REMINISCENCES
Of My Pioneering Experiences in Twp7,
Range 12, Cypress River Locality
During the Winter of 1879 – ‘80

by Robert Henry Little

CHAPTER 1.

I am writing this narrative in the land of the Pilgrim and Puritan Fathers, where the inhabitants are celebrating this year their centenary of the founding of Boston and its surrounding suburban cities.

While reading the various accounts of the struggles and privations these hardy pioneers had to withstand, I believe they had nothing more in the way of hardships than what the little band of pioneers withstood who spent their first winter in twp 7, rge 12 on the western frontier of Manitoba.

It appears strange to me how these early settlers three hundred years ago were prompted to keep such a complete record of events that had transpired from day to day among them, when all that Tiger Hills community had not kept, as I have been informed recently, a public record of events that have occurred since its first settlement.

During the ten years in which I resided in 7 – 12, I had jotted down dates and events that had occurred and with this data at hand, I will endeavor to write an account of how we spent the first winter in 7 – 12 and perhaps it may lead others in neighbouring locales to write their experiences and in this way form a basis for a history of what we called in early days the Tiger Hills Settlement.

When Manitoba became a province in 1870, it was situated in such an isolated position, but few emigrants braved the hardships of the overland journey, but as the railway each year crept nearer the southern boundary the influx of settlers gradually increased and when completed to Winnipeg in 1879 the first great rush for land began.

I was engaged in business with my brother Nathan in Brussels, Huron Co., Ontario at that time and many were leaving each day for Manitoba.

Naturally residing in a community where so much talk was going on about the west, we both began to think about joining the rush, so my brother decided that he would go and investigate, and should he find conditions satisfactory, I was to sell out and follow him.

My brother was joined on the trip by Connie Vanstone, a miller in Brussels and Sam Townsend of Seafoarth. They reached Winnipeg via Chicago.

On their arrival in Winnipeg they were puzzled to know in which direction to go to obtain homestead land, as there were so many conflicting accounts as to which was the most promising locality in which to settle.

While wandering around the town they met an acquaintance who had just arrived from the Tiger Hills settlement and he informed them that several families from around Brussels had located there. They were so pleased with his description of the district that they decided to go there. On reaching Portage la Prairie by steamer, Nat, as he was called for short, purchased a Red River cart, on which he loaded a supply of provisions. He had brought with him from Brussels a large round tent, a camping outfit, guns, ammunition, etc and a bulldog all this making quite a load for the cart.

They took the road to Fortney's ferry 22 mile distant up the river. This was during the rainy season, and the trail where it lead through the willow and poplar bush sections of the way was simply bog holes which could not be avoided owing to the trees on each side.

It took them two days to reach Fortney's, where they camped for the night, and Fortney ferried them over the next morning.

This took considerable time as the cart had to be taken over in sections and their supplies in small amounts each time for the ferry was just a small row boat that could carry with safety only three persons at a time. The oxen were taken up along the bank of the river for some distance and made to swim across and were carried down stream by the current until opposite the ferry crossing.

Cart and goods were then assembled again, and they proceeded on their way for about three miles where they entered the willow swamp.

This swamp and the river crossing were the great barriers to the land seeker in those days, and many had come this far and returned rather than face such obstacles.

Nat and his comrades proceeded about a mile into the swamp that day, and found the trail one continuous bog. When near sun down, the cart axle broke, so the oxen were let go to forage around the camp, and they looked around to find dry ground to camp on, but were unable to find a dry place. So they ate a cold lunch and sat around the cart all night a prey to hordes of mosquitoes.

Connie felt that this experience was the limit, and that he had endured enough, and as there was no necessity to go further, he left the party and returned to civilization.

Nat, after looking around for some tome in quest of a suitable tree from which to make an axle, found one and with the aid of an axe and a bowie knife, had it made and attached to the cart that evening.

Each day that followed brought its share of troubles and when they emerged from the swamps near the Boyne River, it had taken them five days to come from the ferry.

The trail from here led over a rolling prairie with an occasional slough to cross, and they made good headway. On reaching Jim Warren's they were directed to Sim Palmer's who lived a short distance further along the trail.

Sim Palmer, his two brothers, Sam Ballard, George Treherne (after whom the town of Treherne was named) all kept batch together in this house and all had taken up land in 1878.

Sim and his brothers made it their business to guide those in quest of land to find a desirable location. They kept on hand a list of vacant lands which was of great assistance to home seekers, as they would otherwise have had to go to the land office to obtain one.

Nat, on reaching Palmer's found several others who were seeking land so he and Sam joined the party and proceeded west to 7 –12, as most of the desirable land had been filed on out that distance. Nat took the North half of Sec. 15-7-12 for himself and reserved the south half of sec. 22-7-12 for me. Each member of the party had at least three locations on his list, so that in case they found at the land office their first choice had been already filed on they could try others.

Sim Palmer then guided the party to Nelsonville, a distance of some 60 miles, where they entered for their land. 160 acres was then given as a homestead and 160 as a pre-emption. The land was being taken so very rapidly at that time, so the law was changed so that 80 acres was given as a homestead and 80 acres for a pre-emption.

This change almost caused entry for land to cease, and after a few months the former land law was restored.

Nat wrote me to come, so I sold out and started for Winnipeg via boat line to Duluth and train to St. Vincent and boat to Winnipeg. It did not take much time to take in the sites of Winnipeg at that time, and I ended up sightseeing by a walk along a road leading towards Fort Garry, which could be seen away to the south on the bank of the Assiniboine River with the surrounding land almost vacant prairie.

I visited the stores within the stockade enclosure of the fort and the traders, Indians and Half Breeds, dressed in their western garb, all appeared very strange and interesting to me. I could see from the Fort a big stern wheeler being loaded from a warehouse a short distance down the river, so I walked over to investigate. I was informed that it was leaving for Portage la Prairie in a couple of hours, so I engaged passage and had my baggage transferred to it.

We reached Portage landing the next day at noon and then walked the mile and a half to town.

The great wheat fields along each side of the road were just beginning to ripen and presented a fine object lesson to a new comer as to the fertility of the soil. Never before had I beheld such crops.

Portage la Prairie consisted of two small straggling villages called the east end and the west end, lying about a mile apart and connected by the slough road, and the back road. The Hudson Bay store and a flour mill were the principal buildings at the west end. There was also a flour mill at the east end with several stores and a hotel at which I stopped overnight.

