

Wakopa

Reminiscences of an Early Homesteader: By Alex Rankin

In the days of which I write, Wakopa was the metropolis of the Turtle Mountain district. There council met and parliamentary nominations were made. At our first political meeting Arthur Rollins was asked the question, "What are the boundaries of your constituency?" To which he replied, "They begin at Clearwater, on the East and end at sundown on the West."

Harrison Bros. saw mill was built in 1879. Later on they built a grist mill, George Bennett, a freighter, brought in the first and second pairs of stones for this mill from Emerson. One of these trips was made with oxen. I have made trips to Nelsonville for grists in September 1881. Also to Glenora, Crystal City, Deloraine and Wawanesa.



MAIL CONTRACT!

SEALED TENDERS, addressed to the Postmaster General, will be received at Ottawa until noon, on 26th September, 1884, for the conveyance of Her Majesty's Mails, on a proposed contract for four years, once per week each way, between Turtle Mountain and Wakopa, from the 1st November next.

The conveyance to be made in a suitable vehicle. The Mails to leave Turtle Mountain every Monday at 8:00 a. m. and arrive at Wakopa at 2:00 p. m. Leave Wakopa every Tuesday at 8:00 a. m. and arrive at Turtle Mountain at 2 p. m.

Printed notices containing further information as to conditions of proposed contract may be seen, and blank forms of tender may be obtained at the post offices of Turtle Mountain and Wakopa, or at the office of the subscriber.

W. W. MCLEOD.
Post Office Inspector's Office, P. O. Inspector,
Winnipeg, Aug. 11th. 1884; 312

Portage La Prairie Press, Sept. 5, 1884

The first team of horses in the Turtle Mountain district was owned by a man named La Riviere. His nephew, Jeremiah La Riviere, a big, husky freighter, drove them to Emerson for store goods. On the return trip the horses played out at Badger Creek (now Cartwright). The driver walked to Wakopa for a bundle of hay, and a sack of oats, which he carried back to the horses, a round trip of sixty miles. At one of the stopping places on the way, before coming as far as Badger Creek, there was a free for all fight. La Riviere saw that he was not going to be

able to get any sleep indoors, so he went out side and scooped out a hole in the side of a snow-bank, rolled himself up in his buffalo robe, and slept peacefully till morning in 15 below zero weather.

I had a trip in the fall of 1881 from Crystal City to old Desford and back, and had dinner and supper in one meal at Joe McKibbon's, Badger Creek. All the country was burnt black, not a blade of grass to be seen A prairie fire had swept the country, starting about where the town of Melita is now, and extended to Cartwright before it was brought under control.

A man by the name of Hill, a Hudson Bay trader, was out five days in a blizzard his legs were badly frozen to the knees, and his arms to the elbows. He crawled from Wood Lake to Wakopa, a distance of five miles. The Indians found him and took care of him. They daubed the frozen parts with a knife before thawing, so that the congealed blood would ooze out in thawing, the parts healing perfectly.

La Riviere, who owned the horses, was a Justice of the Peace, and a commissioner for affidavits, could speak seven dialects of the Indian language, also French and English, but could not write his own name.



A Cairn marks the corner of B.B. LaRiviere's property

Our first July First celebration was held in 1883, at Wakopa. The races took place on the road on the west side of the creek. Jim Cowan's pony being the winner, with Bob Weir as jockey, I built a granary that my neighbor, Jim Gordon, said I might fall down and worship, and not commit any sin, as there was nothing like it in the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth.

Mr. Rowsom, when telling Mr. Gordon of the new game laws, expressed the opinion that it was quite right for the prairie chickens to be protected, as they stayed here all winter, but the ducks, being here for he summer only, didn't need protection. Mr. Gordon could not see eye to eye with him there, his opinion being that a bird that could fly, and hadn't sense enough to get out of this country for the winter didn't deserve protection. In expressing an opinion on returning

borrowed articles, he said it wasn't right to break the laws of the country, if people wanted their things let them go after them, and be mighty thankful that they knew where they were.

It has been decided to place a patrol of Mounted Police along the International line east of the western boundary of the Province of Manitoba. Hitherto the Mounted Police have not operated within the Province, but horse stealing has become so prevalent in Southern Manitoba that it was deemed advisable to station a force of twenty men at Wakopa, who will watch the boundary as far east as Emerson.

