



Smeltzer House

Built for Maurice Smeltzer, one of the Salisbury district's first homesteaders, this handsome Foursquare has stood steadfast since 1920 as surrounding rural farmland shifted to urban streets. Having served as the Smeltzers' family home for more than a half century, "Smeltzer House" lives on as a visual reminder of Strathcona County's pioneering past.

Unless noted otherwise, photos throughout this booklet are sourced from the Smeltzer Family Collection, held at the Strathcona County Museum and Archives.

Family roots

Born in Ontario in 1867, Maurice Smeltzer first ventured west in 1891 to deliver a railcar of draft horses. Arriving on one of the first trains to travel the new Calgary and Edmonton Railway line, he scouted for good farmland while he was here. Joined by his friend Jim McConnell, Maurice brought more horses west the following year and paid the \$10 fee to apply for the “right of entry” on a quarter section—the homestead land just west of Smeltzer House. In 1895, Maurice and Jim built a two-storey house.

In 1899, Maurice Smeltzer married Eliza Pithie, who emigrated with her family from Scotland. The couple lived in the house on Maurice’s homestead. They had two sons. James, born in 1905, died in infancy; Francis John (Frank) was born in 1907. From a young age, Frank helped his father on the farm.

Early on, Maurice supplemented his farm income working nearby in coal mines and the lumber industry. As demand for agricultural products rose, Maurice turned to full-time farming, winning prizes for hogs, oats and barley.



Left: Maurice with Frank as a toddler in front of their house on the home quarter; 1909

Top: Maurice and Eliza; circa 1900

Bottom: Silver medal award: Twin Cities Seed Fair, December 1909, Best Sample of Six rowed Barley won by M. Smeltzer





Above left: Smeltzer family in their car in front of their house on the home quarter; Young Frank in driver's seat, Maurice in front passenger seat, Eliza in back; circa 1918

Middle top: Maurice and Eliza holding baby Frank in a horse-drawn sleigh; circa 1908

Middle bottom: Maurice on right, Eliza in centre, Frank on bicycle (two men on left not identified); circa 1916

Top right: Simulated photo of Maurice and Eliza at Niagara Falls; Photo Department, Niagara River Elevator Company, Whirlpool Rapids, Niagara Falls, NY; date unknown.

Background photo: Aerial of Smeltzers' home quarter; 1954 (#315-35-13, Homestead Aerial Photo Ltd.)





Main photo, both pages: Aerial of Smeltzers' brick house and garage; the home quarter in the background remained standing until 1973; date unknown

Inset top: Taking advantage of advances in machinery, in 1918 Maurice purchased the farm's first threshing machine, which attracted local press as "a great labor saver."



Inset bottom left: This barn burned down in 1914.

Inset bottom right: Hired hand Jim Handyside (far left) and others (either hired hands or neighbours) take a lunch break on a sunny day during harvest.

Advances

In 1920, the Smeltzers moved across the road from their homestead into their new house, what we now call Smeltzer House. The two-storey house has the square profile and pyramidal roof characteristic of the Foursquare style. The family enjoyed such welcome features as double brick walls (which helped insulate the house), leaded glass windows, a full basement and indoor plumbing. Electricity in the home was generated by a Delco plant until 1944, when the area was connected to Edmonton Power.



Community

In 1899 settlers in the area gathered to establish a school district. They chose the name Salisbury, after Lord Salisbury, then prime minister of Great Britain, who had risen from modest beginnings just as the community hoped to do. The original Salisbury Rural School opened in 1901.

Below: For Frank Smeltzer's first year of school, he attended the original Rural Salisbury School.



Frank Smeltzer and classmates outside the Salisbury Rural School in 1921. This brick school, built in 1916 to replace the original school, was lost to fire in 1947. (Strathcona County Museum and Archives)



West Salisbury General Store and Post Office opened in 1911 a mile west of the Rural Salisbury School at what became known as Salisbury Corner. Peter and Annie Yohemas purchased the store from the Richardsons in 1941. The store served as a community hub; it was moved a mile south in 1964 to make way for highway expansion. (#315-33-14, Homestead Aerial Photo Ltd.)