I met at the hotel a schoolmate from the County of Durham, Ont., who was looking for a location for a general store. I told him where I was headed for, so he decided to go along with me and see what the prospects would be for a store in the Tiger Hills country.

In the morning we struck off along the slough road to the west end where we procured a lunch to take along as an emergency ration, for we were informed that we could get meals at stopping places along the way. From here the road led us along toward the river, where an old Hudson Bay

Co. Fort stockade stood on the river bank, and then on through poplar bush for a few miles until we came to Vermillion plain where we had an early dinner at a stopping place.

After leaving this plain we passed through more poplar bush and into Long Plain, an Indian reservation where there were quite a number of dwellings. Here we obtained a view of the river again, and I was surprised to find that we were on such elevated ground. We inquired from the Indians where we could obtain drinking water and they directed us to a path that led down the hillside to a fine spring of good water. This revived us considerably, and as we walked along the trail we ate our lunch as we passed through more poplar bush and on into Round Plain. The trail led south from here for a mile or so and then began to descend into the valley on what was called the Hogs Back, an easy grade down to the ferry.

George Fortney resided in a log shack on the hillside back from the river, where we put up for the night. We reached here at sundown pretty tired after our long walk and being pestered by mosquitoes all the way. Mr. Fortney prepared supper and we ate heartily of the plain food. As the settlers further on had to pass this way, he knew them all. I enquired about Nat's location and he told me it was about 35 miles further on.

We retired for the night to a bed of hay on the floor, and in the morning were up early to make room for our landlord to prepare breakfast consisting of pork, bannock and tea.

When we were across the river, we made our way up out of the valley and away around the bend of the river to where there were a number of log houses occupied by Indians. This was on a little higher ground near the brink of the valley, and presented a grand view of the river as it swept around in a great curve deep down in the valley with its densely wooded banks. Here I obtained my first view of the Tiger Hills far to the south, shrouded in a blue haze. This was about where Indianford P.O. was afterwards located.

The trail then led us south west through the willow swamp which was now well dried up since the rainy season and came out near the Boyne river and then on to Mallock's where we made a short stay. Then on past Mr. Steadman's to Jim Warren's where we had been informed we could obtain refreshments.

Mr. Warren was almost out of supplies and could not give us anything to eat. He was going to Portage in the morning for supplies. However they gave us each a glass of buttermilk which somewhat appeased our hunger and was a treat after drinking slough water along the way.

I now realized how foolish I was in not bringing along as much food as I could readily carry, and that I was now on the frontier among a few settlers scattered over the plains, who had been here for but a short time and who were all busily engaged in building shelters in which to reside. Every ounce of food was valuable for most of it had to be carried on their backs.

We then walked along to Sim Palmer's and found no person around. We hesitated about going further for fear that we might be unable to reach some place where we might obtain food. However we decided to go on over a poorly marked trail which was difficult to follow. We could see away towards the hills a tent here and there where settlers were making a start towards building their homes.

We had gone on about five miles without seeing a house and then came to an empty sod shack, roofed with hay on the McLean homestead and lay down in its shade thoroughly tired, hungry and footsore. After laying there for some time, we heard a wagon approaching and on arising saw it contained five men and was drawn by a yoke of oxen. They told us they were going north to the Assiniboine to examine a fording place. I enquired about my brother but they were uncertain about his location, but thought his camp was away to the west and gave me a landmark to follow.

We immediately set out for this point over a level plain covered with a growth of grass and shrub, and on reaching our landmark could see no sign of habitation, so we went on a little further to a hill which gave us an extensive view but nothing could be seen that would indicate a settlement. We had become very thirsty, so when we noticed a marshy place at the base of the hill we went down and discovered a shallow pool from which we drank. But our stomachs rebelled against it before our thirst was fully satisfied. We then hurried back to the sod shack feeling we must reach some place to obtain food before night set in.

The water that we had drunk gave us a severe headache and both felt tired and miserable when we reached the shack.

When there a short time, the men who had directed us returned from the river and told me that they had made a mistake in directing me and if my brother was the man with a round tent and a bulldog his location was to the southwest and they pointed towards a shack in that direction and said I could obtain food and shelter there and further directions. My comrade said he had had enough and would go no further, so I struck off alone in a direct line for the house with as much haste as possible.

When I arrived there a man and two boys had just lit their lamp and had sat down to supper, so they invited me to join them, which I eagerly did.

This was Mr. Holland's place and he and his two sons had built their house from clay. The town of Holland was named for this Mr. Holland.

After an early breakfast they gave me a landmark towards the west to follow for there was no trail. When I had traveled a few miles I came to a hill which gave me a fine view and I noticed a house in the distance. I walked towards it and as I came near, I was surprised to see about ten men rush out to meet me, my brother being one of them.

Most of the crowd I had known in Brussels. This was on a Sunday and the log house was on James Young's place, being the N1/2 of sec. 22-7-12 and they had gathered there for a visit.

Nat and I then left for his place a mile further south where he had his tent pitched on an elevation overlooking the surrounding country and the Cypress River valley.

Here I met Sam Townsend and as it was time for their noon day meal, Sam took his gun to a nearby pond and soon returned with three ducks. Nat in the meantime opened the mouth of a flour sack and made a depression in the flour into which he poured water with a little salt and soda and soon had a bannock mixed and the frying pan on the camp stove. The bannock was turned over frequently by flipping the pan up in such a way that it was turned over and caught again.

Sam soon had the ducks prepared for the pot and it was not long before we sat down to a bountiful repast.

As I lay in the tent watching them prepare the meal, it all appeared as primitive to me and I wondered if I could acquire their skill and be content with camp life.

During the afternoon Nat and I took a walk over my location and I was well pleased with it and fully realized the trouble and labor it had relieved me from in having it located for me. After our evening meal we sat around our campfire and had a chat before turning in, and then the coyotes who had their dens along the valley began their mournful howl for an hour or so.

Three miles west of our camp, the McLeod family who had come from near Brussels had built a large log house. This was the furthest west house in the settlement and on the western boundary of Manitoba. The land across the boundary was not subdivided until the following year.

The McLeod family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. McLeod, his sons, John, Angus and William, daughter and son-in-law, W. Lawn and Jim McDonald. All the menfolk of the family had each taken up a homestead and a pre-emption claim adjoining each other.

I spent a week at our camp and we planned that I should return to Brussels and return with some livestock and settlers effects.

