

Experiences of a Homesteader

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When I was a small boy, I read a book called "Cedar Creek." It was the story of two English lads who went to Canada, took up homesteads somewhere or other in that strange far away land, chopped down big trees in a "primeval forest," caught great trout in the creek, shot deer, worked hard, had a good time and by and by became rich and prosperous farmers. I made up my mind before I had read half way through that book, that one day I would go to Canada and do as they did. The only thing I did not like about those boys was that they made the hired man whom they took with them – the son of an old servant of their family, if I remember rightly – wait for his meals until they had finished. It seemed to me that he was the best man of the three. He could cook, and do lots of other useful things that they were not able to do, he saved them from all kinds of trouble, and I thought that he should have had a more prominent place in the story than they gave him.

As I have said, I was a small boy when the ambition to become a Canadian farmer first took possession of me, and though it was a dozen years or more before I bade farewell to my English home, that idea never left me. Meanwhile I finished my schooling, went to work in a printing office and became a newspaper reporter. This did not particularly fit me for chopping down big trees, but the boys of Cedar Creek had not done any hard work before they went to their Canadian homesteads and I thought that I could grow big muscles and learn to swing an axe just as they had done. Well, I haven't chopped down big trees in a "primeval forest" yet – there are none on my homestead – but I have grubbed willow roots and dug wells, which was just as good a muscle maker, though not nearly so romantic to read about.

I Arrive at Winnipeg

I landed in Winnipeg on May 5, 1905. I was twenty-four years of age and had English money worth \$30.00 in my pocket. I have some of those English coins yet. I got off the train, as I shall always remember, on top of the C.P.R. subway, shortly before noon, and looked down at the gateway city of the great west I had come to seek my fortune in. A belated snowstorm had visited Winnipeg the night before, and Main Street, which badly needed a new pavement in those days, was a mass of black mud. So far as I knew, I had not a friend in the city and as I stood there wondering where I should go first, the prospect was not inviting.

At the Immigration Hall

However, I had read about the immigration hall, how kindly immigrants were treated there, and what good jobs the officials found for people wanting work, so I went there. They couldn't give me a job just then, but would have one for me in a few days, they said, so I registered my name, previous occupation and so forth, and sat around awhile and talked to others who were

situated like myself and to some who had been out on farms and had come back disappointed. Of course, those who were satisfied with the jobs that had been found them did not come back, so I was not much discouraged by the bad reports of the unsuccessful ones. The immigration hall did not look an inviting place to stay in – it has been improved since, I believe – so I went to a boarding house on Selkirk Avenue, the address of which I got from a dodger handed me outside the C. P. R. depot. This place was in the foreign part of the city and was no better than the immigration hall, but I did not find that out until I had paid a week's board in advance, so I stayed. The day I arrived in Winnipeg I met two old school mates from home, and you may be sure it did my heart good to see them. They were both doing well; one had his parents and brothers and sisters with him, and I felt strongly tempted to try and secure a position in the city and stay with them.

But I had come to Canada to be a farmer, so I went to the immigration hall each day and looked for a job. After four days waiting, as I was sitting in the immigration hall, I heard the official announce that a farmer wanted an inexperienced Englishman. He got one. Me. He lived at Carman, 57 miles out from Winnipeg. I was to get \$15.00 for the first month and after that we could make a new bargain if we were both satisfied. I went out with my new boss next day, but we were not satisfied, either of us. If I were to tell you all about that farmer, and how he treated me, the editor would probably be sued for criminal libel, so we will let that go, but after planting five acres of potatoes, digging I don't know how many acres of garden with a spade, and getting kicked by all his horses and cows, not to speak of losing all the skin off my hands, I returned to Winnipeg with \$7.50 for half a month's work, and the belief that one Canadian farmer, at least, was not fit to have any man, white, black or yellow, working for him. He gave me one word of praise, though, which I must not forget. He saw me one noon-hour stretched luxuriously upon the manure pile and he remarked, "Well that Jack is the comfortablest rester I ever had around the place." I hope he will see this article, so that he will know I did not starve to death the first winter, as he predicted, and perhaps hoped, I should. However, I did not think the Canadian farmers could be all alike, and went out of Winnipeg the day after I arrived, this time to Union Point, Man., from where a shipmate had written saying he had a good job and could find me one near him.

