A Family’s Century-Long Legacy of Farming and Roots

Lured by the land, staying for the community

The prospect of fertile land was the start of a century-long legacy for a Sturgeon County family.

Frederick Bokenfohr was born September 4, 1887, in Westphalia, Germany (then part of Prussia), as the youngest child of Johann and Theresia Bokenfohr. He was also known as Fritz.

In 1902, at the age of 15, Frederick’s parents emigrated to America. They passed through New York before settling in Westpoint, Nebraska. By the fall of 1903, the family moved north to Alberta – following a recommendation from Fritz’s uncle, Joseph Kluthe, who had spoken highly of the land. When they arrived, they found an abundance of water and soil ideal for raising cattle and horses.

Much of the land was covered in sloughs and bush, and it took years for roads to be built. Frederick found hauling lumber home from Morinville to be especially difficult. The rough terrain often caused him to get stuck, forcing him to unload the wagon, guide the team to higher ground, and then reload the lumber. For every two miles he travelled, the effort made it feel like four.

Initially, he bought land just south of Morinville where he grew hay and sold it at the livery stable on Jasper Avenue in Edmonton. During the winter, Frederick spent much of his time cleaning grain and bagging it at his fanning mill.

Frederick first met Annie Kieser while she and her sister were picking wild berries. Later, Father Boniface Heidemeier introduced them more formally at a social event. On April 16, 1918, the two were married at Sainte Jean Baptiste Church in Morinville.

The couple lived on the Hardes farm for about three years before relocating to the Rivet farm in late 1920/early 1921 with their two children. Finally, on May 16, 1924, Frederick and Annie bought land from Emmanuel Rivet, east of Morinville, near the current Cardiff Pittsburgh neighbourhood. This became their permanent home, where they raised nine more children.

Frederick was interested in buying land, often selling parcels to friends or relatives arriving from Europe. Many newcomers sought his help to get established in the Morinville area, staying with the family and working on the farm until they could start their own.

Annie also found ways to help those in need. She would often feed drifters as the train passed near their house. Some repaid the kindness by chopping firewood, but many just walked away.

Their home was a lively place with 11 children and frequent gatherings of relatives and friends for large dinners, often followed by evenings of dancing. In 1933, they built a new house complete with its own electrical plant.

Annie passed away on December 11, 1958, and Fritz remained on the farm with his three youngest sons. By the 1960s all eight sons were farming, though a few eventually pursued other interests. Fritz remained on the family farm until his passing on May 17, 1966.

Today, a careful restoration is underway on Frederick’s barn by Aaron, Frederick’s grandson, and his wife, Chantelle. The project stands as a testament to the family’s commitment to preserving the legacy of their 100-year farm, for current and future generations.