

Canadian Immigration Addendum

Daniel Hallock, 2023

In the fall of 2023, I decided to take a trip to the Didsbury, Alberta, area in Canada. This is where my great-great grandmother, great uncles, and a great aunt homesteaded for about 10 years as mentioned in *The Strength of Oakes*, pgs 103-114.

I will share the pictures I took with some commentary in this addendum.

One of my stops was Heritage Park Historical Village in Calgary, Alberta. I had been there a few times in the 1990s and wanted to see it again. Think Colonial Williamsburg except the time period is the turn of the 20th century on the plains of Alberta.

There was one exhibit there that illustrates the trip the Oakes made from Minnesota to Didsbury via rail. From the book:

The Oakes' trip to Alberta would be deplorable by even the worst modern standard. The car seats were just wooden slats so they could be easily hosed down. The passengers were mainly immigrants from Europe who had not bathed since starting out on long ocean and then train voyages. Each car contained a small cookstove used for "frying onions and a conglomeration of any and every thing. The stench was almost too much for our stomachs."

In Heritage Park is one of only two Canadian Pacific Railway colonist sleeper cars known to exist. These cars, with their Spartan accommodations and low fares, brought 100,000s of immigrants from eastern Canada to Canada's "Last Best West". A one-way third class fare was \$7. Bedding was extra! Based on James Oakes' description, this is the type of car they rode to Calgary. This car, #1202, was built in 1905. There's a slight chance it was the very car they rode!

Here is a period picture of the interior of a colonist car:



Here is the restored interior of car #1202:



James mentioned a cooking stove in the car. There is one in the restored car:



In the museum in Didsbury they had the original bench, dated 1904, that was in the Didsbury train station. Since the Oakes spent quite some time waiting to be picked up, there is a good chance they made use of this bench:



When the Oakes arranged transportation from Didsbury to their homestead, they only got as far as Elkton by the end of the first day. Elkton no longer exists. There had been a post

office but it closed in 1969. In fact, I could find no other building of the period except the school house.



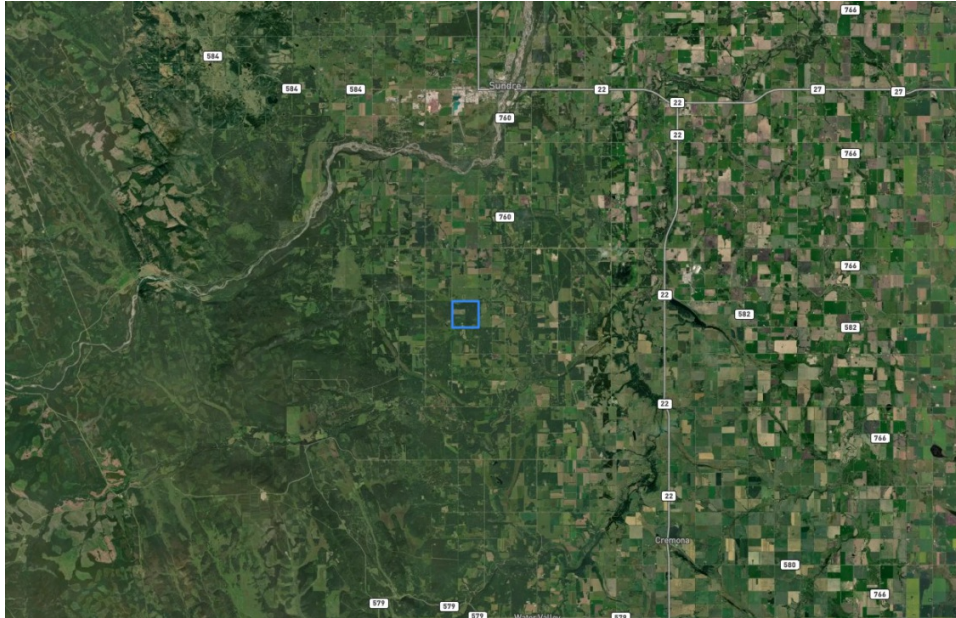
The trip from Carstairs, Alberta, to Elkton is one of the prettiest I think I've ever seen. Rolling hills of golden grain, deep green pockets of deciduous and evergreen trees all around, and classic high gabled red barns. All framed by the purple Rocky mountains in the distance.