\$12 a Month

I got there at night, and the next morning started to work. I hadn't a very big idea of my own worth on a farm, and only asked for \$12.00 a month, which my new boss agreed to give me till the freeze up. I found out afterwards that I could have got better pay if I had asked for it, but I was well treated and learned a good deal about farming, how to care for horses, how to plow and seed and harrow, to pitch hay and build stooks and stacks, and also how to get up early and keep on working till late at night. I stayed there till winter began and then went back to Winnipeg, without much money but a lot of experience, which I knew would be valuable when I took up my homestead. I worked in Winnipeg that winter and went to Prince Albert in the

spring, wishing to get nearer the homestead country, but determined to stay in town till I had made enough to make a fairly good start when I should take up land.

The Doukhobor Land Rush

In June, 1907, a large number of homesteads, which had been held by Doukhobors for about eight years, but had not been lived upon or cultivated by them, were thrown open to the public, and I thought this an excellent chance to get an extra good piece of land. I accordingly visited the locality and inspected the lands, making a list of the best sections in three townships, knowing from the number of people I saw on the same errand that it would be no easy matter to secure any particular quarter.

The rush for the Doukhobor lands was all that I expected. A crowd camped on the steps and sidewalk outside the land office at Prince Albert each afternoon, stayed there all night, and in the morning fought among themselves and against new comers to see who should be first at the counter to secure the choice locations. I watched the proceedings for ten days, during which time a strong board fence was built on the sidewalk enclosing a space about two feet wide and twenty feet long outside the land office, and then made my effort to get in the front rank. A party of us; strangers to each other before then but firm friends ever since, joined together and formed a line, with an experienced football scrimmager of 250 lbs. at our head, and after an hour's rib-cracking struggle forced our way between the wall of the land office and the crowd of 300 men who swarmed and sweated around the entrance to the enclosure. There we held our ground until 5 p.m. when we were admitted behind the fence.

A Weary Vigil

Thus protected we stayed patiently – or impatiently – through the night, some sleeping unconcernedly on the concrete sidewalk, while the rest, myself included, sat on top of the fence or on improvised seats, sleepless and anxious for the morning. We filed on our homesteads at last, I being twelfth man at the counter out of forty who secured homesteads in one township that day. Although I filed in June, I did not enter into possession of my land until November. I was not ready, financially, to go on the land immediately, buy oxen or horses and start work, and by waiting till fall I was able to save some money, and also to spend a whole year on the homestead and be putting in residence duties practically all the time, from December, 1907, to June 1908, being the last six of my first homestead year, and from June, 1908 to December, 1908, the first six months of the second year.

A 75 Mile Trek

Three of my future neighbours were starting out at the same time, and as two of them had a team of horses each they doubled up and hauled out a big load of supplies for the party, filling a hay rack with tent, stoves, bedding, groceries, a little bit of furniture, doors, window sash, roofing and everything that was absolutely necessary to build and furnish our shacks except lumber, which we got from a portable saw mill which was working nearer to the homesteads.

At that time my place was 35 miles from the nearest railway station, Duck Lake, and going from Prince Albert by trail we had a trip of about 75 miles to make. We travelled by the old Carlton and Battleford trail, stopped at a farmhouse the first night out, and if all had gone well should have camped near our future homes the following day.

At the River

When we reached Carlton, where we had to cross the North Saskatchewan, however, we found so much ice in the river that the ferry could not run. There was nothing to do but wait till the river froze up, so we pitched the tent and camped near the crossing. It was no picnic watching the ice cakes grow larger and finally freeze up solid, but after six days the ice was strong enough to bear light loads and we then unloaded the wagon, carried our stuff across, lead the horses one at a time, and pushed the wagon over.