The Mcleod boys were going to Portage with their team for supplies, so they took me along with them on my journey to Brussels.

On my way in being so exhausted I was in no shape to admire the beauty of the country, but now riding along at ease on the wagon, it gave me a fine view of the country with the prairie covered with its vari-colored grasses and bluffs of trees scattered here and there, which gave the landscape a park-like appearance.

CHAPTER 2.

I returned to Brussels, Ont. via Chicago.

I secured a railway car, into which I loaded three horses, a colt, seven cows, and a bull, and other necessary effects for our farm. I arranged a berth in which to sleep and laid out a stock of provisions to serve us between points where we could obtain meals, also a barrel of water, hay and grain for the animals, which we replenished along the way when opportunity offered.

W. Leadbeater who had clerked in father’s store in Brussels came along in the car with me. Our car had flat wheels and thumped along on the rails and shook us all so badly and we obtained very little sleep. On reaching Detroit our car was condemned and we had to transfer to another car.

I laid in a fresh supply of food here for the stock. The hay dealers furnished the hay in large loose bails, in order I suppose to make it appear that I was receiving an amount equal to the big price I was charged.

The stock was unloaded at the Chicago stock yards for a rest of thirty hours and during this time we took in some of the sights of the city, and attended an exhibition that was being held on the lake front park, where I saw the first barbed wire machine in operation and also a crude form of telephone apparatus.

We spent the night in our private car to guard our belongings. The car was directly beneath a hog chute that was bridged across several switch tracks and connected with a slaughter house. This enclosed covered chute was jammed full of hogs and they made the night hideous with their different toned squeals and grunts.

We found travelling by freight a new and novel experience. It was difficult for us to know just where we were between terminal points. Brakemen would frequently call on us and warn us against permitting tramps to board our car.

Each day as we rumbled along we attended to the stock as if on the farm and did the milking. This milk we gave to the train hands and our fellow passengers who had charge of cars loaded with horses. When on a side track, if near a house we would give the woman a pail of milk for scalding our pails.

On some sections of the road the engines would handle the cars roughly and bump the cars while shunting and cause the cows to be thrown off their feet and make a bad mix up. We would then have to go among them and get them in place again.

We spent our spare time during the day on top of the cars, chatting and enjoying the scenery.

On arriving at St. Paul the stock was unloaded for a day's rest and toward evening were pulled out on the road again. Our train was now all composed of through freight for Manitoba, consisting mostly of horses and farm implements.

For some time before reaching Crookston the country along the line was sparsely settled, but on leaving there we were soon out in the open country without a sign of habitation anywhere and the great Red River valley stretched away in the distance east and west as far as the eye could reach.

Occasionally we would pass a box car set to one side and occupied by a lonely telegraph operator. Many miles of this track was laid on ties that were set on the bare prairie and our train made slow headway.

We passed customs at St. Vincent and then our car was pulled across the boundary line to Emerson having then been seven days on the train

We then unloaded the stock and the next morning assembled our wagon. I had brought along doors for our house and stables and these were placed upright in the wagon box and provided a good place wherein to place our goods. This was on a Sunday and during the afternoon we visited Mr. Grant a former resident of Brussels who resided about a mile from Emerson. There we met John Dillon who had arrived a few days previously from Brussels and he decided to join us on the trip to 7-12 as it would give him an opportunity to inspect the country and to find a suitable location to homestead.

We left Emerson the next morning and Bill Leadbeater and Jack Dixon drove the team and I rode horseback and guided the cattle to the ferry and crossed the Red River without much trouble but the heavily loaded wagon made a stiff pull for the team up the steep slope from the river.

The road was good, but our rate of travel was limited to what the cattle could travel each day.

The Mennonites had set up posts about 10 feet high and about 100 feet apart along this road for about ten miles in order to guide them in the stormy winter weather. There was no cultivated land in all this distance.

We were much interested in the way the Mennonites lived in villages and cultivated the land surrounding them. At one of the villages we stopped to inspect a windmill for grinding grain and were told it had been brought from Russia.

It took us two days to reach Nelsonville where we spent the night and put half our load in storage at the hotel, for the road from here over the Pembina mountains was quite hilly.

We discovered there was a road fit for wagon traffic that led in the general direction toward 7-12 so we had to circle around toward the south west by the Calf Mountain and Pilot Mound trail. This led us up a long incline on the face of the mountain to the top where we had a grand view of the country away toward the east. The trail turned more toward the west from here over quite a hilly country on past Thornhill and Darlingford, which were merely farmhouses and on past Calf Mountain.

I rode to the top of this hill and wondered why it was called a mountain for I had imagined it would be much larger than it was.

About a mile further on we had been told to turn towards the northwest where there was a stake set up. This we did and found the trail to be poorly marked and hard to follow, and after a few miles we came to a slough and being so near sundown put off crossing until morning and camped for the night. We could see toward the east a low chain of hills with two houses about a mile apart. One of the houses had a tin roof and the rays of the setting sun were reflected on it. We had seen no person on the trail all that day and the country had a deserted appearance.

This was our first night to camp out. Bill attended the horses and Jack acted as cook and I milked the cows. The neck yoke was placed upright under the wagon tongue and a canvas thrown across it which served for our sleeping quarters. I think this camp was not far from where the town of Manitou was afterwards located.

When we arose in the morning we discovered that our horses had disappeared. This put us in quite a dilemma for it was hard to determine in which direction to go to seek them in this vast wilderness. We decided that one would stay with in camp and one would skirmish around to the west and I went east toward the tin roofed house about two miles distant. Here I found the horses tied to a fence. The settler had been awakened during the night by them stamping around the house, so arose and tied them. The cattle always remained near our camp and made no attempt to stray.

I hurried back to camp with the horses through great tall grass the rankest that I had ever seen anywhere. The wind blew it in great bellows like on water and I could feel the horse on which I rode hesitate when an extra large wave approached.

On arrival in camp the horses were soon hitched to the wagon and driven down the steep bank and into the slough for about 20 feet and became stuck. The team was then unhitched and the contents of the wagon carried across through the mud and then with the chains attached to the wagon tongue, the team pulled it onto dry land and our goods loaded again and we proceeded on our way.

I was now very useful on horseback, for I skirmished ahead to make sure that we were following the right trail, for tracks led off to bluffs of timber along the way and confused us for the trail was now becoming very indistinct.