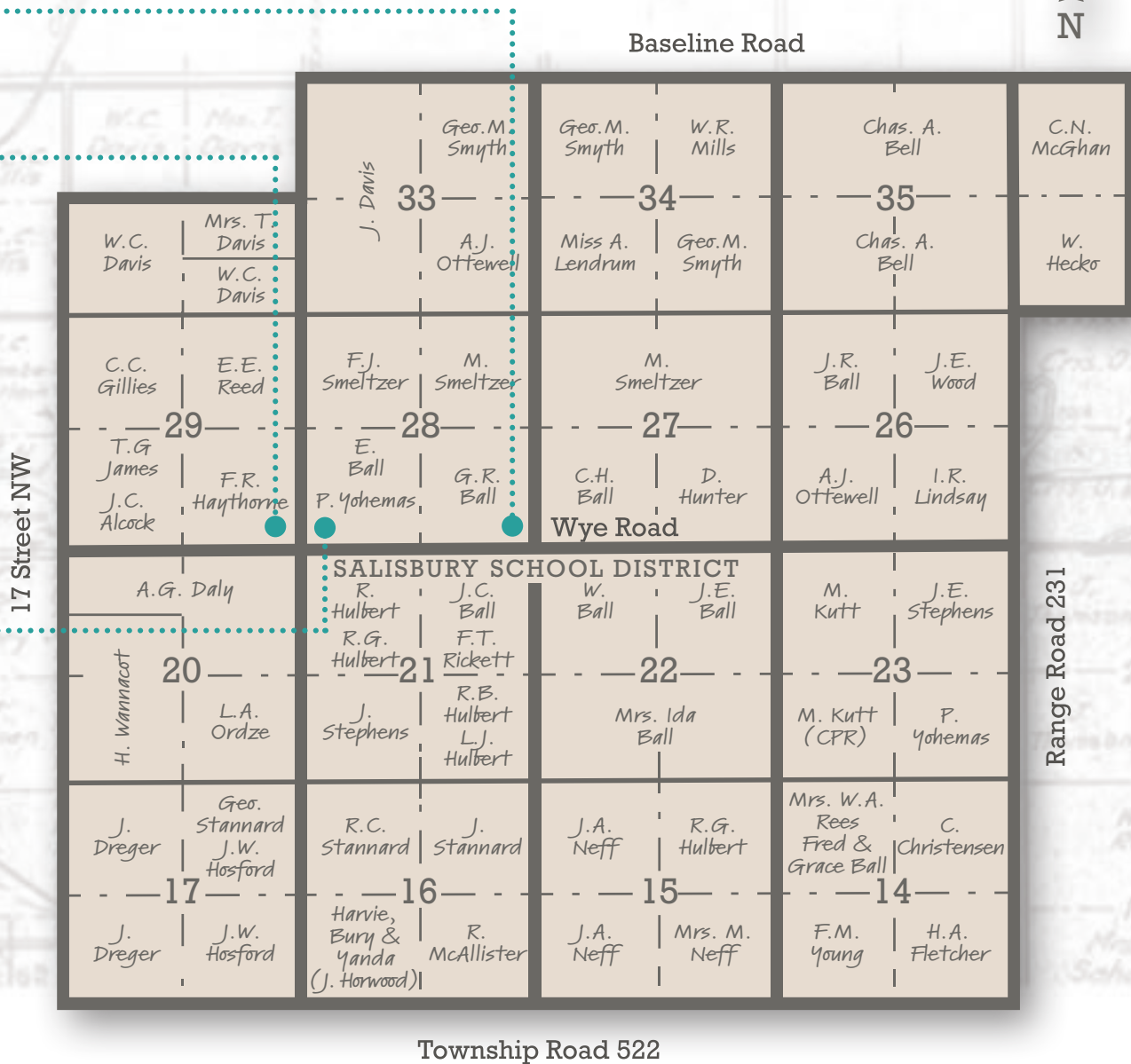
West Salisbury Methodist Church was built in 1915 at Salisbury Corner. In 1925 this church became a congregation of the United Church of Canada through a union of Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches; it took on the name Salisbury United Church. Maurice and Eliza joined this congregation in 1923 after the closing of Homewood Presbyterian Church, where Maurice had served as an elder. A new building constructed on this site in 1959 was moved to Sherwood Park in 1964.



