

SRA actively representing the farmers, expropriation was no longer necessary.

The price paid immediately escalated the land prices in the area. What farmers were paid for land was handed over to another farmer farther away for land to replace it. "There was no land in the country to replace what you lost when the project started," Donna adds. "The farm was down on acres for a few years before anything became available to replace the land," adds Ron.

The reclamation of the land was a huge issue. Ken, as well as all other farmers in the area, did not want their land to look like Roche Percee when the mining was complete. They wanted the land to be returned to a farmable condition so the land would not become a wasteland and eyesore to the community. They lobbied until it was contractually agreed the topsoil would be stripped and saved, to be placed back on the top layer of the leveled land for sale or lease back to the community. It was a hard fought battle that united the community and, in retrospect, probably saved it.

Before the project, Elders had seventeen quarters of land touching quarter to quarter. When the digging began, their entire home quarter was on the list of the first land to be used. When the SaskPower Corporation (SPC) sold the mining rights to a different company, the Minolta Coal leases were in the NE direction of Coronach so SaskPower didn't take

the yard. The first digging used a half section out of the middle of their block of land, which made their travel time to the rest of their land quite onerous.

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SPC owns all of the land and has sold the mining rights to various companies over the years. Private companies cannot expropriate land, so this is the practise for obtaining land for the coal supply.

When the top soil was dropped from the bucket in the mining process, the house shook. It was symbolic of how the community shook with the changes being imposed upon it.

Elders had about half of their land base strip-mined over the years and were able to buy a section back for the first time in 2006. "The reclaimed land is not the best for grain because of the dips and dives it now contains. It is good for cattle," Ron states, "the

stripped top soil was put back, but it wasn't always spread equally. In some areas, it is pretty obvious." "There are hills where there were no hills before," Donna explains.

Some of the reclaimed land was so firmly packed by the cats or buggies or roads for the mining trucks that pounding fence posts was near impossible. Elders had one half mile section of fence that they had to use the water wand to try to make the holes. Thus some of the posts weren't set as deep as they would have liked.

Sink holes in the land are still appearing. They can be a couple of feet wide by four feet deep."The land was reclaimed in the winter, so there were big frozen lumps that never got broke up. After 30 years there are still some showing up. Dad broke the front axle of a tractor once in one," Ron shudders at the thought of how serious the accident could have been.

More recently, the SRA was able to get a First Right of Refusal agreement passed. This was something the first SRA could not get accomplished in the early years of negotiation. This allows the families affected the opportunity to purchase land back that has been in the family. "If you lost a family homestead, you should be able to have the first chance at buying it back," says Michael.

Now reclaimed land prices go on assessment. Elders have bought four quarters back and lease another ten and are back to their original land base plus some. They crop eighteen

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Grazing on reclaimed land





*Above: Reclaimed land and water - This photo shows the rolling hills and ponds of the reclaimed land being used for pasture
Left: The rolling hills and water holes on the reclaimed land*

quarters, graze twenty-four quarters and hay six quarters. "It used to be a year to year tender on the leases. It was just impossible to do improvements because you didn't know if you would have it the next year. Now five year leases are available, so you have incentive to invest in land improvements since you know it will be yours long enough to see a return on the investment," Ron explains. "We paid dearly for the first time bid on the lease. But when it comes up for renewal, it is at a renewal price, which makes it more reasonable. Now it is feasible to fence it and use it however we like."

SPC still owns the land with dewatering wells. "The coal was full of water, so they started pumping it off. When the first pumping began,

our well was the first home well that went dry and the water negotiations began," Ron remembers. Elders had excellent quality water without any filtration system and an abundance of it. After the well went dry, the SRA started negotiating and it was agreed that SPC had the responsibility to make sure the farm had a water supply forever. "Grandpa fought hard for this," states Michael.

"We had such good water, now we have more water filtration equipment in the basement than you can imagine. They have dug five or six wells on Elder land to find a sufficient supply. The current well supplying the farm is a half mile south of the yard and is 130-140 feet deep," says Ron.

"Now if we have water trouble, after checking the obvious things, we

call SPC and they have a contractor come to investigate and repair any problems at the well," Donna adds.

When the digging began, Ken was farming with four sons. During the 1980s drought and the start of the SaskPower land purchases, there just wasn't enough land base to support all the families. Lloyd got a job at the mine, Carl got a job at the power plant and Floyd farmed with his father-in-law for a few years before buying a restaurant in Coronach. Ron stayed on the farm with Ken. Donna started with SPC in 1979 at the camp office during construction of the second power plant. She transferred to the mine, then the plant, where she has spent the majority of her 35 years of service. Judy worked as a lab technician for fifteen years at the plant and is now an Electrician

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Michael and the cows





Top & Center: Roche Percee, where the land was never reclaimed
Bottom: Haying on reclaimed land, there were no hills here before the mining

Apprentice within the company. This is common with many families in the area. There was employment for good money close to home and it kept people in the area and kept the town alive. Without it, Coronach and surrounding towns would be next to non-existent. All in all, it has been good for the area.