The country along here had patches of willow and prairie and numerous soft places in the trail which made harder pulling for the team.

We then came to a settler's shack but the occupant could not tell us anything about the road ahead. This was the only house until we reached St. Leon where a French Canadian colony was being established. There were two log houses here and a number of men were engaged in building a log building which they told us was intended for a store.

The road from St. Leon led us in a straight line up a long grade through poplar bush and the stumps in the road made rough travelling. From the top of the hill the trail led a little toward the west on past Mr. Martin's house and then downhill again to near a large pond where we camped for the night.

The next day we passed through similar country to that of yesterday and passed through the vicinity of where Somerset is now and on the Cypress River where we camped. Charlie Holland's house was a short distance from camp and was the third one we had seen that day.

When crossing the Cypress the next morning we became stuck in midstream and had to repeat the performance we had at the slough but did not have so far to carry our goods.

We were now entering the Tiger Hills range and this delay made it doubtful if we could cross them to the plain beyond by nightfall as I had surmised we could do, so we made all haste possible to accomplish this over an old poorly marked Indian cart trail that had become overgrown in many places with shrub and poplar trees six or eight feet high, which gave the team a hard pull in going through them.

When near sundown we came to the edge of a valley running east and west, and away across it could be seen a valley opening, which I thought, might lead to the plain beyond. I felt inclined to leave the trail and strike out through it but not knowing where we were, and what obstacles we might encounter that way I decided to follow the trail down into the valley close by a stream. Here we curved towards the east over a trail through short grass which the team readily followed.

It was now quite dark and after a mile or so turned toward the north up a little valley and came within sight of a light. On reaching it we found this was John Moir's place. The two Dobbs brothers who had claims adjoining were batching with him.

We were sure glad to get out from the hills and find someone who could tell us where we were and the distance we had yet to travel, which we found was about twelve mile. We milked the cows and did our camp chores and sat around and chatted far into the night. We were pleased to sleep indoors again.

We were up early and had breakfast and the milk was a great treat to our friends. Mr. Moir's house stood well up on the hillside and commanded a grand view of the plain far toward the east and west and away north toward the Assiniboine River valley.

We started off eagerly on the last lap of our journey towards 7-12 and on past Mr. Holland's and Watkin's and Evans' houses, the only houses on the way, and reached Nat's round tent about noon. He was out to meet us and we were all so delighted to meet again and that we had reached our journey's end. It had taken seven days to make the trip across from Emerson.

Nat was all alone as Sam had gone back to Ontario. Nat had moved his tent down the hillside a short distance to where we had planned to erect our house and stables. He had been to Portage for supplies and a mowing machine to cut hay for the stock, but was unable to use the oxen to pull the machine.

I believe I was the first settler to cross the hills with a wagon.

CHAPTER 3.

It was now getting along about the middle of October and the nights were beginning to be rather uncomfortable for camping, so we made haste to construct a temporary shelter for the winter. We were fortunate in obtaining a supply of logs close at hand from bluffs of white poplar that grew along the Cypress valley.

Two of us felled the trees and cut them into the desired lengths, and the other two drove the horse and ox teams and hauled the logs to the building site, and in a few days we had a sufficient supply to build a shack 14x16 feet. It had but one door and a window, which faced the south. The roof was flat and made from small logs and poles placed close together and then a layer of hay placed on them and over all a thick coating of sod was laid which held the hay well packed down.

The spaces between the wall logs were chinked with hay, and then a sod wall built about two feet from the log walls all around the shack except the space for the door and window, and the space between the sod and log walls was filled with earth.

Two double bunks were built one above the other to conserve space. We all felt elated when we moved in from the tent. Our furniture consisted of boxes, syrup kegs and packing cases.

We had become so accustomed to reclining on the hay covered camp floor that it took some time to adapt ourselves to sitting in an upright position again on the kegs and boxes.

We made use of the sheet iron campstove for preparing meals but during cold weather it did not heat the room comfortably.

We then built a stable 14x70 feet with a partition to separate the cows from the horses, and it was all banked up with sod and earth similar to the shack.

We now had to lay in a winter supply of hay for the stock, and this was obtained from a heavy growth on a nearby marsh which was now dry. As the machine cut it, it was immediately raked up and hauled to the stable.

The hay had become frosted and I had my doubts about its feed value for stock, but I was told that it was alright for that was all buffalo and deer had to subsist on. However it was our only recourse so had to use it, and a liberal supply was laid up in order to make up for any deficiency in its feed value.

The pasturage was still good for the stock and the cows were giving a fair supply of milk, and we were still making butter. The stock never wandered very far from our camp and they appeared to realize that they were in strange surroundings.

We now felt that we had everything fixed up pretty good for the stock.

It was wonderful the amount of work that the four of us had accomplished in so short a time. The strenuous exercise had made us all strong and vigorous and caused us to sleep well and gave us all good appetites.

We had lost no time by rain since our arrival and the weather was so fine and bracing that it greatly aided us in our work.

Our stock of provisions was now becoming low so this made it necessary to go to Portage for supplies, and when there I planned to go to Winnipeg to obtain some goods that had been forwarded to me from Brussels. Bill Leadbeater went along with me, also John Dixon who was leaving for home as he would not enter for a homestead of only 80 acres according to the homestead law in force then.

We expected that the ice might be running on the Assiniboine River, so took the ox team along as they could stand the exposure better than the horses. We had been informed that the river could be forded at Smarts' crossing so concluded to go via that route.

We reached there the first evening and camped and made use of the wagon box for sleeping quarters with a canvas thrown over it.

Mrs. Smart had built a large log house here during the fall, but did not occupy it until later on.

In the morning we found the ice on the river flowing along in great masses and it looked doubtful if we could cross. After a time I noticed that the ice came in floes at intervals, so made ready on the river bank to make the ford when a floe would pass. This we did but the oxen after going a

short distance attempted to turn back. So I went out on the wagon tongue and managed to straighten them out again, but just before we reached shore another floe had come along and struck the wagon and oxen with such force that we were in danger of being swept down the river, but the oxen were now getting into shallow water, and managed to pull us onto the river bank without any mishap.

We then followed the old Yellow Quill Indian trail through a sand hill country in a line with the river, and at night camped at a small stream near the trail that led off to Fortney's Ferry.

Shortly before reaching camp, the gun used by Bill when shooting prairie chicken, burst and wounded his hand badly. We dressed the wound as well as we could under the circumstances and then when we reached Portage the next evening had a doctor attend to it.

