

## Central Parks

### Birds Hill Provincial Park

#### Pine Ridge Self-guiding Trail



Pine Ridge School, c. 1930, School District No. 608 Collection  
*Courtesy of Manitoba Archives*

#### Introduction

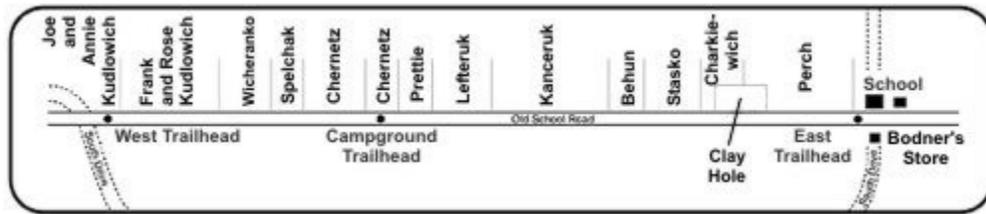
Through time, what is now Birds Hill Provincial Park has been home to many people. The first people were nomadic, staying only long enough to hunt and gather plants for medicine and food. Later came the Métis, highly skilled bison hunters and traders. After 1870, when Manitoba became a province of Canada, much of this land was granted to the Métis. Few Métis stayed.

Some of the first European settlers to build homes and plough the land were British and German. But this hill of sand and gravel was not productive for long. Soon they were selling the land to another wave of Europeans looking for a new homeland.

At the turn of the century, Polish- and Ukrainianspeaking people from Europe came to Canada to find freedom and prosperity. With the best farmland in the Red River valley taken, the new immigrants settled on marginal land. By the 1930s and '40s a strong Polish and Ukrainian community had established themselves in what became known as Pine Ridge.

This trail is dedicated to the former residents of Pine Ridge. Experience their lives during the '30s and '40s as you walk the Old School Road and visit the sites of their homesteads, store and school. Enjoy your walk through the community. Get to know its people. You can start anywhere

along this 2.4-km trail. Use the map to match the name at the site to that in the brochure, and read about the people of Pine Ridge.



### Pine Ridge School No. 608

The school was the hub of the community. Pine Ridge School No. 608 was a two-room school built in 1905. Beside it, tucked into the spruce trees, was the teacher's cottage. Grades one to four were taught in one room, grades five to nine in the other.

Anna and Thomas Novak came to Pine Ridge in 1923. They lived a half kilometre south of the school and became the caretakers in the midthirties. Their children, Frances and Edward, attended the school and helped with the caretaking duties.

Frances was both a student and a teacher at Pine Ridge School No. 608. As a student she recalls one teacher who rewarded a correct answer with a raisin or half a peanut and an incorrect answer with a strap on the hand. Fran taught at the school in 1942 and 1943.

In 1950, a one-room school replaced the original school. When the park was established, the second school was moved to the end of Nimowin Road to become the Interpretive Workshop where today school groups come for winter interpretive programs.



Grades 5-9, Pine Ridge School, 1948. *Courtesy of Pauline Litchie*

Bodner's Store

Across from the school was Bodner's store—a convenient arrangement for the child with an extra penny. There were jars of penny candy lined up in a row. The favourites were jawbreakers, ten for a penny.

Fred and Frances Bodner, and Nick Kanceruk the local carpenter built the log structure in 1939.

It was a combination store and home. The store had a sitting area with benches and a card table. In the evening, four or five men dropped by for a game of cards like King Pedro. The loser bought a round of Cokes for seven cents.

At the back of the store was a counter stacked with bread, and shelves of groceries like flour and sugar. Sausages, eggs and milk were kept cool outside in the well. During the day the women of Pine Ridge might come by to pick up a needed item and chat with Mrs. Bodner who enjoyed visiting with her neighbours.

The Bodners and their two girls also raised chickens, pigs, milk cows and grew a large garden that included some grain. The first threshing machine in Pine Ridge was owned by the Bodners and was in high demand at harvest time. Fred and the threshing machine moved from farm to farm and all the neighbours, young and old, pitched in at harvest time.

Mr. Bodner also had a truck and gave people rides to the city for a quarter or free if needed. The quickest route to Winnipeg, whether by horse and wagon, or truck was down the hydro lines that now cut through the southeast corner of the park.



Getting gas at Bodner's Store in the 1940's.  
*Photo courtesy of John and Ollie Kanceruk*

## The Clay Hole

The people of Pine Ridge were ingenious at using the resources at hand, whether it was gathering local berries to sell or building their homes.

Most of the first houses built in Pine Ridge were made from local materials. Spruce or poplar trees were cut down and shaped by hand. Squared logs were fitted together and stacked on top of each other. Spaces between the logs were filled or chinked with a mixture of clay and straw or manure, and then the whole wall was plastered with that same mixture. A thick layer of clay often protected the log houses from prairie grass fires.

On the inside, one-inch willow poles were nailed on diagonally and covered with two or three inches of clay plaster. Sometimes a thin plaster of lime, clay and colouring was used to paint the inside walls.

Pine Ridge residents were fortunate to have a source of clay so close. The clay hole was on two acres owned by the Rural Municipality of Springfield and the clay was free for the taking. People came from all around to dig the clay to build their log homes.

Behind the clay hole, nestled in the spruce trees, was the Charkiewich homestead. Their driveway ran along the west edge of the clay hole. After the park was established, Mike Charkiewich became foreman of the park. One of his sons, Cameron, also worked for the park.

Many children walked past the clay hole on their way to school. As a little girl, Jean Wicheranko Cam Charkiewich and his dog Duke, April 1965 Courtesy of Cam Charkiewich bought her. She would take the coat off and leave it in the clay hole before getting to school, and picked it up on the way home. The clay hole was a major landmark in the community.



Cam Charkiewich and his dog Duke, April, 1965.  
*Courtesy Cam Charkiewich*

## Kanceruk

The Kanceruk family bought 80 acres here in 1936 and before that they lived on the south side of the road across from Chernetz. Nick and Katherine had five children. Nick was a carpenter and grew wheat, rye, barley and vegetables, and did a bit of blacksmithing. He built some of the log buildings in Pine Ridge. His eldest son John helped. John's job was to nail on the willow poles to hold the plaster, and help his dad dig clay from the pit.



Kanceruk family at their first house just south of the school road, c. 1938  
*Courtesy of John and Ollie Kanceruk*

John can remember at nine and ten years old, taking his dad to Winnipeg by horse and wagon to work for the week. He says that on the way back he was just there to keep the horse company, it knew the way home.

John, his oldest sister Mary, and their mother did most of the work in the fields. Weeding acres of vegetables in the summer was hot, dusty work. He had to miss school at harvest time. Like many of the boys, John worked as a caddie at the Pine Ridge golf course during the summer. They made forty cents a round and sometimes a tip.

John met his wife Ollie at a party for one of the school teachers. Their wedding reception was held in one of the homes in the community. Many Pine Ridge families are interconnected through marriage. As John says "You didn't travel far for courting if you had to walk."

## Prettie

John and Mary Elizabeth Prettie raised four children on their 20-acre homestead. The two youngest children Reta and Leslie were born in their house. It was a large house, huge kitchen, pantry, living room and a bedroom on the main floor and two large bedrooms upstairs. Vegetables were stored in the dugout basement.

The Pretties also had a barn, a granary, a lime kiln and a milk house. Because there was no electricity for refrigeration, the milk house used two cement troughs filled with cold water to store the milk, eggs, and butter.

In winter John travelled to work in lumber camps north of Ottawa. Mary and the children tended the livestock and farm. Later, John worked for a sand and gravel company where he loaded sand into boxcars with a wheelbarrow. It took 40 yards of gravel to fill one boxcar, for which he earned 10 dollars.

Reta remembers the excitement of community dances, held at the school or in private homes. Before the dance, family and friends came by horse and sleigh to their place, and her mother cooked a big dinner. All the young women dressed up and curled their hair with irons heated on

the stove. After the dance, relatives returned home with a pail of strawberries from the Pretties' cellar.

Reta married Peter Bernusky when she was 17. Frances Novak was a bridesmaid. Reta and Peter still live on the Bernusky homestead just outside the park.



Threshing outfit in the Pine Ridge area, c. 1920.

*Courtesy of Rita (Prettie) Bernusky*

## Spelchak

Katherine Litchie was a widow with three children when she married Pete Spelchak and moved into this homestead in 1930. Paul, one of the three sons played violin for local dances held at the school. At 20, Paul married Pauline Zaretski who lived by the hydro lines. Pauline's father was a real equestrian. While in the Polish army, he learned riding stunts. He could ride a horse at full gallop and go under the horse's belly and back up the other side.

Pete's brother Tony Spelchak was considered by some to be a good example for the community. The whole family worked hard to get ahead. Tony and his wife Tena had 12 children, two died within their first year. Tony had the children well organized, whether they were working in the garden or out on the prairie picking berries. They often made more money picking wild berries and mushrooms to sell in the city, than they did on the vegetables they had grown. In 1935 they picked two and a half tons of chokecherries that they sold to winemakers in Winnipeg.



Bodners threshing at Pine Ridge, 1950's.

*Courtesy of Polly Spelchak*

## Wicheranko

Anton Wicheranko arrived in Canada with one dollar in 1922. He was 21 and had come to escape the fighting in his homeland and make his fortune. He didn't speak English but had training as a butcher.

To start, Anton stayed with an uncle in Pine Ridge. His first job was as a kosher butcher for Samuel Simkin, a Russian Jew in Pine Ridge who later became a very successful businessman.

Anton earned twenty-five dollars a month. After three months he had enough to buy a new suit from Eaton's.

He worked for the railroad for a while. It was hard to find work if you did not speak English. In 1924 he landed a job working on a farm in Saskatchewan for seven months of the year. He threshed grain by beating the wheat with sticks. He now made forty dollars a month. In winter he returned to Pine Ridge and threshed straw to make horse collars. Four years after arriving he could speak English and had earned enough to buy his first property southeast of here.

For seven years, Anton, his wife Bertha and their first four children lived in a one-room log shanty with an earthen floor on this 40-acre site. By 1935, the family was able to build a bigger log house. Mr. Kanceruk helped. The well, steps and foundation are what is left of their third home built in 1950.

Jean, the eldest daughter, could handle a team of horses at the age of ten. During planting she got up at 4 a.m. and took her team out to the fields. After a couple of hours of work, it was time for school. Back at the house she washed the dust out of her clothes before heading off to school, often in a damp dress. A second set of clothes was a luxury few had. After school there was other chores and homework. Sometimes Jean took her time coming home.

The Wicherankos harvested thirty tons of carrots, cabbages, potatoes and other vegetables in the fall of 1940. Some of it went to the root cellar to supply the family for the year. The rest went to market in Winnipeg. A trip to the city took all day by horse and wagon, but it was an adventure for the child that got to go along. When dad got home there were strawberry candies for the children.

He arrived in Canada with a dollar in his pocket and by 1963 Anton owned 160 acres in Pine Ridge. He sold his land a year before the park was developed and retired to Winnipeg where he continued to enjoy gardening.



Jean Wicheranko's wedding Day, July 13, 1946.  
*Courtesy John and Ollie Kanceruk*



Kudlowich

Frank Kudlowich, c 1930.  
*Courtesy Frank Kudlowich*

## The Family

Peter Kudlowich was born in Poland in 1879 as was his wife Josephine. They emigrated to Canada around 1905 and settled in the Cooks Creek area to raise a family on land that was their own. They had seven children. As the children came of age, land was available in the Pine Ridge area close to home.

