

# Maksymetz family remembers roots

By MARY PROKOPOWICH

Two hundred descendants of Jacob and Pauline Maksymetz and Peter and Nellie Maksymetz, pioneers of this area, gathered on the July 25 weekend to renew family ties and to remember with reverence the ancestors who preceded them.

For a family whose religious roots run deep, the family reunion began with a Mass service at St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church near Venlaw. Father Peter Stasiuk of St. Vladimir's College was the officiant.

Morris Maksymetz, oldest grandson of Jacob, acted as cantor and the choir was arranged by Nan Pulak. The little wooden church, with its painted floor and cast iron heater, was a reminder to the young Maksymetzes of their great-great-grandfather, Jacob, one of the founders and builders of the little church.

In his sermon, Fr. Stasiuk spoke of the sacrifices and struggles of the pioneers.

"Our forefathers worked so hard to give us a better life." It wasn't easy to make a living on land like this. In spite of hard times, they had a love of God.

"We have become rich. Sometimes we think that God was for Grandma's time.

"It is good to see our roots, where we came from, who we really are. By coming back to this little place, you've shown that you do not forget about those who went before us."

The service was followed by a memorial service at the graves of Jacob and Pauline Maksymetz in the churchyard. Peter and his wife are buried in the neighbouring Mink Creek parish cemetery.

Then the family members moved to the recently-completed cairn on the homestead quarter settled by Jacob and Pauline in 1898. The cairn, of split stone, was financed by the direct descendants of Jacob and Pauline.

Around the fenced borders of the cairn is a field of lush wheat. "Grandfather would have liked this," one man said.

Chairman of the unveiling ceremony was Walter J. Maksymetz, a grandson and also the chairman of the reunion committee. The oldest surviving child of Jacob's family, Mary Onofryton of Phoenix, Arizona, unveiled the cairn.

Walter told the family members that the Union Jack was being flown because it was the flag his grandfather saw when he, his young wife and two children, Luke and John, landed in Canada.

"First we saw the land, then the flag," Walter J. quoted his grandfather's words. "It will be up to you younger members to raise the Canadian flag and to see that it is flown here," he said.

He added that the land upon which they were standing had been solid bush and that his grandfather had cleared it all by hand.

Gilbert Plains Reeve Morris Mazurkewich spoke of Jacob Maksymetz as "a man of foresight, courage and strength of will who arrived in Venlaw with \$300."

"His direct descendants are still farming here today as well as many who have gone into the professions," said Mazurkewich.

Below the inscriptions are the names of the ten children and 37 grandchildren of Jacob and Pauline. The land on which the cairn has been erected was donated by grandson Walter J. Maksymetz.

An evening banquet and entertainment at the 11th Ave. Hall, Dauphin, rounded out the first day of the reunion.

Sister Darlene Pelechaty proposed the toast "to some very special people who gave us love, wisdom and encouragement when we needed it."

Nan Pulak, the oldest granddaughter, spoke on behalf of the 37 grandchildren.

"When Grandma Pauline died, I was only three years old, but I remember coming to her room to see her when she was sick. It seemed to me that she was lying on a very high bed, but I know now that it was because I was so small."



Maksymetz family gathers at unveiling of cairn dedicated to pioneers

Vicky Paskaruk, a granddaughter of Peter and Nellie, thanked the family members for their contributions to the family cookbook published in time for the reunion.

Rosalene Maksymetz, vice-president of the executive committee in charge of the reunion, introduced the committee members and spoke of the involvement of younger members in the reunion.

"Today is a memorable occasion for me," said Rosalene. "The highlight for me was the service in church and the blessing of the cairn."

Gaylene Dutchyshyn, a great-granddaughter of Jacob, spoke on behalf of the great-grandchildren.

Mike Maksymetz, a son of Jacob and Pauline, spoke on behalf of the older generation — his sisters, Mary and Rose, and his brothers, Steve and Harry.

A program of children's acrostics, choir, skits, a fashion show and a musical duet was m.c.'d by great-grandson Brian Olson of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Brian, who is news director for six television stations, serving Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming, did not attend the first reunion five years ago because of work commitments.

"This has been a fantastic day," says Brian. "About half of these relatives I haven't seen for 15 or 20 years, so I'm catching up on kissing with my kissing cousins."

The oldest family member at the reunion was 82-year-old Mary Onofryton, the oldest surviving child of Jacob and Pauline. She and her three brothers, and her sister Rose, who was unable to attend, are all that survive of the original family of ten children, eight boys and two girls.

Mary, who lived on the homestead until she was 21, attended Kolomaya School until she finished grade six. Then she had to stay at home to help her mother with the large family.

When she was old enough, she went to Detroit where she obtained work and met her future husband, Steve Onofryton.

"It's a thrill to see so many relatives," says Mary Onofryton.

The youngest family member at the reunion was Tyler Dudar, son of Louis and Maggie Dudar, of Deben, Sask. The youngest bearing the Maksymetz name was three-month-old Erin Maksymetz, daughter of Gary and Cindy Maksymetz, of Etobicoke, Ont.

Coming the farthest distance to the reunion was Owen Onofryton of Laguna Beach, California.

Guest speaker at the banquet was Sister Darlene Pelechaty, daughter of Myroslaw and Nadia Pelechaty of Ethelbert. She grew up in Ethelbert and, after completing her education and attaining her degree, taught for six years at Dauphin.

In 1984, Sr. Darlene made a decision to enter a religious order and

joined the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate.

Sister Darlene chose as her topic: The Family. She noted that faces have changed over the years, with older members passing on and new ones being added.