It required three days to reach Winnipeg from Portage and we camped on the prairie that extended from main street to the Red River, and not far from Fort Garry.

The next day I obtained my goods at the St. Boniface railway station a mile east of the river. This was the first year that Winnipeg had railway service.

We left next morning for Portage la Prairie, over the only road leading to the great northwest, the same that we had come by. On the way we encountered numerous Red River cart trains drawn by oxen and ponies. One man would have charge of several carts. The wooden cart axles and wheels created a loud groaning and squeaking sound as they traveled along, and could be heard at a long distance. All the vast northwestern country had to depend on this means of transportation for supplies.

At this time there was a great rivalry between the rising towns of Rapid City and Minnedosa, and they had posters put up along the way calling attention to their many advantages, and urging people to settle there, and each claiming that the railroad would pass through their townsite.

It was a difficult problem at that time to determine just where the railway route would be at that distance west.

We secured our supplies at Portage and reached Fortney's Ferry without trouble, but here we found the river to be frozen over except about fifty feet from the bank that we were on. We then had to unload our wagon and take it apart, and take all over in a rowboat. The ox team was taken up through the woods about a mile to where the river was frozen completely across, and then passed over, and back on the road to the ferry, where we assembled the wagon on the ice and loaded up and pulled onto the bank where we made a fire and had our supper.

It was now dark and the weather cold, and our sleeping arrangements were not good on account of our wagon being loaded. We had planned to have gone further on the way where we could have obtained shelter but the delay in crossing the river had upset our plans, but for all this we decided to go on rather than camp.

The trail up the long hill to the plain above led through poplar bush, and was very rough and icy. Our oxen were shod and pulled the wagon without much effort, but when passing over a slippery place the back wheels skidded against a tree and broke the wagon reach.

I built a large fire to work by, then unloaded the wagon and removed the broken reach. I then procured a suitable tree for the reach and made it, fortunately having tools with me for the purpose. Most all this work was accomplished by myself as Bill's hand was still very painful and he had only the use of one hand.

The wagon was again loaded and we went on about five miles and reached the first house on the way at daylight. This was Mr. McInnes' place in the willow swamp and on the trail that led on past Phelig Smith's in a direct line to the Boyne River.

Mr. McInnes kept batch and soon prepared a warm breakfast for us and the oxen were fed and cared for. We were both so fatigued that we lay down and slept until noon.

I might digress here and relate an accident that befell Mr. McInnes during the preceding summer which will illustrate the danger a person incurred in living alone, in case of accident or sickness, far removed from neighbors or a doctor.

While mowing hay with the oxen something became caught in the cutter bar, the oxen stopped. As he stood in front of the cutter bar and removed the obstruction, the oxen suddenly started and he was thrown down on his face and the cutters hacked the calves of his legs to the knees before the oxen could be stopped. He took off his shirt and tore it into strips and bandaged his legs and road home on the machine, and when there a short time, a man on the way to Portage with a wagon and team happened to pass and took him along to a doctor there.

When we awoke at noon a lunch was partaken of and we proceeded on our way, and reached home the following evening without further mishap, having taken fifteen days to make the round trip.

We were all anxious that a trip be made to Nelsonville to obtain our household goods that we had stored there while on the way in from Emerson.

We were afraid to take the wagon for fear that we might become snowed in on the way, and if we made a trip to Portage to purchase a sleigh it would take a week or more, and then there would be the uncertainty of the river crossing, so I decided to make a pair of bob sleighs. I found small oak trees along the Cypress that served my purpose, four of them having natural crooks for the runners. Each large piece for the sleigh was hewn from a single round piece of log, and it all required time and much patience. I had never attempted such a task before but I managed to make a fair job of them, and they served us well for a couple of winters.

A slight fall of snow had come but was not sufficient for sleighing.

The old timers had regaled us with exaggerated stories about blizzards and intense cold weather, that it caused us to have strong forebodings as to what we might expect to encounter on such a trip through a sparsely settled country, so we made every provision that we thought would be necessary for any emergency.

A box was provided for our cooking utensils and provisions, blankets and comforts were folded and put into bags and these with buffalo robes that we used on the way, insured us against the cold when camping out.

A supply of kindling wood and white birch bark was also taken, in order to make a quick fire. Now we awaited sufficient snow to make sleighing.

CHAPTER 4.

At last sufficient snow had fallen to make sleighing, so we decided to begin our journey to Nelsonville in the morning.

The old homestead law giving 160 acres for a homestead and 160 acres for a pre-emption came again into force so I planned to enter for my land when at Nelsonville, and W. Leadbeater came along to enter for the N1/2 of Sec.16, twp. 7, range 12.

We had arranged to call for W. Watkins on the way as he wished to go along and enter for his land.

We made an early start and had reached Watkins' and Evans' shack 6 miles east at daybreak. Dave Evans a few days previously had shot a lynx and we thought to play a joke on him and imitated the cry of a lynx as we walked around the house and stable.

We could hear them stirring inside and then as the door was quietly opened and Dave appeared with his gun, partly dressed and closely followed by Billy as Watkins was usually called and when they saw us we had a good laugh on them. We warmed ourselves as Billy ate his breakfast and then we headed in the direction of John Moir's house and reached there and had an early lunch.

From Moir's we went direct south into the Tiger Hills, over the Boyne river and on past where John Hall later took up land, and then along through a rough country covered with a growth of scrub and scattered timber, and had difficulty in following a poorly marked trail. It was now becoming dark and we lost the trail completely, but we managed to keep on a southerly direction until we came to a hay stack on the edge of a marsh, and decided to camp for the night. The horses were well blanketed and made as comfortable as possible. Hay was pulled from the stack to feed them and also to provide a bed for ourselves. We made a big camp fire and had something to eat and became well warmed up and then turned in for the night. A light snow was falling so we had to keep our faces covered.

We all had a fine night's sleep and awoke early in the morning and found a fine blanket of snow over us.

We had breakfast and all ready to proceed before daylight and then recognized land marks and soon found the trail and in a short time came to our old camp ground on the Cypress River near Charlie Holland's place. At noon time we stopped for lunch a few miles north of St. Leon.

When we reached St. Leon I intended purchasing oats for our team which I was informed could be obtained at the store.

