



NANAIMO MUSEUM

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Media Release
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New Feature Exhibit *Acres of Dreams: Settling the Canadian Prairies* Opening Soon at Nanaimo Museum

The Nanaimo Museum is pleased to announce the opening of ***Acres of Dreams: Settling the Canadian Prairies*** in the museum's Feature Gallery starting Saturday, June 5.

Acres of Dreams: Settling the Canadian Prairies, which runs until Sept. 6, is a travelling exhibition produced by the Canadian Museum of Civilization in collaboration with the Library and Archives Canada. It was developed to mark the centennials of Saskatchewan and Alberta, both of which gained provincial status in 1905 thanks largely to the people and events depicted in ***Acres of Dreams: Settling the Canadian Prairies***.

Between 1896 and the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, about two million settlers from Europe and the United States poured into the Canadian Prairies in the greatest single wave of immigration in Canada's history.

Acres of Dreams: Settling the Canadian Prairies revisits the unprecedented marketing campaign led by the federal government that lured immigrants into Western Canada. It also examines the origins, motivations and experiences of the settlers who forever changed the prairie landscape and played an essential role in building Canada.

The exhibition highlights the dazzling array of posters, pamphlets, slogans, contests, travelling displays and lecture tours used in the marketing campaign led by the government, railway companies, steamship lines and other business interests. The invitation to settle the Canadian Prairies — touted with slogans such as "Free Farms for the Millions," "The Land of Opportunity," and "The Last Best West" — was embraced by individuals and families from as far away as Russia.

Although most of the settlers came from the United States, Britain and Continental Europe, some emigrated from Central and Eastern Canada. The exhibition underscores the efforts of religious and cultural leaders in French Canada who sought to establish a French Roman-Catholic stronghold in west communities such as St. Albert, Alberta, which today remain important places for Western francophone culture.

Massive immigration crested in 1913, when 400,870 newcomers came to Canada, setting a one-year record that remains unchallenged. The wave ended abruptly in 1914 with the start of the Great War.

The immigrants' contribution to their new homeland — culturally and economically — was profound. A concrete measure of their impact was the amount of cultivated land in Canada before and after their arrival. In 1871, the entire country had 17 million acres of improved farmland. By 1916, Saskatchewan alone had close to 20 million cultivated acres, most of them broken by immigrant settlers.





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Museum members are invited to a sneak preview of the exhibit on June 5 from 11 to 1 pm. Local author Lynne Bowen will also be on hand to read from her book *Muddling Through: The Remarkable Story of the Barr Colonists (1992)*. As the granddaughter of Barr colonists, Lynne grew up on stories of what it was like to be young and green in the huge, raw Canadian west.

Following the members-only opening, the exhibit will then be open to the general public. For more information, call 250-753-1821 or visit www.nanaimomuseum.ca.

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Photo Courtesy of the Canadian Pacific Railway Archives NS.8454
Scottish crofters sailing to Canada Cs 1920-1929