"The Maksymetz thread binds us all in a special way," said Sr. Darlene. "Our ancestors believed in each other, supported each other and had a deep faith. Sometimes our family members can be the hardest people to love. But let's not take our family or those near us for granted. It's important to know that we're loved. Life is difficult. Knowing we're loved makes it easier."

"What about the dark times? Parents or children don't meet our expectations. That's when loving is difficult. Accept each other for who you are. All of us need to be loved," enjoined Sr. Darlene in her inspiring address.

The balance of the evening was spent in dancing to the music of the

Hadway Orchestra and in much visiting and mingling.

Zita Waliuk, a granddaughter of Jacob, now lives in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. She grew up on the farm just across the road from the homestead and has vivid memories of grandfather Jacob.

"When we were small, he'd go to his wooden chest upstairs and always find us a treat. When we got older, he'd offer a glass of wine. He was hard working, but never got excited. Always on an even keel. And he rode horseback until he was in his 80s."

The weekend, which began with prayer, ended with a picnic and golf at the Gilbert Plains Centennial Park on Sunday.

## Maksymetz memoirs

The first Maksymetz family reunion took place in 1982. A 120-page book, titled Maksymetz Memoirs 1865-1982, was published in time for distribution at the reunion.

The book is dedicated to Jacob and Peter Maksymetz and con-

tains accounts of their early days in Canada, and biographical sketches of the families descended from them.

Jacob and Pauline were among the first wave of Ukrainian immigrants who came to Canada in 1898 because of the promise of land and a better future for their two young sons born in the Old Country.

They arrived on the S.S. Bulgaria in Halifax on April 24, 1898 and came west to Sifton by train. Their friends, the Hupalos, had arrived a year earlier and met the young Maksymetz family and offered to share their home until Jacob Maksymetz took up land and built a house.

Searching for land took two weeks of walking through dense bush. Every so often, he would stop and dig up some soil. Finally, he found what he considered an ideal location, S.W. 34-27-22, and purchased the 160 acres for \$10 as noted in the homestead grant register.

Jacob then walked to Dauphin, 30 miles away, to buy two window panes and a bag of nails. In two weeks, he and Pauline completed a small house, walls plastered with clay, roof covered with sod, and a clay floor.

The sparse furniture was improvised from wood, a wooden bunk for a bed and wooden blocks for chairs.

Jacob had come to Canada with \$300. His first farm purchases were two oxen and a cow.

That first summer, working side by side, Jacob and Pauline cleared and broke three acres of land and built a small barn.

To augment their dwindling cash supply, Jacob often went to work for longer-established farmers, taking in payment a calf or a couple of piglets.

The Maksymetzes were a religious couple and felt the need for a place of worship in the little settlement. Jacob was one of the pioneers responsible for the building of St. Michael's Catholic Church in Venlaw.

Because there were few priests, Jacob was often called upon to baptize the babies and to bury the dead.

As their family grew, Jacob saw the need to have more land, a precious commodity, and, in 1903,

he purchased another quarter for \$720, with yearly payments of \$80. Within a few years, by dint of back-breaking labour, the family began to prosper.

Jacob was the owner of the first team of horses at Venlaw. A new house was built and, as the older sons grew up, they went to work in the United States, sending most of their earnings to Jacob to invest in land for them.

The family grew to ten children. Sorrow struck in 1927. Their mother died at the age of 52.

As his sons acquired more land, Jacob remained their confidant. He lived to the age of 94, keeping up an interest in newspapers, radio, farming and social events.

Peter Maksymetz, Jacob's brother, was also lured to Canada by the promise of fertile, cheap land.

He made his first journey to Canada in 1904, leaving his wife and five children in Ukraine. He worked on the building of the Grand Trunk Railway, saved some money and returned home.

In 1907, Peter made a second journey to Canada, this time working for the C.N.R. at wages of ten cents per hour. His ambition was to save enough money to bring his family to Canada.

In 1913, his ambition was realized. After a voyage of six weeks, Peter, his wife Nellie, and their five children arrived at Montreal. They boarded a train for Gilbert Plains, where they were met by brother Jacob.

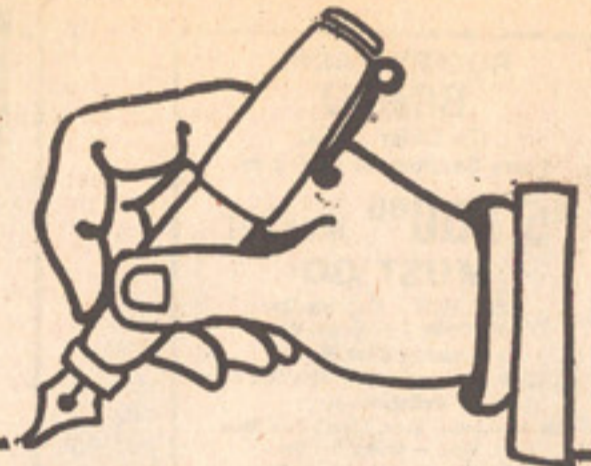
They lived with Jacob's family for two months until Peter bought his homestead in the Zoria district.

Three more sons were added to the family and Peter bought two more quarters of land.

They faced much the same hard conditions and privation as their pioneer neighbors, cutting brush, picking stones, stooking and working for the municipality for a few dollars toward the land taxes.

Like Jacob, Peter became involved in the religious life of the pioneers, helping in the building of the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Mink Creek.

Peter's wife, Nellie, died in 1944. Peter lived to the age of 78 and is buried in the Mink Creek Cemetery.



## DEADLINES

FOR

The Dauphin Herald  
of Tuesday, September 8, 1987

IS FRIDAY, SEPT. 4, 1987

AT 5:00 P.M.

For news copy and advertising copy.