The Nor'Wester – July 24, 1884

Lyonshall was the first school built in the district in 1882. Miss E. A. Jones, now Mrs. Alex McKnight, was the first teacher. Miss Reeves was the next teacher.



Lyonshall School

Many people used to come to Wakopa mills, bringing grain to be ground into flour, or buying lumber at the saw-mill. Meals were served at the Harrison home, at La Riviere's, and at Mrs. J. Melville's boarding house.

The first church services were held in the Hudson Bay trading post, and were conducted by a young Presbyterian student by the name of Patterson, now Dr.

Patterson, of Toronto. The church was built in Lyonshall in 1897. I remember being at a box social held in the school house, where T. J. Lawlor acted as auctioneer.

Fire!

A prairie fire was one of the early settlers' great fears. The grass being quite tall, the fire could be seen blazing skyward at a great distance, the roar and crackling heard, the heat intense.

During one fire when her husband was away, Mrs. Montieth, thinking the house was going, gathered the children together around her knee and sat watching it come closer. All that saved them was the freshly dug earth around the newly built house. Another time they ran nearly half a mile and jumped into a big slough until the fire went over.

What's In a Name?

Who named our villages, communities and landmarks? Officially, once settlers began and applying to the Federal Government for Post Offices, that Department had the final say. They would take the suggestions, check their records, and if necessary ask for changes. That happened in the new community of Manchester in the southwest corner. The locals had settled on a name – someone had even drawn up a survey and started selling lots in the proposed town, but as happened quite often, that name was taken elsewhere in Canada. The local settlers had to go back and reconsider. How about Melita? That was OK.

Sometimes a name had to be changed for a similar reason. Rowland was pretty well established when the Post Office named was changed to Hyder. Apparently with a town called ROLAND some distance to the east, it was just too confusing.

So while we have a record of how names get to the point where they are in official records and maps, the real process of how the names were arrived at in the first place is sometimes a little less clear.

Take the case of Wakopa. The name was in place some time before there was a Post Office. We have a few accounts as to how that happened - all gathered, like so much of our local history, from recollections of the pioneers.

George Monteith, the son of a pioneer, and the author of a short history of the Killarney region, tells it this way:

In the early days, a Frenchman named Lariviere came there as a fur trader. There was also a post of the Hudson Bay Co. fur traders there. Lariviere gathered a force of half-breeds and they had a fight with the Hudson Bay Company and defeated the company men and drove them out. The name of the fight was called the Battle of the Broken Wheel, a Red River cart having overturned and a wheel broken. The name Broken Wheel is the Indian name for Wakopa.

We're not sure where Mr. Monteith got his information but Mr. Henderson, also a pioneer, passed down this story of his first visit...

There was a little village started, a house and a store were there, built by a man by the name of Lariviere. The village was at first called Lariviere, afterwards named Wakopa by an old Indian, who thought a lot of Laraviere, Wakopa meaning "White Feather".

In the Johnson family, yet another version is told.

"Wakopa – a small village five miles from the U.S. boundary, through which runs what is known as the old "Commission Trail" up which in the Rebellion of /85 the half breeds from the U.S. ascended to the North West. Inhabitants suffered greatly though fear. Its Indian name means Running Water.

In the story of Peter Bryan we come across a variation of our first example.

The necessary groceries he got from Wakopa, which was the community centre of that time. Wakopa is the Indian name for Broken-Wheel. A few years earlier the Indians and half breeds under La Riviere had fought a battle on this very spot. During the fray a wheel of one of the Red River carts was broken. Hence the name of the town that sprang up.

So what are we to believe?

There is probably an element of truth in most accounts, but details get mixed and memories get hazy with time. There are no verified historical records of a battle at Wakopa, especially with HBC traders. There were, however, some serious battles between Metis and the Dakota elsewhere, and there may have been skirmished here and there. There was not much, if any movement of Metis or Aboriginal warriors travelling from the U.S. to take part in fighting that took place in central Saskatchewan, but at the time there were fears that such might happen.

In the case of nearby Killarney were have a more unanimous recollection in that the lake was called Oak Lake and at time Hill Lake. We also seem to agree that John Sidney O'Brien suggested the name Killarney for the lake and thus the town. Apparently everyone was OK with that.