From Elkton, I went to what I believed was the Oakes' homestead. UNFORTUNATELY, when I converted the Section/Township/Range to GPS coordinated using a utility, I typed in 32 for the township rather than the correct 31. This placed me exactly 6 miles north of the proper location. The pictures I took are of absolutely no use. I have really kicked myself for that flub up as it is highly unlikely I will ever return to the area again.

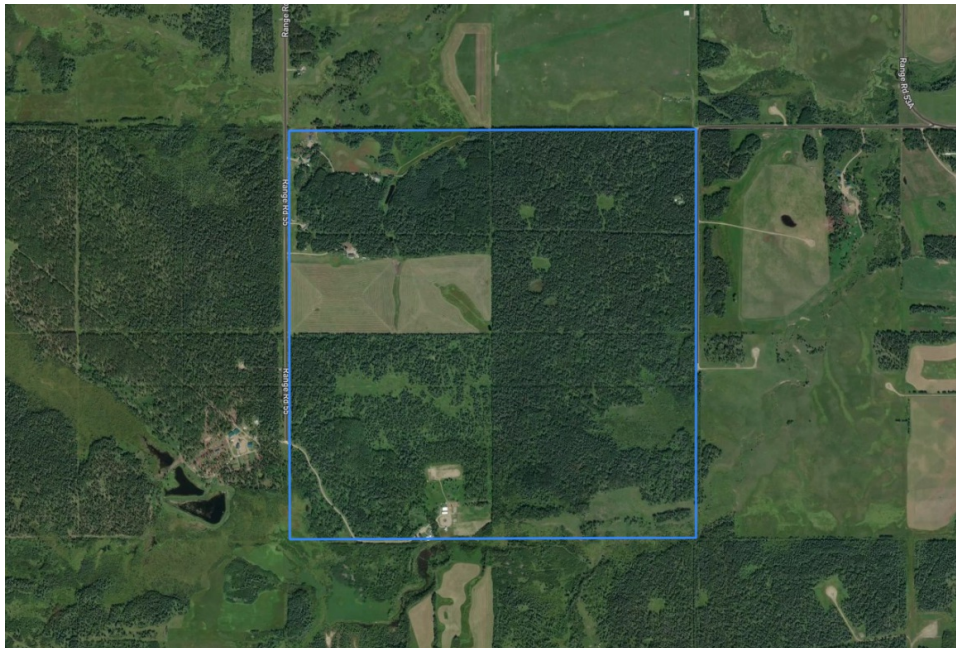
The proper location is

[N 51.671207 W -114.674795 \(click to see in Google maps\)](https://www.google.com/maps/place/51.671207,-114.674795)

The correct location for the section is due south of Sundre:



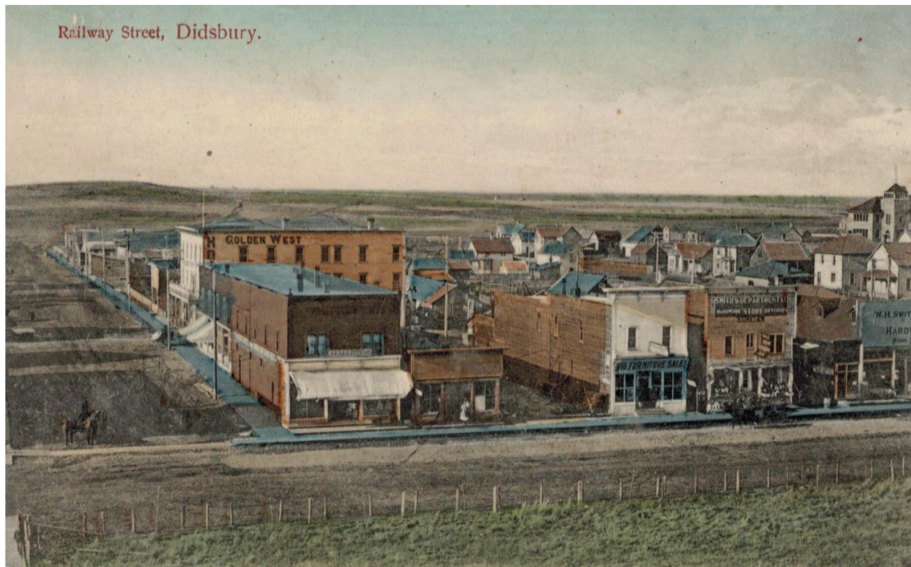
Enlarging to just the section, you can see a house on the SW corner:



I have learned that the SW corner of section 20 was the homestead of Carmelia Whiting Oakes:

You can see the Golden West Hotel to the far right. This is where the Oakes were known to visit on occasion.

Here is an undated post card of Didsbury. You can see the Golden West Hotel to the left and in the distance on the right you can see the new school which the Oakes brothers helped to build.



Here is a picture of the school in 1920:



The school closed in the 1980s. That was about 70 years of use! It then became a museum which is still in operation today, 2023. Here is a picture I took in Sept 2023:

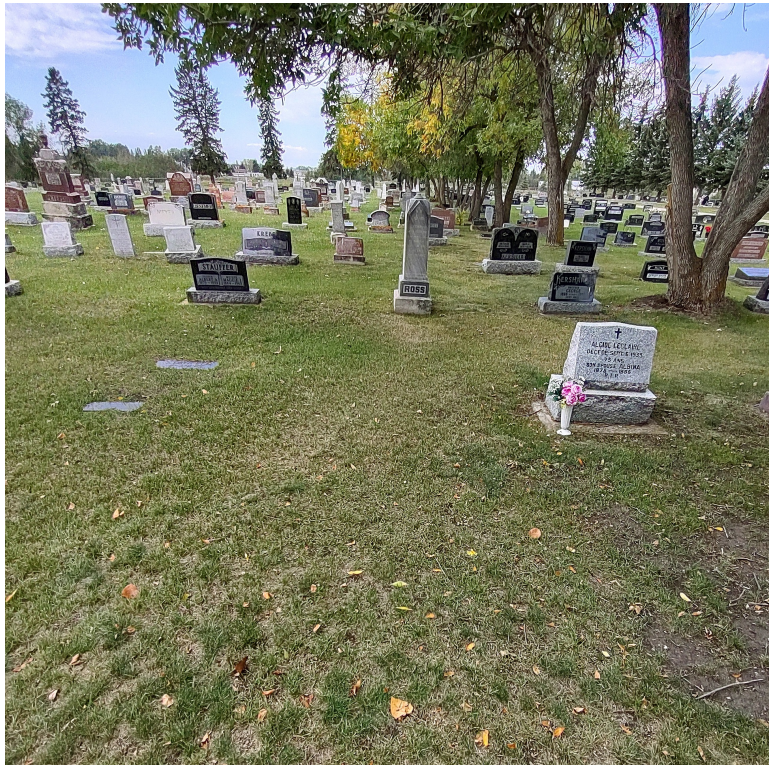


Note there are two sets of doors on either side. In the days when the school was built, the boys and girls had to go through their own set of doors!

The museum contained many displays of life in Alberta, but one room was still dedicated to what school was like in its early days.



My last stop was the cemetery to see Leonard Oake's grave. Either there was never a stone or it was no longer present, but using a map I located the proper spot where he lies. He is located just to the left of the monument with the pink flowers.



Since publishing the book, I found this picture of the Golden West Hotel burning during the great fire of Didsbury:

