

## Mink Ranching and Fishing in Lac La Biche

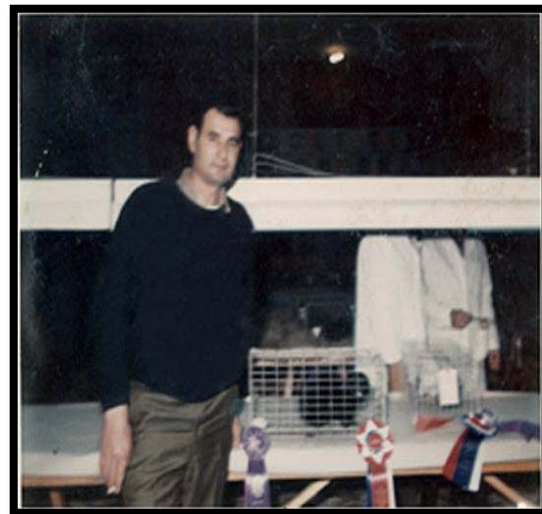
When the Lebanese first arrived in the Lac La Biche region around the turn of the century, they came as travelling fur traders, crossing the Athabasca divide on their way to the Arctic. In 1905 Sine AbouChadi and his nephew Ali AbouChadi arrived and settled in the region, opening a small store and trading post. Most of the Lebanese who followed them in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did the same thing, for example, Saeed Hesham was a young man who had a trading post in the Craigen area (situated on the Stefanyk farm on the Elinor Lake road). Sadly he was robbed and murdered and his trading post was burnt down. He was buried at the Lac La Biche Mission cemetery.

Lebanese pioneers like Sine Alley Abougoush and Frank Coutney were the first to raise furs domestically. They started with beaver, marten and fox, however mink were much easier to raise and much more lucrative after World War II so they eventually changed to mink ranching. Lac La Biche was an ideal place to raise mink because of the plentiful supply of tulibee in the lake that were used to feed the mink. The next generation of Lebanese immigrants followed in their footsteps and most of the families began raising mink. These included people like Mike Fyith, who came from Slave Lake with his mink when the fish supply petered out there. Others included Sam Asiff, Ahmed Abou Chehadi, Abe Zrein, Yousef Fayad, Albert Fyith, Mohammad Eludin, Chaffic Moghrabi, and Hassan Taha among many others.

At the peak there were over 20 Lebanese families who were raising mink. Frank Nashim, Ameen Abougoush and Jimmy Tarrabain raised some of the best mink stock in Canada, if not the world. Their mink would win most of the breeding stock shows in Canada.



Jimmy Tarrabain Family - Pelting Mink



Ameen Abougoush – Mink Show Awards

Like any farming, mink ranching was a hard life where you needed to work seven days a week feeding, watering and cleaning and tending to a very fragile animal. It took the whole family to care for the animals. During pelting time I remember many a long

night when our whole family was an assembly line preparing the mink pelts before shipping them off to auction houses in Montreal or Vancouver.

One huge advantage of mink ranching was that it kept the family together allowing the children to more easily retain the morals, language and culture of their ancestors. When the mink fur prices fell, and the tulibee population in Lac La Biche Lake collapsed in the early 70's, most of the mink ranchers found other ways to make a living. This included businesses and professions. Lebanese parents put a huge value on education and pushed their kids hard to get a secondary education and a profession if they could afford it. As a result, over the years there have been many Lebanese valedictorians graduating from J.A.Williams high school, but no more mink ranchers.