Horse Thieves

In 1882, when absent from homestead duties, I took part in a hunt for horse—thieves, and three stolen horses. The thieves had stolen the horses from a man of Calf Mountain, near Morden, and were travelling westward near the boundary when overtaken by the sheriff. They would not surrender either themselves or the horses, but told him to take them dead or alive if he could. The sheriff did not shoot, but called out some of the nearest settlers to help him, and the thieves were over-taken beside a large slough; but they still defied the sheriff to take them, alive or dead. Some who had rifles wanted to shoot, but others restrained them especially a young man by the name of J. W. Smail, from Crystal City, who, strongly advised them not to shoot, for if they should happen to kill the men they could be tried for murder under British law, even though the men were

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST HORSE-THIEVING.

Mounted Police to Commence Patrolling at Once in Manitoba.

Yesterday ten mounted police, in charge of Major Shurtleff, got off the train from the west to operate in Southern Manitoba to checkmate the horse and cattle thieves that were so long doing the country. The headquarters of this force will be at Wakopa, and they will operate westerly to the boundary to meet there a detachment from the west. They will guard the frontier easterly till met by another force sent to Emerson from Winnipeg a day or two ago.—*Brandon Mail*.

In reference to the above a reporter called upon Capt. Norman to-day to get particulars about the arrangements. The captain says he has not received any instructions from headquarters as to the disposition of the detachment of 25 men now under his command at Fort Osborne. The item quoted above, he says, is correct so far as he knows. Commencing at two o'clock to-day a regular guard will be mounted by the police at Fort Osborne. The detachment was inspected this morning by Captain Norman. The arms and kits were found to be in excellent condition. The men will be taken to Stony Mountain soon for rifle practice.

The Nor'Wester – Aug. 8, 1884

thieves. In the meantime, while the sheriff and settlers were parleying with the outlaws, two brothers, by the name of McKittrick had crept close enough to the horses, through the long grass to stampede them, so the horses were caught,

but the thieves escaped. The sheriff was satisfied to get the horses, and let the men go. The thieves traveled about seven miles east that night, and stole three horses from the Lynes brothers. They then went a few miles west and crossed the boundary into Dakota.

The next morning the men of the settlement, well armed, followed their tracks, resolved this time to get them. There was not a man left but myself and a young fellow by the name of Alex Mutch. When the women of the district realized that all the men were away, and that they had no provisions or extra clothing, they got us to take a team and wagon and go around the settlement gathering up provisions. We started out, well supplied with bread, tea, pork and flour, also overcoats and quilts, as rain had come on, and they expected the men would be away for several days and the nearest settlement in Dakota was at Devil's Lake, sixty miles away.

We met many of the men returning, their ardour to catch the outlaws being dampened by the rain and chill. However, we continued our journey until we overtook the leaders of the party, just before dusk.

When it became too dark to follow the tracks further, we unhitched our horses and tied them around the wagon, and prepared our own supper. Then we spread our quilts under the wagon, and laid down and tried to sleep, but the rain trickled through the bottom of the wagon box and sleep was out of the question. We moved out into the open, so that the rivulets could not reach us. With two horse blankets on the ground, and our quilts over us, we tried to sleep in the drizzling rain. There were eight of us, the ones behind crowding out those in front, so that he, too, got in behind, and thus we tried to keep warm, as we were chilled to the marrow although it was the last week in June.

With the breaking of the day we had our breakfast, and then resumed our tracking. We followed the tracks until well on in the day, and they led us away to the south-west, toward Bismarck. We changed our course south for Devil's Lake, or Fort Totten, where we might get assistance from the militia, or the Indian scouts.

We camped on the north side of the lake that night, crossed over by the ferry in the morning, reaching the fort, and found that the men we were seeking had been there all night; having travelled around the end of the lake, and had left only an hour before we arrived. We asked the major in command if we overtook the men, and they would not give up the horses, if we had the right to fire on them, even if we should kill. "Oh", he said, there is no law in the United States protecting horse thieves; you take your own chance. There we had the difference between the law of the United States and the law of Britain.

The Lynes boys offered seventy-five dollars reward for their three horses, or twenty-five for each horse, and the commandant sent some of the Indian scouts

with us. We came on our men where they had camped for dinner. The Indians had spread out, and came on them from different directions. The Indians drew their revolvers and the thieves surrendered. They made them deliver their guns, and give up the horses, then to our great surprise, they let the men go.

