave up. It was just too hard for them. At one point, there were more going out than coming in, especially the ones who didn’t have wives. They’d get so lonely that they would simply give up.

Peggy Holmes homesteaded about 100 km north of St. Paul.
In 1906, a terrible winter put many ranchers out of business. The snow was so deep that some cattle were lost in it. Others couldn’t find food. Many ranchers never got over these losses.

Some settlers started market gardens and sold some of the fruits and vegetables they grew. Families worked side by side for years and years, clearing and preparing more land. They saved the money they made to buy more land so that they could grow more crops.

How Did Wheat Become “King”?

Before long, wheat farming became much more important than ranching in Alberta. What do the photos below tell you about the way in which wheat became “king”? Why did wheat farming change the land more than ranching had done?
At first settlers tried growing flax, beans, barley, and oats (shown here). They found it very difficult in Alberta’s climate. Many switched to wheat.

New inventions helped the settlers. This photo shows an early combine harvester near Nobleford in 1928. On the right is C.S. Noble, an American settler who sold farm machinery. He invented the Noble Blade, which helped to kill weeds. Nobleford was named after him.

Farmers could save money by hiring travelling threshing crews. The crews brought their own machinery with them and just worked for the harvest. Some people came from the East to work on threshing crews during the early fall.
Settlers had huge challenges trying to make a living off the land. They did not have modern machinery or tools to plow the land and harvest crops. Hailstorms, floods, frost, droughts, and tornadoes could destroy entire crops the settlers had worked so hard to plant and grow.

Farmers today have similar challenges. They have better machines and tools, but these are very expensive and can break down. Alberta’s weather still makes farming very challenging. How can we help farmers when bad weather strikes?

How Can We Help Farmers?

Farmers grow the food we all need. If they are in trouble, we’ll all be in trouble.

Lori Brown

I lost my farm after the terrible drought in 2001 and 2002. With no crops or money, I had to give up the farm. It had been in my family for generations. It broke my heart.

Sandy Hammel

I helped my uncle when his farm and house flooded. We couldn’t do much about the lost crops. We did help clean up the barns and house. We had to fix buildings and machines, too.

Lucas Hunter

Wheat harvests affected by drought at Crossfield, 2001
My dad is not a farmer, but he helps the community by helping to maintain the dam and irrigation channels so the farmers can water their crops.

Maxine Chong

A funnel cloud touches the ground near Drumheller, June 2001

A tornado flattened my crop. I was devastated because I could not sell the crop and get money to buy things my family needed. The government gave me some money. Right now my new job is selling farm machinery. Next year I will plant another crop and hope the weather cooperates!

Pat Bernier

Over to YOU!

1. What are some things communities can do to help farmers when times are hard?
2. As a class, think of how your community might be affected by bad weather. Then plan a citizenship project that might help your community in this situation. Make a plan of action.
How Did Communities Grow?

Different kinds of communities grew in Alberta. Many had one thing in common: a spirit of cooperation. For most, helping one another was a way of life. People worked together to help their communities grow.

Living Together

People often settled near others with the same homeland or religion. For example, the Mormons settled in Cardston. Scandinavians settled near Camrose, New Norway, Wetaskiwin, and other areas. Many Icelandic immigrants settled in the Red Deer region. Germans first settled in Pincher Creek and Medicine Hat. Then they moved farther north to Bruderheim and Stony Plain. The first Mennonite colony was established in High River. In all these places, people worked together to build places of worship and schools. Grain elevators were built along the railroad tracks so farmers could sell their wheat. Gradually, stores, restaurants and hotels were built.

Building a School

People volunteered help and brought lumber. One young homesteader brought a wagon and team and hauled sandstone to lay a stone foundation. Secretary Bates and I cut the logs. We had to plane the siding with an old-time wooden jack-plane and a great amount of “elbow grease.” I did my share of the siding and I volunteered until the school was completed.

John Niddrie, settler, Eagle River District, 1905
Francophone Communities

Settlers from Québec built some of the earliest communities. They started coming to Alberta long before the huge numbers of settlers from Britain and other parts of Europe. By the 1890s, many English-speaking settlers had arrived. To keep their own communities strong, Francophone priests decided to bring more French-speaking people to Alberta. They went to Québec, the United States, France, and Belgium, looking for people who would come.

Putting Down Roots

When they arrived, many Francophone settlers put down roots in St. Albert. Later, they also went to other parts of Alberta, including St. Paul, Vegreville, Bonnyville, and the Peace River area. Edmonton, too, had a strong Francophone community that had existed since the days of the fur trade in Fort Edmonton. Francophones opened many stores, hotels, and other businesses there.

In communities like St. Paul, almost everyone spoke French. School would be called l’école. On main street buildings you would see signs such as La Banque d’Hochelaga and boulangerie. You would read newspapers in French to learn what was going on in Alberta and the world. These communities developed their own culture and identity, unique to Alberta. They became Franco-Albertan.

The Révillon Frères store, Edmonton, 1903. Révillon Frères was a major rival of the Hudson’s Bay Company.
Jeannine de Moissac grew up just north of St. Paul. What can you learn from this interview with her about how the community grew in the early days?

What was it like to live in St. Paul in the early days?

At threshing time, one thresher would go around to all the farms. So everybody helped everybody else. When my father was very sick, all the farmers around came to milk the cows and so on. Some people were better farmers than others, so they would give their expertise.

We bought our groceries in St. Paul and went to church there. When my brothers grew up, they played hockey there. There were a lot of wedding dances. There was a lot of music in our family. My uncles played accordion, violin, and guitar. That was how we all got together. There are still a lot of connections between the families.