Women in the West Salisbury Ladies Aid were active with organizing events, raising funds and improving the church's furnishings. Eliza Smeltzer, fourth from the left; 1924.

Boundaries of the Salisbury school district (a portion of Township 52, Range 23, West of the 4th Meridian) also defined the community. Names shown are those believed to be of landowners and/or occupants in 1935.

Source: Mitchell's Map of the Municipal District of Strathcona No. 518, 1935-36





Generations

In 1933, Frank married Agnes Kirkwood and the couple lived together with Frank's parents, a common practice in the day. They had two sons, Ian and William (Bill); a daughter, Wyona Agnes, died in infancy. Frank and Agnes were active in the Salisbury United Church.

After graduating from the Olds School of Agriculture in 1926, Frank took on more of the farming responsibility and when his parents passed away in the 1930s he continued to operate the successful venture his father had established. Frank built up a purebred Yorkshire hog operation with as many as 250 hogs, and over time the farm encompassed 600 acres (including 120 acres of leased land) as well as a mix of livestock.

During the 1950s and '60s, Frank owned a gravel truck and kept busy hauling dirt, gravel and peat moss; there was high demand for these services throughout the region. Ian bought his own truck and did similar work. Bill trained as a mechanic, and both Bill and Ian served as volunteer firefighters in the community. The two brothers moved to British Columbia in the late 1960s.



Above: W. C. McDonald (driving his tractor), Frank Smeltzer (centre, behind wheel), and Maurice Smeltzer (on 1928 model binder) are harvesting a field of barley; the Smeltzers' brick house in the distance; date unknown

Inset: Ian Smeltzer snowshoeing, circa 1940



Top left: Frank and Agnes beside the family's 1938 Nash; circa mid-1940s

Top centre: In a foretaste of careers to come, Ian and Bill play with trucks in the sand near the original garage; circa 1941

Top right: Truck garage, built in the mid-1950s, with new residential construction in the background

Aerial photo: This 1954 aerial of the 1920 house shows the mature trees, outbuildings, farmland in the foreground and country road in the background. (#315-35-12, Homestead Aerial Photo Ltd.)





