

Latvians in Lake Isle



Lake Isle, Alberta

Lake Isle, a lake in the Lac Ste. Anne region of Alberta and along the old trading route known as the Yellow Head Trail, was first settled by a Metis trader named Pierre Gray. Both the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Northern laid railway lines through the area and many residents constructed the tracks. The towns of Gainford and Magnolia were nearby. According to census records studied by Ausma Birzgalis for her thesis "Latvians in Alberta: A Study", 125 of the total 156 Albertan Latvians lived in the Lake Isle area.

First Latvian Settlers

Although the displacement of Latvians during the Second World War and the 1944 Soviet occupation of Latvia prohibited the return of displaced ethnic Latvians, these events were not the only impetus for the Canadian settlement of Latvians. The 1905 Revolution in Latvia, and its preceding decade of economic and political hardship resulted in the First Wave of Latvian emigration to Canada. Many of the first Latvians to arrive in Canada were of different socioeconomic stock than the Latvians who came after the Second World War. They were simple farmers or laborers looking for opportunity and reprieve from political persecution. Some of these families include: **Mutzeneek**, **Plavins**, **Lapin** and **Deering**. Josephsburg, a German-Baltic settlement near Medicine Hat, was the site of the first Latvian Lutheran church, and the region from where some Lake Isle settlers moved. **John Jones** moved his family from Josephsburg to Lake Isle in 1905. Jones was a part of the first wave of Latvians to arrive in Alberta, and after the

Second World War he and other ethnic Latvians like Tom Peterson secured sponsorship for over two-hundred displaced Latvians.

Magnolia Cemetery

Some of the Latvians who lived near Lake Isle, Alberta are interred in the Magnolia Cemetery. Names include: **Caks**, Deering, **Jones**, Kuplais, Leyasmeir, and Osolin.

Lake Isle Today

Lake Isle is still settled by the descendants of Latvian immigrants. It is a farming community but also a site of festivities and relaxation for many Latvian-Canadians who own seasonal homes in the area. Lake Isle's many trees and serene setting make it comparable to the Latvian countryside.