Reaching the Promised Land

We camped that night on the homestead of my neighbor Shepley, the next quarter to my own, and in the morning two of us started to dig a cellar in the frozen ground while the other two went for lumber. The only lumber to be had was rough lumber and flooring, so we took five inch flooring for the sides of the shacks, and three inch for the floors. At first we used only one ply of boards, putting thick felt building paper outside the studding, tar paper over that and then the boards. For roofing we used paroid, a tar material costing about the same as shingles, and much easier to put on in cold weather. It was cold, too, and I don't think any of us really enjoyed those first days on the homestead. In June, when I went over the land, the prairie looked its best. The grass was green and luxuriant, wild flowers grew everywhere; an occasional bluff of poplars gave a welcome shade from the sun, and each of the little sloughs dotted here and there on the rolling prairie had its family of wild ducks that had never heard a gunshot and were not afraid of men.

A Changed Scene

Now in November all was different. Prairie fires had burned off all the grass for miles around, leaving the earth bare and black. The bluffs looked thin, and many of them contained but the charred remains of young trees. The sloughs were dry or frozen to the bottom, and the cold wind swept a chill to one's bones. While we were putting up the first house we slept in the tent, but as we had fur coats and lots of blankets we kept warm at night and in the day time we kept our blood in circulation by hard work. I was cook, and operated in an outdoor kitchen equipped with a heating stove, tea kettle, pot and frying pan. Beef, beans, frozen potatoes and frozen bread made by the Doukhobors, who had a village two miles away, were the chief items on the menu, but working outdoors all day supplied the relish the cook failed to impart to the fare. In four days we had Shepley's house, which he made 14x20 feet, with ten foot walls and a peak roof, near enough to completion to move in, and we then had a little more comfort. Shacks similarly constructed were put up for each member of the party in turn, I being content

with a modest structure, 12x14 feet, with eight foot walls, two large windows and peak roof, with a ceiling of stout building paper.

Winter Building Costly

At \$22 a thousand for rough lumber and \$30 a thousand for flooring, this cost me \$75 for material, the lumber costing about \$50 and the roofing, sash, doors, nails, paper and other finish \$25. My own labor, and that of my neighbors, which I repaid by helping them, was worth about another \$50. The work could probably be done for half that cost in warm weather, but driving nails and tacking up tar paper is slow and unpleasant work in zero weather with a forty mile wind blowing. When all of our party had shelter over our heads, I settled down to put in the winter as comfortably as possible. My shack was quite warm as long as I kept a fire going, but as I did not attempt to keep the fire on during the night the temperature was often down to zero by morning. I had at first only one stove, a small cast iron box heater with two holes in the top, on which I could boil and fry, and above this, fitted into the stove pipes, was a tin drum oven in which I baked small things, such as pies and biscuits, and which also helped to warm the shack.

Lazy but Comfortable

The stove stood in the centre of the room, and it was my custom before retiring at night to cook next day's porridge in a double boiler and leave it and the tea kettle on the stove. Then I prepared shavings, kindling and stouter wood, and left them handy to the stove. In the morning everything in the shack would be frozen solid, but I could light the fire without getting out of bed and so stayed under the blankets until the shack was warm, the kettle boiling and the porridge steaming hot. As I had no animals to care for, I had no outdoor work to do except to provide myself with fuel. For while I got sufficient dry wood from the bluffs near the shack, which I hauled home on a hand sleigh which I made from willows, and when I had used up all that was within easy distance I bought a big load of dry poplar for \$6.00 from a neighbor, who cut it from unoccupied land about 16 miles away. At first I carried water from a neighbor's well, nearly a mile from home, and when I stepped in a badger hole just outside my front door one dark night, and fell and spilled a pail of water, I am afraid I said something that would not look well in a Sunday School paper. Later I got water by melting snow. It takes about ten pails of snow to make one pail of water, so I was pretty busy on washing day, but there was plenty of time.

No Need to be Lonesome

My city friends have often asked me if I did not feel terribly lonesome, living all by myself in my little shack all winter, but I did not. Some men, I know, feel the lonesomeness, and to them a winter on the prairie, even though they have company, must seem interminable. I have read of such men going insane, though in a pretty wide acquaintance of homesteaders, I never knew one who lost his reason. People also go crazy in town, and I doubt if there are not just as many in proportion become insane through dissipation in the cities as through loneliness on the

prairie. I know, too, that many who were on the high road to ruin through drink and drug habits who have been regenerated and become new men through the wholesome surroundings and healthy life of the farm. There is no reason, however, why a homesteader should pass weeks at a time, as some do, without seeing a friendly face. I made it a rule that winter not to stay at home alone more than one day at a time.