When they returned to the Fort they were asked why they did not bring in the men too. They replied, "Reward for horses, no reward for men."

They were given the seventy-five dollars, and the officer in charge allowed them to keep the guns and revolvers they had taken from the men and the Indians were happy. We were happy too, as we started back over the trail, and we reached home safely on the first day of July.

Lyonshall Church

A Presbyterian Church was built at Lyonshall. The whole community went there whether they were Anglican, Methodist or Presbyterian. The young people walked to and from church gathering others as they walked along until there would be twenty or more by the time they reached the church. The girls walked ahead and the boys trailed behind, each engrossed in their own conversations. Sometimes the Plymouth Brethern held services in the Long River School when Ministers would come for a week or so from the States.

A story is told of one Minister having tied his horse to the fence where he could watch it out of the window as he conducted his service. Being a hot, sultry day with plenty of mosquitoes, the horse was very restless. Near the end of the service it had become so upset it might have got into trouble at any minute. In pronouncing the benediction the Minister concluded with "Whoa" instead of "Amen" for which an explanation seemed in order.

Peter and Mary's Love Story - A Romance on the Prairies

Before we had online dating apps, personal ads, and even singles bars, romance sometimes took a little longer to develop. May be that was a good thing? Either way it seems that even on the lonely prairie, they is still hope of finding a soul mate.

Peter Bryan operated a successful dry goods store in Liverpool, England, before he was lured to the Canadian West, influenced by the descriptive promotional literature and tales of great opportunities (and perhaps adventure?) in Western Canada. After working on railroads for some time he ended up in the Wakopa area.

Mary Harrison came to the same area with her family. She helped at the store run by the William's family.

That is where they met and it seems some mutual attraction developed.

But, according to Mary's daughter, Mary was an attractive girl and others had noticed this as well. One in particular, a "gallant young Scotsman" named Robert Douglas would also drop by the store, sometimes with his, "prancing steed and gig" to take Mary for a ride.

All was going well until the day they went across the line to St. Johns and young Robert made a serious mistake. He went off and got drunk, leaving Mary to find her own way home.

That, as they say, was that. With Peter waiting in the wings, Mary had options.

Things went slowly. Mary had moved with her mother to her Uncle's farm. Peter lived nearby. On a fine day he would take his gun over to Victoria Lake and later drop by with a few ducks, which Mary would roast and they all would enjoy a tasty meal.

Life went on this way for some time until Mary decided to be a bit more proactive.

According to her daughter, Mary had a sense of humour and was fond of jokes, "practical as well as verbal." She tells the following story, - a classic happy ending...

"...One chill Halloween afternoon she ambled over to Peter's shanty with a bundle of rags under her arm. He was busy in the field harvesting. She climbed to the top of the shack and stuffed her rags into the smoke-stack. She then returned home. Peter came from the field ravenous and lit a good fire. To his

consternation the shack was soon full of smoke. We leave it to you to imagine how he unraveled the plot. But mother's little joke worked and she got her man."

As with any good romance movie, there has to be that final scene, where the happy couple rides off into the sunset. In this case they seem to have made quite a fashion statement while doing so.

"on the morning of May 29, 1889, they set off for St. Johns North Dakota, in the wagon drawn by Dad's pair of prancing blacks – Prince and Maude. Sitting on the spring seat they made a jaunty pair. Mother wore a beautiful wine basque which reached to her ankles – with high-buttoned black shoes. On her head she wore a black sun bonnet beneath which dangled golden curls. Dad wore a suit fashioned in his Liverpool tailor shop. It consisted of pants in fine woolsheperd's check with high waist after the style of sailor's pants. His coat was a black swallow-tail and his vest was white. His hat and gloves made his costume complete. On reaching St. Johns the only minister they could find was a Catholic priest, and he agreed to marry them"

By all accounts they lived happily ever after.

Cue the final credits

Brotherly Advice

John Stewart was the brother to Reverend Andrew Stewart. One day the Reverend came up to John when he was having a difficult time plowing and suggested he would do quite as well without the profanity. John offered to let his brother try.

Professional Baseball

Killarney had a professional baseball team in the early days that lasted until their defeat by the Winnipeg Maroons resulting in the bankruptcy of the club. Jess Trip, later Saskatchewan M.L.A. and druggist at Oxbow, was the catcher and Cal Dwan was one of the hired pitchers. (J.C. Treleaven)