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Elders had between fifty and sixty commercial cows in the late seventies. Now they are breeding 320, half purebred and half commercial. The family operation now consists of Mel (Ron’s Mom), Ron and Donna, Michael and Judy and their three children, Cassidi, Keanan and Klay.

They bought their first purebreds in 1991 and the KLR tattoo was born. It stands for Ken and his two sons Lloyd and Ron. They were looking for a Charolais bull and talked to their neighbours, the Planz family, who were using Charolais bulls and were pleased with the results. They were sent to Darneth Charolais to buy a bull. During the conversation, they mentioned they were looking for a few more commercial cows. Ken Plewis suggested they buy purebreds and they ended up with nine cow/calf pairs and ten bred heifers.

Michael had been working in Alberta and came home to help with harvest in 1999 and got a job in town at the machine shop for the winter. In 2000, he leased some cows from Ken and Mel, his grandparents, and has been a full-time part of the operation ever since. Ken died unexpectedly in 2001, but Mel continues to be involved in the operation. She helps with the food at the bull sales and is often out checking on the newborn

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Elder Charolais received the 2009 Saskatchewan Charolais Breeder of the Year Award

calves or the crops. Her interest in the operation has not wavered. If you stop in for coffee, you can bet the baking on the table came from the hands of Grandma Mel.

Lloyd decided to keep only his commercial cows and sell his purebreds to Ron and Donna in 2000. He is a strong supporter of the Elder Charolais Bull Sale each year.

After the commitment to start in the purebred business, Elders bought many females across the country from many sales. Those who shared Ron's keen eye for quality cattle didn't own them without paying what they were worth.

“ **He was the Grand Champion Bull at Ag-Ex in Brandon in 1996, the Elder's first appearance on the show road.** ”

The first high profile bull they purchased for their purebred cows was A-Jay's Mercury 73D (HTA Whitehot 105A x NOR Mystique 14X). He was a high performance bull

and produced some very powerful cows in the herd. There are still a few in the herd. He was the Grand Champion Bull at Ag-Ex in Brandon in 1996, the Elder's first appearance on the show road. The success didn't stop there. At the same show, they also had Grand Champion Female, with KLR Elder's Diamond 701F, the first Mercury calf born on the Elder Charolais Farm.

Although the success of two Grand Champions has not been matched again, Elders have been very competitive on the show road. They have bred and exhibited many winners including Reserve Grand

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A-Jay's Mercury 73D, Grand Champion Bull at Ag-Ex 1996 and Reserve Senior Champion at Agribition



KLR Elder's Diamond 701F, Grand Champion Female at Ag-Ex 1996



Grants Playboy 3X, a main herdsire at Elder Charolais



KLR 20Y - one of their typical two-year old females

Champion female at Canadian Western Agribition. Over the years, their cattle have always brought top prices at the sales too. You buy top end cattle, you sell top end cattle.

Over the years, they have owned and used well-known bulls like Silverado, Kaboom, Wahkamo, Canyon and Playboy, to name a few.

This spring they held their 4th Annual Bull Sale on the farm with great success. The sale has been building with many repeat customers and purebred breeders from across Canada and into the U.S.A. being on the buyers' list. They clean out their calving barn and have a power point sale the end of March, which has worked very well for them.

They enjoy the show road and meeting all of the people in the industry. It has been a good way to

build the profile of their herd. "We spent a lot of time getting really good pictures of the cattle we offered for sale and it always paid off. Brent Thiel came up to me at Agribition once and commented on the quality

of our pictures. A few days after the catalogue goes in the mail, we always get a call from Adolph Hollus in BC," Ron and Donna state. The pictures have been a key part in their marketing success.



The SCA Board of Directors elected Donna as President in 2013



Poplar River Power Plant

In 2001, Michael showed his first animal. He had never participated in 4-H and was pretty leery about doing it. Donna just told him to go watch some of the best in the ring and see what they do. He started in a jackpot class where everybody was walking through the cattle, so it wasn't very intimidating.

Now Michael and Judy's children participate in 4-H and Cassidy is attending her fourth CCYA.

This year Keanan's steer weighed 1280 lb. and was purchased by Rocking W Machine Shop, of Coronach for \$4 at the regional show in Swift Current. Cassidy's weighed