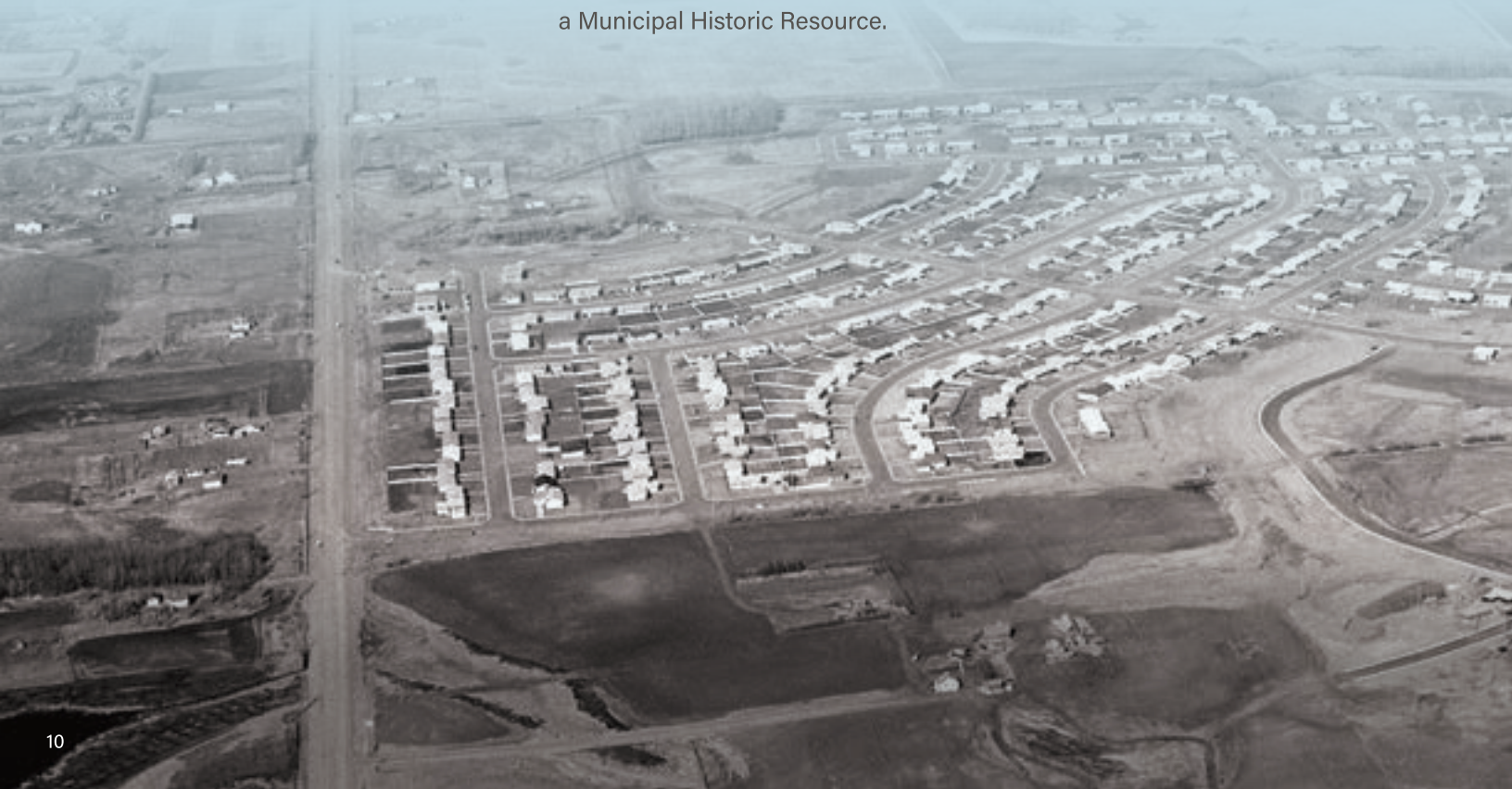
Above: Frank and Agnes; 1973
(Strathcona County Museum and Archives)

Background photo, bottom right: Aerial of Sherwood Park, looking west; 1959
(Wells Photographic Studio, Provincial Archives of Alberta, WS244.4)

Becoming urban

The discovery of oil at Leduc in 1947 and the launch of nearby refineries prompted the Municipal District of Strathcona to approve a satellite community; it was located immediately south of the Smeltzer farm. Beginning in 1952, the Smeltzers began selling portions of their land to developers for this new urban centre. By 1955 the first houses were going up, with Bill Smeltzer among many, many locals who helped with the construction effort. In remarkably short order, the successful farming community known as Salisbury was transformed into Sherwood Park, one of the first “planned communities” in Canada.

In 1974, Frank and Agnes sold their home and final three acres, and moved to British Columbia to be near their sons. Wanting to retain the home’s historic presence in the community, the County of Strathcona purchased the property in 1976. A decade later, Smeltzer House was designated a provincial Registered Historic Resource; and in 2013, it was designated a Municipal Historic Resource.



“Father had a forward approach to the area and one day said to me, ‘You may not witness this, but one day this area will be connected to Edmonton by houses or industry.’ Little did I think at that time it would happen, but it is no miracle now.”

– Frank Smeltzer, 1981



Above images: Promotion of the new community centred on a “Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest” theme; Sherwood Park’s population grew rapidly to 2,900 residents in just five years.
(Strathcona County Museum and Archives)



Eliza (far left) and Frank and Maurice (far right) with visitors in front of brick house; date unknown.