The trail was about 50 feet from the store and as I walked up the path leading to it, I noticed a young lady at the window looking out at me. A thermometer was on the wall near the door and I noticed the temperature and shouted to boys on the sleigh, "25 below zero boys." Then I opened

the door and enquired from the young lady if they had oats for sale. She looked rather abashed and did not reply, and then on looking into the room I saw that church services were being held and the congregation had turned their heads and were looking at me. I hurriedly closed the door and made my way back to the sleigh. I discovered afterwards that the store was in the other end of the building.

We were informed here that we could save many miles by following a trail that led south east, instead of going via the Calf Mountain trail. So we traveled this trail for several miles and came to Mr. Saunders' where we put up for the night.

We met a man here who was going to Nelsonville and he joined us in the morning and acted as guide.

Only three buildings could be seen on the way from this trail which was poorly marked and led through a prairie and willow scrub country, until we came near Kilgour's saw mill, which was located in quite a large forest of oak timber, near the brow of the Pembina mountains. From here the trail led gradually down a valley to the plain below and then turned south for a few miles into Nelsonville.

The team was put into a stable and we made our way to the land office and entered our land, and then the sleigh was loaded with our goods and all made ready for the return journey.

The people who kept the hotel were very kind and hospitable to us and we spent a very pleasant evening with them.

It was now along about Dec. 15th and we endeavored to make use of every minute of daylight during the short days so as to make as many miles as possible. Each day since we had left home the same weather conditions prevailed, cold and calm with a light snow fall and a dark lowering sky.

We began our homeward journey as daylight came, and we soon found that load made travelling much slower than with the empty sleigh, and when we began to ascend the trail up the valley to the mountain top, it became much slower and it was near noontime when we came to Kilgour's mill, so we stopped and had lunch.

The road so far had been sheltered by the mountain and the woods to this point and now we began to experience a strong wind from the northwest. As we proceeded it became stronger.

When we emerged from the woods into the open country we began to encounter a succession of snow drifts. We could scarcely see any distance with so much driven snow in the air.

We struggled along under these conditions for a time and I began to realize that we could not possibly reach Mr. Saunders' place before dark with our load. I judged we had left about five miles to go. We decided that Watkins and Leadbeater would camp at the sleigh and I would go on and find shelter for the team.

The horses were unhitched from the sleigh and I drove them with the lines feeling confident that I could soon reach shelter. The wind was blowing from the direction that I was to take to reach Saunders' and I headed directly into it to guide me.

The sleigh marks left by us on our way to Nelsonville over the burned ground were obliterated and even if they were not it would have been impossible to have followed them as the darkness had now set in.

The storm increased in violence as I struggled along, and the biting cold wind was blowing a terrific gale, driving the snow in dense masses and sweeping the burned prairie clear of snow and piling it up in great drifts wherever there were shrubs or trees to hold it.

The horses would plunge through the drifts and would become entangled in the lines, so I then made use of the lines to lead them. They were unwilling to head into the storm and always endeavored to turn their backs to it and go with the storm.

When they plunged through the drifts, I was in danger of being trampled upon and I had to exert myself to keep out of their way, and being so heavily clothed it was very exhausting. I would allow the horses to turn their backs to the wind occasionally, and I would hold onto the harness and support myself and have a short rest. I felt so warm and sleepy that I imagined it would be pleasant to lie down in the snow, but something always prompted me to keep on.

The moisture from my breath and snow froze into my mustache and formed into a solid mass, and it would freeze onto my chin and my eyelids would freeze together with the snow so I had to rub them frequently to clear them. The horses became hard to control, and would insist on stopping near bushes to eat them.

During all this time the wind kept up a steady roar, and I had struggling and wandering around so much I thought it was time that I should have reached Saunders' and then I came to a small shack. I rapped on the door but received no response. I could hear that there was something moving inside, so I shouted to them that I was lost and had a team with me, and pleaded to be admitted but still no reply so I concluded they did not want to let me in, so traveled on, and the horses reluctantly followed me.

After some time I came to a small log stable with a few loose poles on it for a roof. I got the horses into it and with much difficulty with my benumbed hands managed to unharness them and tied them to a pole manger.

The logs had been chinked with hay, and some of it was still clinging to the logs. This the horses eagerly reached for and ate, and they soon had all within reach devoured and I gathered all I could get and gave them. They spent the balance of the night in gnawing the manger poles and the logs before them.

The shack was really no shelter in a way, for the wind blew through between the logs and snow drifted over the floor. However, it gave me a rest and I crouched down in a corner where there was a big drift outside the logs to shelter me. The warm drowsy feeling had left me sometime before I had reached here and now I kept up a constant shivering that I could not get rid of

although I was warmly clad. I felt confident that I was in no immediate danger of freezing to death, as long as I shivered for it kept me wide awake.

When the first streaks of day came I was out with the horses, and began wandering around again. The snow drifts had become so packed and frozen that it made difficult travelling. After a time the snowfall suddenly stopped and I could see Mr. Saunders' house about a mile and a half distant, so I struck out and reached it by ten o'clock.

The men put my team in the stable and I was hustled into the house, and the women gave me warm drinks and thawed out my frost bitten nose, cheek and chin, and soon I felt no ill effects from my experience, except for the chilly feeling that persisted for several hours.

Leadbeater and Watkins arrived late in the afternoon. They had called at the two houses on their way to enquire for me, and felt relieved when they found I was before them. They had slept well all night and were so warm that they had perspired and after they arose their overcoats became frozen on them. They were buried under a snow drift and had quite a time separating their bedding from the snow.

The next day Mr. Saunders took his team and recovered our sleigh, and I found that the place I had called at during the storm and was not admitted, was a stable, and the owner lived only a short distance from it.

We resumed our homeward journey next morning, Bill drove the team and Watkins and I went ahead with shovels and dug through the deep drifts. It was a very cold day. We passed on through St. Leon, and reached Mr. Martin's place where we spent the night.

Mr. Martin was a French Canadian, and was the only member of the family that could speak English. He recognized me as the man who had called at the church for oats. We reached C. Holland's the next day and he kindly took us in for the night.

The next morning we began the most dreaded part of our journey through the Tiger Hills, for the distance through to the first house could not be made during the short period of Daylight.

Watkins and I made ready the team to the sleigh and Bill looked after our provisions and bedding.

Watkins and I went ahead as usual and shoveled and Bill followed with the team. We gradually gained on the team for they had to stop frequently to rest, and when noontime came we were quite a distance ahead, so we stopped and built a fire to be ready for lunch when the team would come along.