The Grain Growers Guide December 13, 1911 p 8

If I stayed home one day, without having a visitor, I went off visiting next day, travelling around the country on snow shoes and getting acquainted with my neighbors for miles around. Twice a week I went to the post office, six miles away, for mail, and on Sundays a few of the neighbors would gather at one of the homes for service in which singing and not preaching was the chief feature.

We Get a "School Marm"

Then I busied myself in connection with the organization of a new school district, of which I was one of the first trustees, and the erection of a school-house and the engaging of a teacher. I succeeded in persuading my fellow trustees that we should not be doing justice to the children (not to speak of the bachelors of the district) if we engaged a male teacher, and if the very charming young lady who came from Ontario to take charge of the school was as fond of male company as she appeared to be, she must have had a good time. She had at least ten proposals that summer, but turned them all down. In the busiest season someone was sure to have an errand that would take him past the schoolhouse about the time the children were dismissed, and then, of course, duty and pleasure alike required him to see her home. After the schoolhouse was built services were held there every Sunday, the Church of England and Presbyterian "missionaries" taking turns in conducting the services. Some of the first pupils at our school were Doukhobor children, and though the school cost considerable, both in time and money (the annual school tax comes to \$8 a quarter section), we were well repaid in seeing the little "Douks" learning English, playing baseball, and making a start towards becoming good Canadian citizens.

Schools for the Doukhobors

Since then schoolhouses have been built all through that section. The Doukhobors have shown themselves very anxious to have their children educated, and one school, which I had the pleasure of helping to organize, started off with an attendance of 23 children, only two of whom could speak English when the school opened.

The rest of the winter I spent quietly in my little shack, trying experiments in the cooking line, and reading Ruskin, Henry George, Dickens and the current farm and weekly papers.

Altogether I enjoyed the winter, but still I was not sorry when spring came and I was able to begin the work of improving and cultivating my homestead. The first thing was to dig a well,

which I began before the snow was entirely gone. This necessitated picking through six feet of frozen ground, which seemed as hard as solid rock, but time was not of much value then and I took a week to dig the first six feet, working a few hours each day. Then I got assistance in hauling up the dirt and soon had the well finished, only having to go down about 16 feet for a good supply of pure water. I finished off the well with a square crib of lumber, and a good tight cover, and hung a pulley over it on a tripod of poplar trees.

A Yoke of Oxen

When the snow was gone I got a yoke of well-broken oxen from a Doukhobor, paying \$120 for the team and harness, and a walking plow, with breaker and stubble bottoms, for \$28. Before beginning to plow, however, I had to clear out some of the poplar bluffs and willow patches, which, though they did not cover a large area – probably not more than 10 acres of the 160 – were scattered all over the quarter-section, so that it was impossible to plow a straight half mile furrow without taking some of them out. The poplars were easy to clear, and made good firewood when they had dried for a few weeks, but grubbing willows, some of which have roots a foot thick and a yard square, with branches going off in every direction underground, is slow, hard work.

I had built the shack in the southeast corner of the homestead, facing the road allowance on the south, and with sheltering bluffs of young poplar on the north, east and west. Leaving these bluffs, and a few trees along the boundary lines, I first cleared and then broke ten acres near the shack.

Slow but Sure

Plowing with oxen is slow work at best, and until I got used to the brutes, and they got used to me, I worked just about as hard as they did. Often it took over an hour to make a round, turning over a strip twelve inches wide and a mile long, and I thought I was doing pretty well when I plowed over an acre in a day. The great advantage of oxen is that beside costing so much less than horses they require very little grain, and some people manage to keep them working on nothing but grass. As all the grass in that district had been burned off the previous fall, however, I had to buy some hay, which I got from the “Douks” – who were universal providers for the district while we were making a start – and when the oxen were working I fed them a little chop, whole oats not doing them much good as they failed to chew and digest them.

When I had ten acres plowed, toward the end of May, I hired a man with horses and machinery to disk and seed it with flax, the cost being \$5 for disking, \$5 for seeding and \$5 for seed, flax then being worth only \$1 a bushel, and half a bushel to the acre being sown.

The Boys Arrive

At the end of May my brother and a cousin arrived to spend the summer with me. I walked the 35 miles to Duck Lake to meet them, wearing my best clothes and a rubber collar, the first I had had on for nearly six months. I think they were surprised at that collar, for I had always been something of a dandy at home, but they did not say anything. We went out with a hired team, and when we got "home," and they had looked around the little shack and seen me discard my collar and Sunday best and put on my old brown overalls, they looked at one another as much as to say "What kind of a place have we been enticed to now?" However, when they had got well tanned by the sun and had torn their clothes in the bush they got into overalls too and soon looked as disreputable as I did. They turned in and worked too, though I couldn't pay them any wages, and I was glad both of their company and their help.

I Get a Cook

My brother and I took turns at plowing and grubbing while our cousin – who was in search of health, and found it too – was installed as cook, housekeeper and milkmaid, a cook stove and a cow, the latter costing me only \$25, being added to the establishment when the boys arrived. In our spare time, or perhaps I should say when we were too tired to do anything else, we put in a few potatoes, onions, lettuce, radishes and other garden stuff, and though the gophers, which were a great pest till we poisoned a lot of them off, got more out of the garden than we did, this enabled the cook to vary our diet somewhat. The cook made very creditable bread too. Of course he made a mistake occasionally, and turned out a wonderful batch of biscuits one day when we had company, by using cream of tartar instead of baking powder.

Financial Stringency

By midsummer I was just about "broke." I had \$500 in cash when I started homesteading, the rest of my savings having been invested in town lots, but this was now all gone and nothing coming in but \$10 a month on some lots I had sold, and this was hardly enough to pay the store bill, and for expenses such as sharpening plow shares, food for the oxen, and so forth. A homesteader can get along without much money, however, and I went to work for neighbors who had horses and machinery, grubbing and breaking for them in return for discing and cutting of my flax, and by fall I had thirty acres broken and disced besides the ten acres to flax. The flax, unfortunately, did not turn out well. The summer was dry, and it did not grow long enough to cut with a binder, and had to be mowed and raked and stacked like hay, a good deal being wasted in consequence. Then when threshing time came, my little crop had to wait till last, and finally the machine pulled out and left it. However, I was determined to get all there was in my first crop, so I spread it on the ground after the freeze-up, laying it out in a circle and driving the slow but faithful oxen over it, and then lifting off the straw and putting the flax and chaff through a fanning mill, borrowed of course. Finally I got twenty bushels of flax, which I sold to the local store-keeper for \$1 a bushel. Thus my first crop realized just \$5.00 more than it had cost me for seed, discing and seeding. My own labor of breaking and threshing and what

I did in return for the cutting brought me only \$5.00 and what is more, the land that the flax grew on has produced very poor crops of wheat since. The chief reason for the failure probably was the dry summer, but I have learnt since that the best authorities do not recommend the sowing of flax the same year as the land is broken, except in heavy land and then only when discing and seeding are done immediately after breaking before the soil has a chance to dry out.

Altogether I put in a strenuous summer. Grubbing willows is a back-breaking job and it was all we could do to get enough land cleared to keep ahead of the plowing, slow though the oxen were. The oxen did as well as could be expected, but I certainly had my troubles with them. On hot days the poor brutes were sometimes in such distress that I could not make them work. When they came to the end of the furrow nearest the house they would make straight for the well, and there was no getting them back again. Then when the mosquitoes were bad, they often became almost unmanageable, and once they bolted for a bluff dragging the plow on the dead run with me hanging on to the lines and shouting "Whoa," I might as well have tried to stop a locomotive. The mosquitoes tormented me too, and on more than one occasion I let the oxen go and put in the day grubbing in a smudge with they also came around and enjoyed.