How did Francophones help Alberta grow?

With their energy! My father was a farmer. He had a mission to grow lots of food and feed the world. The Francophones worked hard. And family values are strong. Our ties are getting stronger and stronger.

There is a lot of French in the music in Alberta, and in the art and the literature.

We are proud of who we are. I am proud to be a Franco-Albertan.
Métis Communities

Like the Francophones, the Métis of Alberta built their own identity. In 1932, they formed a group called the Métis Nation of Alberta. Read these stories to see how they built strong communities.

A Place of Our Own

Shelley Jackson lives at the Kikino Métis Settlement near Lac La Biche. She explains how Alberta’s Métis settlements came to be.

The Métis had come from all over Alberta and Saskatchewan. A lot of Métis moved into Alberta in the late 1880s, and they had no place... of their own. There were a few gentlemen in the early 1930s who started to talk amongst themselves about how the Métis needed to get together as a group and talk to the government about putting land aside for them. The government agreed to give the Métis a land base. There’s a bunch of lakes around here. They’d be able to fish and they’d learn to farm and make their own way.... Settlements came into being in the late 1930s and families started to move into Kikino in 1939.

The Métis community is very large. It’s very close knit. I feel fortunate to be a part of it. Anybody would help you, like you were the child of the whole community. That’s what it really was like growing up there; it was where you were looked after by everyone.

Marge Friedel, Métis Elder

Thinking It Through

How does belonging to a community add to quality of life? Share your thoughts with a partner.

In 2005, the Métis Nation of Alberta helped to organize this wagon trek from Saskatchewan to Métis Crossing, Alberta. It celebrated the great contributions made by Métis communities to Alberta and Canada.
Analyze Advertising

In a small group, look for an ad for your community, another community you have visited, or any local event. Try travel brochures, the Internet, or even the radio or television. Pay careful attention to the ad.

- What message is being sent?
- What questions do you have about this ad or brochure? Is there anything about the ad or brochure that is possibly misleading?

Answer the questions using jot notes.

Picture What Makes It Alberta!

Victoria McDonald lives in Fort MacKay. She tells about the houses in her community. “All the houses were painted red. The First Nations name for Fort MacKay was Red Clay. That’s what everybody put on their houses.” People coming around the bend of the Athabasca River recognized Fort MacKay because of the colour of its homes. What helps you recognize your community? Draw a picture, take a photograph, make a video, or create a collage to show what makes your community distinct, but still part of Alberta. Tell your class about your work.

Write a Story

Write a story from the point of view of a settler. Use what you have learned and your imagination.

- Where did you live before coming to Alberta?
- How did you travel to the province?
- What did you do when you arrived?
- What challenges did you face? What went well?

Add illustrations or copies of historic photos.
Inquiring Minds

Look What You Have Learned!

Settlers came to Alberta from different parts of the world and Canada. They helped to establish and build communities. Many were based on farming. They brought their knowledge, languages, and culture. Homesteaders worked on the land, building houses, planting crops, and caring for livestock. Alberta became known for its wheat. Ways of life changed for Aboriginal communities in various ways, as well. The stories of different groups of people are all part of Alberta’s identity.

Review the inquiry questions for this chapter:
• How did settlers shape Alberta?
• How did the land and resources affect ways of life?
Show what you have learned by making a web. At the bottom of your page, make a prediction. What do you think will happen to the land and communities next? Check your predictions as you keep reading.

Take Time to Reflect

Before you go on to the next chapter, think about what you learned in this one. What did you learn from the stories of the people? What might you do in the next chapter to improve on gathering information?

Choose something from this chapter to save for your Alberta Treasure Chest.
Looking Back: Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7

Anita uses a fishbone organizer to outline what she thinks are the key points in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Chapter 4: Living with the Land
- First Nations were the first people here
- many ways of life, based on the land and available resources
- traditional ways still valued
- all First Nations have their own culture and language
- British ways of life became part of Alberta (e.g., NWMP)
- railway built across the country; brought new settlers
- ways of life changed for people already here
  - nearly all buffalo killed
  - First Nations sign treaties

Chapter 5: New Roots For Alberta
- Canadien, Métis, and British roots developed
- fur trade with First Nations
- Métis Nation began
- diverse languages and cultures
- settlers from all over; lots of opportunities
- brought their knowledge, languages, and culture
- communities grew; some new ones established
- farming wheat becomes important

Chapter 6: Preparing for New Settlers

Chapter 7: More Settlers Arrive

Diverse people helped shape Alberta.
Share What You Know

Inquiring Minds

Study Anita’s fishbone organizer closely. Then skim through Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 to help you recall what you learned. Turn to page 3 in Getting Started. Which one of the overall inquiry questions for the book is the main focus of these chapters? Why do you think that?

Work with a small group to prepare an Alberta Treasure game show.

Plan to prepare two parts for each question:

- a fact part of the question that asks “who,” “what,” “where,” or “when”
- a thinking part that asks “how” or “why,” such as
  - Why was this important?
  - Why did this happen?
  - How does this make Alberta unique?
  - How did this make a difference?

Retrieve, or recall, what you’ve learned in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. Check your projects and activities as well.

Process, or think about, your information. Each group member should think of five fact questions.

Create game-show cards by organizing your questions. Choose a thinking question to go with each fact question. Write each two-part question on the front of a card. Put the answers on the back.

Share your questions by presenting them as a game show. Invite your classmates to play.

Evaluate how well you and your group worked together. Were you pleased with your game show? Did others seem to like it? What would you do differently next time?