When Bill came I went to get the provisions box, we made the terrible discovery that Bill had failed to put it on the sleigh at Holland's. We looked at each other, speechless, for we realized the serious predicament that we were in, for we were not then half way across the hills.

The horses were very much fatigued and we were extremely hungry from our strenuous exercise. We realized there was not a moment to spare so Watkins and I set out at once, and Bill fed the

team and came on later. We both worked desperately with our shovels in order to make the road as easy as possible for the team.

This was the coldest day that we had experienced so far on the trip, being about 45 below. We were now getting away from the shelter of the trees, and into more open country and were facing a bitter northwest wind.

When we came to the hill where the trail led down into the Boyne valley, we could see a valley toward the north west that led into it. I had noticed this valley when coming from Emerson, but had hesitated to about taking it. I explained to Watkins that I thought this valley would lead out to the plain somewhere near his place and he agreed with me, so we planned to that he would go and follow this valley out into the plain, and should he succeed in reaching his place, he would hang a lantern outdoors and fire off a gun occasionally to guide Bill and me.

Watkins started off at once and as I could not see the team coming, I went back to find the cause for delay and came on them about a mile back, coming along a few hundred feet at a time, and then would rest for a few minutes and then at it again.

The sleigh was plowing up the snow and it was so dry that the runners cut through it to the ground much of the time and made hard pulling for the team. I had planned on my way back as to what I should do in case we should manage to get the team to the place where Watkins had left me, so I left Bill to urge the team on, and I took the axe back with me and procured a pole in a nearby bluff for a lever, and when Bill came we pried up the front bolster, and sleigh box and had the horses pull out the front bob. We then placed the bags of bedding on it, and went on across the valley in the direction that Watkins had taken. Darkness had set in, but it was a clear night and we could see the tracks made by Watkins where he would occasionally break through the crusty drifts.

The snow here was drifted into billows and packed hard, but it made hard travelling for the horses and finally they refused to pull the bob sleigh, so their harness was removed and the bags of clothing tied to the back of one horse, and Bill rode the other.

We now speeded up a little, and were getting out into the plain north of the hills and then we saw a light a couple of miles away, and heard the report of a gun, so we knew Watkins was safe and found his house.

My moccasin strings had become cut by the crusty snow, and I could not keep them on my feet, so I walked the last mile or so in my socks. I had three pairs on and managed to get to the house without them being frozen.

We had trouble in getting the horses into the sod stable for it had settled so much since it was built.

Dave Evans had a good warm supper of pork and beans ready for us as we entered the house and we sat around the cook stove and ate from tin plates laid on the stove.

Dave Evans and W. Watkins had farms adjoining and batched together. They had come from England during the past summer and winter had caught them unprepared for cold weather.

Their house was made with sod walls. It had a peak roof and the pole rafters had boughs and twigs interwoven on them all ready for the thatch. As we lay in bed we could view the stars through the holes. It was useless to try to heat the house, for the heat given off by the stove could not be felt three feet from it.

The temperature the day we arrived was 48 below and the next day it was 52 below, so we decided it was too cold to go back and recover our sleigh.

We were anxious to get home for we felt we were consuming much of their food supply. It was not so much a matter of cost of provisions but the cost of getting them from Portage that counted at that time.

On our second day at Watkins, Dave Evans and I went back with his ox team and brought our sleigh back, and the following day we reached home at noon, after having been fifteen days away.

CHAPTER 5.

My first thought on entering the house on our return from Nelsonville was to get the stove set up and a good fire started. This was soon accomplished and the furniture brought in and arranged in place, and we all felt quite elated with the improved appearance of the room.

The small camp stove we had was unable to prevent the earth floor from freezing, and now the new stove thawed it out, and when we sat on the chairs the legs would penetrate the ground but after a time when the floor became dry and packed this feature was overcome.

A clay floor or a poplar floor were the only floors at the time and sometimes were overlaid with a layer of hay. This gave a warmer appearance to a room but sometimes this harboured fleas, which recalls to mind a letter I received from an old timer a few months ago, which said: “Do you remember the night you spent at our place, when we arose and slept in the haystack in order to escape the fleas?”

Although we felt elated with the improved appearance of our room, it was often remarked that the housing of the settlers during their first year was usually not equal nor as good as that which the animals occupied back on the old homestead. However in a year or so all these temporary abodes gradually disappeared and were replaced by substantial and comfortable dwellings.

Those who have been reared with all the modern conveniences around them, never appreciate them as those who have endured the privations of the pioneer, and in the matter of food the pioneer is usually cured of his likes or dislikes for certain foods, and is satisfied with whatever is given him to eat during the remainder of his life.

Our usual diet was pork, beans, bannock, dried apples and syrup. We had plenty of prairie chicken and rabbits. Potato was the only vegetable, and they soon became frozen while on the way from Portage, and when thawed out and cooked were not very palatable. While the cows gave milk it was a great aid to our diet.

We had a small organ, a violin and a banjo, and these instruments served to help pass away the long winter evenings.

“The Winnipeg Free Press” was the only newspaper we received and it came very irregularly as well as other mail, for Portage was our nearest post office. When someone went there he would bring the mail for everybody and distribute it along the way.

During the winter we made frequent trips to Portage for supplies. It was impossible for the few settlers west of Jim Warren’s to keep the trail in good condition for the tracks became drifted over soon after a sleigh had passed, so our cargo each time was limited to what could be hauled under such conditions. We usually planned to reach Warren’s the first night from home for he had good accommodation for man and beast.

The trail led from house to house in as direct a line as possible.

Mr. Sanderson’s house was the first on the trail, then Jackson’s and Edward’s, where Mr. Duncan of Glenboro spent his first winter; then Sam Ballard’s dugout on the side of the ravine, then Henselwood’s, Palmer’s and Warren’s. From here it led by Stedman’s to Ring’s, and on through the willow swamp to Mr. Delf’s stopping place which was about two miles from the river crossing. This was a popular stopping place to be reached in coming from Portage.

Sometimes a traveler on reaching a regular stopping place would find it full, so he would then have to go on to the next house several miles further. This in winter on a cold stormy night meant a great hardship. The settlers as a rule were very hospitable. It naturally caused them considerable inconvenience to accommodate travelers for their houses were usually small and sometimes tables and chairs were put out doors in order to make room for beds on the floor.