Sport with the Ducks and Geese

Harvest, which is the busy time of the established farmer, was a holiday for us beginners, and in September we enjoyed good sport shooting ducks and geese, with prairie chickens for a change when October came. At the opening of the season the ducks and chickens were so tame it seemed a shame to kill them, but after a while they became very wild and it took considerable skill to get near enough for a shot. I remember one day when we were completely out of meat and I had no money to buy more, and only half a dozen cartridges were left. I started out with my gun, promising the boys I would not come back till I got something. Everybody was packing a gun wherever he went at that time, and the ducks and chickens were so scared that they seemed able to smell a hunter half a mile away. However, there was a large slough two miles from home where I had seen before a large flock of geese and without venturing to look to see if there were any there, I lay down flat about a quarter of a mile from the water and wriggled on my stomach through the long grass. As I got near I heard a "honk, honk" and when I parted the grass at the edge of the lake, I saw fully five hundred geese swimming around in the water and not one hundred yards away. It was a pretty sight, especially to a hungry man. I must confess, I was not sportsman enough to make them fly before I shot, but banged away into the middle of them and got three with my first shot, and two more with the second barrel as the geese rose and filled the air. I waded into the mud and water to get them and used the rest of my cartridges to put the finishing touch on some of the geese that were only wounded. And what a reception I got when I arrived home staggering under my burden! I have shot bigger bags before and since, but I never did another bit of shooting that gave me quite so much satisfaction.

December 20, 1913 p. 19 & f 28

As a Hired Girl

An experience I shall not soon forget was a couple of weeks at threshing time when I took on the job of cooking for the gang. Homesteaders have to work at all kinds of jobs sometimes, but they have not all had the distinction of working out as a "hired girl." It was stook threshing and there were twenty men on the job, including the bachelor farmer for whom I first cooked and his men, and though the thresherman's appetite is proverbial, I never realized before how much food men could really eat. I prepared the day before the threshers arrived by baking a big batch of apple and raisin pies – not "like mother used to make" but solid and substantial at least – and a bushel or so of doughnuts, which did not prove so satisfying. The outfit started work at 6 a.m., so breakfast, consisting of beefsteak and potatoes had to be ready at five, which meant that I had to be on the job at four. I cooked roast beef for dinner and boiled beef for supper, with potatoes, cabbage and turnips from the garden, and pie or apple sauce, prunes or rice pudding at each meal. Supper was at seven, so that the men were working out doors for twelve hours a day besides doing their chores, and they had a right to be hungry. But while they worked twelve hours, I put in seventeen with hardly a minute that I was not on the go. The actual cooking did not seem a great deal of work, but the jobs of dish washing and potato peeling and the constant trips for water to a well a quarter of a mile away, made me glad I was not a woman all the time. I made quite a hit as a cook though, and my fame evidently spread, for when the outfit moved on after a week's work the next farmer they went to got me to go along and help his wife. Sleeping accommodation was scarce and at night when the supper dishes were washed, potatoes peeled, steak cut and wood made ready for the morning, I found myself a resting place on a pile of bagged potatoes, in the log stable in the stall next to old "Dan" who used to be a trotting stallion, but now helps pull the plow. Potatoes may be considered a hard bed, but if they were, I did not know it, for I had no sooner lain down, it seemed to me, before I saw a lantern flash and heard someone say, "Ho, Cookie- quarter of four – get up."

Xmas on the Homestead

I was away from the homestead for six weeks in the early winter, earning a few much needed dollars, and so had to remain until the end of January to complete my second year's residence duties. This, of course, meant Christmas on the homestead. I had spent the previous Christmas on the prairie, but that was shortly after I had commenced homesteading and when I was full enough of enthusiasm to enjoy anything that had the spice of novelty about it. The first Christmas day I spent at the home of my friend Shepley, with three other bachelor guests. It was different from any Christmas I had ever spent before, but not the least enjoyable by any means. We had very little of the usual paraphernalia of Christmastime. There was no Christmas tree, no holly, no mistletoe, and no girls to kiss under it if there had been. But what really counts at Christmas is a spirit of goodwill, a good dinner and a good appetite to enjoy it. We had all of these. Shepley had been to town and might have stayed there over the festive

season, but he would not disappoint the rest of us, and came back the night before with a pair of nice fat ducks and a plum pudding. We all contributed something to the bill of fare, and took turns at cooking and sawing wood outside so that all should have appetites appropriate to the occasion. Chicken soup preceded the roast duck, and plum pudding and mince pies followed, and the feeling of sweet content that seemed to steal over us all when we drew around the stove after dinner, made us forget the homesickness which we all no doubt felt, but which no one spoke about.

