

Williams/Christie Family

The Williams/Christie family from the Gibbons area is one of two families to receive the Sturgeon County 100-year Farm Family Award in 2022. This award honours families who have continually owned and farmed land in Sturgeon County for a century.

Their story begins in Iowa with 19-year-old Clara Grosland.

Clara was the oldest grandchild, so her parents sent her to Canada to help her uncle, Carl, and his wife, Muriel, on their farm during World War I. Clara had \$3,000 cash hidden in her clothing to help her uncle buy a tractor—a comparative fortune back then.

“She was scared to death,” recalls Clara’s daughter, Judith.

Eventually, Clara met and married Jack Williams. In March 1921, they bought a homestead in Sturgeon County just east of Gibbons. They broke the land themselves and had three children including Judith, and sons, Gerral, who died at three months old from the Spanish Flu, and John, who died after he suffered a collapsed lung playing college football in the U.S.A.

Judith recalls helping her mother on the mixed farm as her father worked as a cook away from home with the air force.

“When I was about 13 or 14, I ran the threshing machine and the tractor and everything. I would collect the grain with four horses,” said Judith, who recently celebrated her 94th birthday.

Eventually, Judith took over the family property and continued to farm. She also worked full-time at the nearby Alberta Hospital for about 25 years to earn additional income to support her family of seven children.

Judith said it was a busy life managing the then cattle/dairy farm, her work offsite, and raising her children Lloyd, Stan, Lockey, Kathy, Dale, JoAnn, and Ronnie.

“I worked hard, ate good, I didn’t smoke, and I didn’t drink,” said Judith, describing her lifestyle matter-of-factly.

“You just do what you got to do, right?” added Judith’s son, Lockey Christie. He continues to farm in the area as does his brother, Stan Christie.

The Town of Gibbons annexed half of Clara’s original quarter section a few decades ago. Judith still owns 80 acres, while the Christie family now farms about 3,000 acres. The Williams Park Subdivision in Gibbons is named in honour of the family.

Judith is proud of her family's farming heritage that took root in Sturgeon County in the early 20th century and continues to grow today.

Pelletier Family

Dan Pelletier discovers a connection to his ancestors nearly every spring when he seeds his crops.

More often than not, the Sturgeon County farmer pulls a metal ring or two off of his seed drill shanks during spring seeding—artifacts that fell in the field during his relatives' time about 100 years ago.

"My dad told me that these rings are from the horses in the old days," said Pelletier. The rings—which are about two to three inches wide—periodically fell from the horses' collars as they worked the fields.

"It's always a piece of history when you pick up something like that on your seed drill. You look at it and go, 'Wow, this has been in the field for like 100 years. It is quite amazing.

"You throw it in your toolbox, and it gives you a little piece of history."

Those vintage pieces symbolize a chain of events that began when Pelletier's great grandfather, Joseph Ouellet, purchased a quarter of land a few kilometres southeast of Legal on Aug. 11, 1922.

"He was born in Quebec and came west to buy this fertile land he was hearing so much about," said Pelletier.

In 2022, the family celebrated a century of ownership of that original property—a feat acknowledged by Sturgeon County's 100 Year Farm Family Award, an honour given to families who have continually owned and farmed land in the municipality.

Over the years, the original land passed from his great grandfather to great uncle, Amable Ouellet, to his father, Maurice Pelletier (and mother Frances), and eventually to Pelletier and his wife, Michelle, in 1989.

Today, Pelletier grows wheat and canola on 1,500 acres with his younger brother, Mark and wife, Francis, along with his 88-year-old father, who still climbs into the combine regularly to help. Pelletier's son and his brother's sons also pitch in as needed during busy times.

"It's nice to have the family involved ... and be able to make a living on the land. We [don't] need to hire anybody. It's nice to keep it in the family.

"We're proud to be the fourth-generation family to own the property."