The four oldest children, Mary, Frank, John and Joe were all to live in Pine Ridge. Mary, the oldest, married Mike Zaretski and had eight children. The Zaretskis are a well-known family in the area. Frank and his wife Rose, who built this homestead, had two children Olga and Stan. John and his wife Emily had five children Joe and Annie had two children.

Frank and Rose, with the help of John and Joe, constructed the homestead by hand in 1936. Frank and Rose grew vegetables and kept animals to supply their food. For seven hard years they tried to eke out a living on their 60 acres. In the fall of 1943 they left for Ontario.

John moved into the homestead with his family after Frank and Rose left. John liked fast horses and he trained them well. The neighbours knew when he was coming for a visit, because his horses wore a set of beautiful bells. John had trained the horses to head the wagon for home when he touched the reins. Once while visiting the neighbours, the children accidentally touched the reins and the horses and wagon left for home without John.

John and Emily and the children stayed for seven years trying to make a go of the farm. In the summer of 1950 they also moved to Ontario.

Little brother Joe took a different approach. He left Cooks Creek and got a job in Winnipeg. There he married Annie whom he had grown up with in Cooks Creek. Joe and Annie spent a lot of time visiting in Pine Ridge. Joe liked fast motorcycles. He loved riding around on the trails that crisscrossed the Pine Ridge countryside.

There must have been a strong attraction to Pine Ridge because in 1948, Joe and Annie left the conveniences of city living. They left indoor plumbing, running water and electricity, and bought 160 acres on the west side of Frank and Rose's homestead. They lived in a one-room house the first year, which later became the granary. Then with help from the neighbours they built a four-room house.

Annie had left her job but Joe continued to work in Winnipeg. He also cut wood from the bush, some of which was used to heat the house. The rest he sold as firewood, or as fence posts for fifteen cents each or rails for thirty cents each.



Building the Kudlowich  
homestead, 1936  
*Courtesy of Stan  
Kudlowich*

Annie, and her two children Judy and Henry, tended the farm. Most of what they raised was for their own survival. But they did find something that they could sell that grew well in the sandy soil-radishes. Tending acres of radishes is hard work, but it helped the family income.

Joe and Annie lived and worked on their homestead until 1964 when the land became part of Birds Hill Park. They built a new home next to the park.

### The Lifestyle

Life in the '30s and early '40s was difficult for everyone. They called it the Dirty Thirties because it was a time of economic depression, unlike anything we have seen since. Money was scarce and jobs were not easily found. In some ways the people living on the land were better off than those in the city. Here they grew vegetables and raised livestock for their own food. They gathered wild berries, nuts and mushrooms. They made good use of the resources they had around them and nothing went to waste.

The people of Pine Ridge did not have the best land for growing crops, but they could feed their families and often found creative ways to make a little extra money. Making sure the family survived was not just the responsibility of the adults, the children also worked hard and made their contribution. The whole community pitched in at harvest time, helping their neighbours dig potatoes or thresh the grain.

The people of Pine Ridge grew many vegetables-potatoes, cabbage, carrots and radishes. If there was extra they took it by horse and wagon to Winnipeg's North End market. They also sold chokecherries, saskatoons and other wild fruit and nuts. Most families grew some grain. Rye grew well and they could even sell rye straw to make horse collars.

Chickens provided meat and eggs. Cows supplied meat and milk. Any surplus was sold to the local store or in Winnipeg. The cows of Pine Ridge roamed throughout the community during the day. It was the children's responsibility to find their cows in the evening and bring them home.

Like other families Rose and the two children managed the farm and chores while Frank was away working for months at a time. They had no electricity, no running water and no machinery to run the farm. Each day was filled with hard work just trying to get everything done. At the end of the day when the children were in bed, Rose cut chamois, a soft leather, by oil lamp for a clothing company in the city.