The second Christmas was different. We had by this time extended our acquaintance considerably, and had discovered that there were some ladies living in the neighborhood after all. We started to celebrate on Christmas Eve, and with two teams and sleighs gathered up a merry party of nearly twenty. We first went to a Doukhobor village, and with one of the ladies of the party dressed as Santa Claus, beard and all, visited each house leaving toys for the children and having a great time generally. Then we went off to another village, where the Catholic members of the party attended service before we returned home in the early hours of the morning. The festivities were renewed as soon as we had had a few hours' sleep and had done our chores, and the whole neighborhood started on a round of visits which lasted till the New Year.

Social Life on the Prairie

Sometimes a bunch of a dozen or more would descend unannounced upon some unsuspecting bachelor just as he was preparing for bed and proceed to make ourselves at home in his shack. In case his pantry should not be well supplied, we always took some eatables along, as well as a few packs of cards and usually some kind of musical instrument. When travelling on the prairie at night one is apt to get lost, so being careful people we generally waited for daylight and breakfast before dispersing. Those were good times, and no one who has not taken part in the social life of a prairie settlement can understand how enjoyable it can be made.

When I went to town in the fall, I had sold the cow and a newly arrived calf, and disposed of the oxen for the winter by lending them to another homesteader, who undertook to care for them till spring in return for the use of them in hauling logs, fence posts and firewood from the bush. I could not get what I considered a fair price for the cow and calf in cash, which was a very scarce article in that district then, so I sold them for twelve acres of breaking to be done the following summer, this work being worth \$36 at the price prevailing in the district.

Putting in the Crop

At the beginning of February, having two years' duties done, I went to Winnipeg, where I worked at various jobs until spring. I saved a little money during this time, sold some lots which I had bought before I homesteaded, and with all the money I could scrape up returned to the farm in time for seeding. I bought another yoke of oxen, horses still being beyond my means, and got an old seeder cheap from a man who was buying a new one. Then when I had seeded my forty acres with wheat I went to work breaking again, and with four oxen on the plow made

better time than the previous summer, sometimes turning over two acres a day. I hired a man for a short time to help with the grubbing. I was alone most of the summer, however, and having to do my own cooking, as well as put in a long day in the field, made me heartily sick of batching. Except on Sundays, which was washing day about once a month, I never gave myself time to cook proper meals, and in the evenings there was always something to be fixed or an errand to do. To drive the oxen to the store and back, a journey of twelve miles, took half a day and I did most of my errands on a bicycle after supper.

A Good Harvest

That summer for the first time I went into debt. The fact that I had oxen, which were paid for, and a crop growing, and had nearly completed my homestead duties, enabled me to get credit at the store and also to buy some machinery and lumber on time. My first purchases were a disk, harrow, a binder and a wagon. I also put up a rough stable for the oxen and a small granary, and bought a dozen hens which kept me supplied with eggs. I broke sixty acres that summer, including twenty acres that I plowed for another man at \$3 an acre, and got it all well disked and harrowed by harvest time. My crop turned out well, averaging 24 bushels to the acre in spite of the fact that the land where I had grown flax the year before yielded very little. This gave me nearly 1,000 bushels of wheat which graded No. 2 Northern, and I thus had almost 850 bushels to sell after providing for next year's seed. A new railroad had been built to within fourteen miles of my place since I homesteaded, and I hauled enough of the wheat right after the freeze up to pay my debts, including the first payment on my machinery, and then sold the four oxen for \$200, payable in the spring, and went to town for the winter. When I came back again I did not consider myself a homesteader any longer, but a full blown farmer. I was not a bachelor either – but that is another story.