

## Roe Lake pioneer: Ole Ellingston (1876-1959)

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by Sherry Stewart



In 1968, when my family and I moved to the north end of Roe Lake, we brought with us a small herd of purebred dairy goats. Neighbours would come by to meet us, and

immediately react to the goats.

"Oh! You have GOATS! So did Ole Ellingston," they would say. "This was all his land, and his cabin was right down there, just in the field a ways from the frost heave on the road." We heard all about his cabins, his goats, his long white beard, and more; and also about the frost heave (is it still there?) where, one neighbour insisted, the body of great chief had been buried.

So that was our introduction to Ole Ellingston. We learned that he was a bachelor and lived his life all alone with his goats on the land that was now ours. I would often put flowers on his grave, because he had no family and I had decided that since we were on his land, and had goats, we could be his surrogate family.

Ole was born in 1876 and died in 1959 at the age of 83. "Ellingston was a Swedish fella, came from North Dakota," Howard Malm told me recently. "He came to the Cariboo before the land was all surveyed, and he squatted on a piece of property up

around North Bridge Lake. That was about 1905.

When the property where he was squatting was surveyed off, around 1908 or 1909, it didn't get surveyed off the way he would have liked it, so he up and moved to Roe Lake, and he homesteaded there. His first homestead was the piece where the cemetery is today. His second place was your old place on Judson road where Scherrers are now.

"For a living he trapped a bit at the end of the lake, and if there was any work to be done on the road he did that too. You could at least work off your taxes that way. And he worked out winters as long as he was able. I know my dad (Ed Malm) met him when he first came to the country. They were skidding cedar poles up in the Clearwater country. He and my dad became good friends, and they also bunked together that winter up in the camp."

Chris Horn says, "One time Ole was workin' with my Uncle Gus putting up hay. Then, in the fall of the year, my uncle went into hospital, and Ellingston stayed at my uncle's place for the winter to feed his horses and cattle. He just brought his own horses over from Roe Lake and wintered them there too. Then, that next spring was when I moved on to that place and Ellingston moved out."

Howard Malm says, "He always had a bunch of beautiful Belgian horses. He



Ole Ellingston surrounded by friends. L to R: Gus Horn, Hartwig Horn (Chris Horn's dad), and Mr. and Mrs. Chris Horn visiting from South Dakota.

only had one that was broke that I'm aware of. And he didn't ride them. No one ever saw him ride. They just ran on the range winter and summer between Roe Lake and Sheridan Lake. I can remember him walkin' along, and them horses all following him like dogs.

"Then, in later years, he got a couple of goats. Well, they multiplied, and so he had a bunch of 'em. His house was a log structure, but in two parts, with what we would call a breezeway in between the two, with a sod roof over it. I remember seeing those goats up there on that roof."

Ole may be best remembered for donating the land for the Lake View Cemetery. It is said that for the rest of his life at Roe Lake, there was never a grave to be dug or filled in that Ole didn't show up with his shovel and shoulder to put into it.

When they asked him about what it felt like to have a graveyard on his property, he replied, "Well it's all right.



Ellingston's sod-roofed log cabins were in the field to the right of Judson Road in this picture, about half way between Scherrer's driveway and Bridge Creek

Them dead ones are OK, it's the live SOBs you've got to watch."

Then there was the time when they were digging a grave and Lee Hansen, one time owner of the Double T Ranch was helping. Apparently Lee was petrified of mice and during the digging a mouse ran up his pant leg. Lee started "jumping around and hollering and carrying on." Ellingston grabbed his shovel and was running behind Lee with the shovel raised, prepared to bat him on the head. Finally the mouse jumped away from Lee, Lee turned around and saw Ellingston, shovel raised, and asked him what he was going to do. Ellingston explained, "I thought you went nuts, so I was gonna do you in before somebody got hurt."

According to Marie Monette, Ole was the only man in the country who had a beard. "It was very long and very white," Marie says. "And it was always a big fascination, because nobody else that I knew had a beard, and of course kids were always curious why he had it."

"I'll tell you why Ole wore a long, long beard," Howard Malm told me. "He always said that only when the CCP (later the NDP) came into power would he shave his whiskers off. He never did shave those whiskers off." Howard remembers, "He didn't have a very broad view of politics—other than his own. And he had piles and piles of books and periodicals that he had acquired. When I'd go visit him he'd dig into that stuff, and you can imagine, a kid of my age, how interested I was in that, but I always listened anyway."

Marie Monette remembers her mother and aunts talking about what a marvelous dancer Ole was. "He always wore perfume to the dances," Marie told me. "It was something like lavender or gardenia, something like that, and the women all loved this perfume that he wore. It probably covered up some goat odour."

"By the time I knew him," Howard says, "Ole Ellingston was getting to be

an old man and crippled, I think he had a bum hip. I was in my early teens then, but I am told by all my family, the early pioneers, that in his younger years he



Ole's grave, in the cemetery he made possible

was a fine dancer, he loved to dance whenever one was held. He went there and he danced with all the ladies, but I understand that he never had a girlfriend.

"When they opened the first Roe Lake Hall—that's the one that burned, eh?—it was in the late forties. The hall was just a shell, but they hired a band for the grand opening, so everybody of course who was physically able turned out for that event. And Old Ellingston walked over from his place with his cane. So when everybody got up for the grand march, arm and arm for the grand march to open the hall, Mrs. Bell, Cora Bell, went over and she said to Ole, 'How about you get up, and you and I'll go round in the grand march.' Well, Ole said, 'I can't, 'cause I only got one leg that works.' She said, 'So what, I only got one, so between the two of us we'll be fine.' So Ole, the oldest pioneer there, got up and they led the grand march, and that was the last dance that Ole Ellingston was at."

"You could tell he was ill when he didn't come out to pick up his mail," Noveta Leavitt says. "In those days they picked up the mail at the top of the hill (corner of Judson and North Bridge Lake roads) and he had asked my husband, Frank, to bring his mail all the time. We knew that for days he hadn't been around, only once in a while.

Then Slim Grossett and Frank came along, and I had a big pot of soup and they took him a bowl of soup, and it wasn't no time at all 'till Slim Grossett was back at my house again and he wanted more soup. He said, 'He's starving to death, that's what's wrong with him, he's starving to death.'

"And when they found him he was leaning over an old wooden slotted barrel, too weak to get back out; he was digging in the bottom of that for some crackers. Frank called the police to come and do something for him and they took him to Williams Lake Hospital." As the story goes, when Ole was well enough he was transferred to a senior's home in Terrace, where he died two years later.

"When Ole died," Noveta says, "my husband got right on the phone and told that hospital that he was to be brought back here for burial. That was his wish and the community wanted it too. So they sent him on CNR to Prince George and on to the PGE to bring him down. Ole had arranged that it was paid all the way. "Howard, my nephew, went out to the Exeter Station to pick him up and they said, 'The transportation hasn't been paid, and you have to pay that transportation before we are allowed to give you this casket.'

"And Howard said, 'It was paid.'

"And they said, 'We don't have any record of it.'

"So Howard said, 'Well then, you just keep him.' And the guy didn't hesitate at all to give over that casket!"

May you rest in peace, Ole Ellingston, in that lovely corner of the old pioneer cemetery, overlooking the lake and the land where you lived for so any years. And, wherever you are, may you also hear the music and kick up your heels and dance. And, oh yes, have you heard? Your Co-operative Common-wealth Federation became the New Democratic Party and they did finally come into power!