Perhaps because Rose was alone with the children much of the time, she always welcomed visitors. She would offer a cup of tea made from berries. Her yard was always well kept. The cows cut the grass for her. She loved working in the yard.

Frank was an inventive individual. He liked to take things apart and figure out how they worked. He also invented ways to make money. While working in the lumber camps he would sharpen other men's saws for the price of a cigarette or two, then in the evening he would sell them back their cigarettes for a few pennies.

One Christmas when Frank was home, he gathered cedar boughs from the cedar bog. They made wreaths that gave the house a wonderful aroma, and they sold some at the market in Winnipeg.



## The Homestead

In 1936 Frank and Rose built this homestead. Olga was three. Stan, a baby, lay in the grass while Frank and Rose worked. Trees were cut from the land, squared with an axe, and stacked to form the walls. Rose mixed the clay and manure to chink and plaster the walls. Within the year they were living in the house.

The house is two stories, but only the main floor was used for living; the upstairs was for storage. In one corner Frank and Rose had their bedroom with cedar walls. In the centre of the house was the stove that provided heat in winter. The kitchen was in the back and a dugout cellar was under the stairs. The children slept in the living area that also had a large circular table and big floor radio that stood under the window by the door. Oil lamps were on the wall unless Rose was cutting chamois, then she put them on the table. Entertainment at night included listening to the fire crackle and Orson Welles on the radio.

The barn was built in the following year. Hay was stored in the loft and the animals stayed below. Behind the barn was a dugout root cellar.

The small granary, also a summer kitchen, is another example of Frank and Joe's resourcefulness. They took apart an old railway car in Winnipeg and used the lumber to build the granary. Faint white lettering is still visible. The granary, empty in summer, was used as the kitchen so the house wouldn't get too hot for sleeping. The well was close to the granary. Besides providing the family with all its water, the well also served as a refrigerator.

At the yard entrance were two large spruce trees. In front of the house, there was an orchard with apple and plum trees, and grapevines. Behind the house was a hedge of high bush-cranberries. The surrounding area, much more open then, was a prairie with crocuses and other wildflowers.

When the family left the homestead, Stan was seven years old. His uncle John's family moved into it for the next seven years, then they also moved to Ontario. Several other families lived in it until Gary Robertson bought it for \$4,500 in 1961. His rebuilding of the homestead was interrupted with the park development occurring in 1964. The homestead now sits within the park boundary.

In middle age Stan Kudlowich moved back from Ontario to an acreage just outside the park. He visited the homestead often and always thought of it as his home.

### Conclusion

The community of Pine Ridge was much larger than the snapshots you have seen along this trail. It extended south to the Pine Ridge and Elmhurst golf courses and to the northern edges of the park.

The people that pioneered this land almost one hundred years ago built it into a strong community of hard working people. Because of the lack of rapid transportation in those days, the community was quite independent. You made-do with what you had at hand. You could count on your neighbours to help when needed. The whole family worked to make ends meet. You needed very little money because you could trade with a neighbour for something you needed. If you did need cash to buy something, you found innovative ways to earn it. You found a use for everything and you wasted nothing.

Many people who grew up in Pine Ridge live around the park today. Others who have moved to the city visit often. Some of those who once lived here work in the park now. They have a strong connection to the land where their families first put-down-roots.

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the residents of the Pine Ridge community, many of whom are not included here, who have generously shared their family histories and photographs for this trail and publication. If you would like to see other heritage sites in the park, visit the Pine Ridge Cemetery on Nimowin Road at North Drive, the kiln on Lime Kiln Trail, or Smith's Potato Cellar off Festival Drive. You may also wish to visit Cooks Creek Museum 10 km east of the park.

### Epilogue

Since the initial printing of this brochure Anthony Wicheranko (1901-2000) and Stan Kudlowich (1936-2001) have passed away. Their pioneering spirit and ingenuity will be missed.

*Research and text by S. Dangerfield*