A settler usually took along on a trip blankets and provisions.

The stopping places were a great help for the settlers to become acquainted with each other, and among the first questions asked was where they came from. The climate was quite a topic for conversation, and some maintained the opinion that the government should not have opened the country for settlement as it was fit for only Indians to live in.

From our place a round trip to Portage took about five days.

I might cite here an accident that befell the Sanderson family who lived on the trail. They had moved in during the fall, and it had rained while on the way, so they put a package of gunpowder in the stove oven. When the stove was set up in the house and a fire kindled, the powder exploded and wrecked the stove.

Again to show how we become mixed up in this world, I cite the following: While returning from a trip to Florida in 1917, I conversed with a young man who sat opposite me in the diner. It developed that he was a son of Mr. Stedman who lived on the trail. My cold weather experiences in Manitoba, related in these articles might give the impression to those unacquainted with the climate of Manitoba the idea that it was too severe to live in, but it should be understood that most of the discomforts occurred during the first year of settlement, for afterwards the country

became more thickly settled, there were better homes and roads. Stores were started, grain and other produce could be obtained close at hand and it was unnecessary to make long trips.

Those who spent the winter of 1879 and 1880 in tp 7, rge 12 were the McLeod family, consisting of Mr. And Mrs. McLeod, their sons, John, Angus and William, their daughter Mrs. Lawn and Mr. Lawn and Jim McDonald, J. Chewing, wife and 2 children, Bob Owens, JamesGowanlock, Mr. And Mrs. James Young and their two children, Mr. and Mrs. John Young, Mr. And Mrs., W. Young, Mr. and Mrs. Carnagie and two children, W. Leadbeater, Nathan Little and myself, making a total of thirty-one.

George Holmes had built a house on his place during the fall, and returned to Ontario for the winter and came back in March with his bride.

The few settlers lived so far a part that it prevented them from visiting each other very often, as there were no beaten paths, and there was the possibility of becoming lost if out at night.

James Young was our nearest neighbour and Mrs. Young would make us a batch of bread occasionally and it was a great treat for bannock became tiresome as a steadfast diet.

During severely cold weather we did not drive our stock to the river for water, but melted snow for them. The care of the stock and household duties took up considerable time, and it was just as well for it served to make the time pass more quickly.

The broad extensive view in every direction from our place, with only a few houses to be seen, was extremely bleak and desolate.

The constant movement of the sand-like snow drifting along the surface appeared to be endless and always on the go.

The sundogs or mock suns and circles around the sun, and the wonderful display of the aurora at time, were interesting sights for the new comer.

Lumber was one of our greatest necessities, and I began to consider if sufficient timber could be obtained in the surrounding country to make a saw mill a paying venture. No person had explored the country sufficiently to know the extent of the timber, so I decided to make a trip north to the Assiniboine River and make an investigation.

I put on a pair of snowshoes and crossed the Cypress, and on past where W. Sisson afterwards lived, and on through the sand hills until I reached the banks overlooking the river valley. This gave me a very extensive view for several miles along the valley, which was entirely covered with a growth of trees. On descending into the valley I discovered the greater part of it was too small for sawlogs, and only here and there were to be found groves of a few acres in extent large enough for sawing. I could only inspect a couple of miles of valley as I had to figure on the time required to reach home and this would be usually after dark.

I made three such trips and I estimated there was sufficient timber to warrant me in buying a saw and shingle mill.

As I tramped along through the valley many interesting things were to be seen. One of these I might cite here: Springs on the hillside above would form small streams which ran down through sheltered groves of spruce, and where the water fell over an obstruction into a small pool, the water did not freeze. The moisture arising from the pool would freeze into flakes and fall around the pool and build up a cone three feet or more in height like a miniature volcano with glistening white flakes.

The valley was sheltered and still and the only sound to break the silence was an occasional howl from a lynx or wolf. These animals rarely permitted me to obtain a view of them, and sometimes I would come on a partially eaten rabbit, where I had disturbed them at their meal.

I have often thought since then what a risk I ran on these trips, for if I had become disabled in any way, it would have been a difficult matter for me to have reached home, or for any person to have found me, but I did not stop to consider those things then. The average distance walked on these trips would be at least twenty-five miles or more.

My next step was to find a location for the mill. This would necessarily have to be located at a point further down the river so that all localities where the logs were cut could be rafted, and also be within easy access to the settlement. I then made a trip to the junction of the Cypress and Assiniboine rivers. When within a mile of this I entered the Cypress valley and found some fine timber. I was surprised to find a snowshoe trail made by the Indian trappers. I passed several beaver dams and trees that had been felled by the beavers for the dams.

On reaching the Assiniboine, I found sleigh tracks and followed them along a short distance, and then they lead up the river bank to an ideal spot on which I decided to build the mill.

I then followed the sleigh tracks up an easy incline out of the valley and then back on the prairie about a mile and there found John and Adam Anderson in a small dug-out shelter. They had recently come on their place and were hauling logs from the river in order to build a stable for their ox team.

I told them that I intended to locate the mill on the river flat, and they and their neighbors got out a quantity of logs to be cut into lumber.

I then traveled towards home on the east side of the Cypress and came to a broad deep ravine. I went down into this but going up the opposite bank I encountered a great snow palisade made by the drifted snow from the prairie. I made several attempts to scale it, but found it impossible to do so. Then I noticed some distance away, a grove of trees, some of which stood near the face of the drift, so I climbed one and got out on the branches that were imbedded in the drift.

I then went on to Mr. Campbell’s place and arrived there at dark, and just as they were sitting down to supper, so they invited me to join them. In the morning I crossed the ravine to Mr. Brock’s and then past Carnagie’s and Young’s and was home at noon.

I found my brother, Nathan, and w. Leadbeater anxiously awaiting my return, for they had expected my return the previous evening as I had planned.

CHAPTER 6.

Manitoba was being settled so rapidly that it became necessary for the provincial government to form the province into municipalities. The formation or division placed Twp. 7. Range 12 in the southwest corner of the municipality of Norfolk, which embraced Twps. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 in Ranges 9, 10, 11 and 12.

This was rather a poor layout for our country, for the settlements were in the north and south tiers of townships and were separated by the Assiniboine river, and an unsettled region, mostly sandhill country about 20 miles across.

The interests of these settlements were different, and not being connected by a road made it difficult for the council to meet.

The dates for the nomination and election of officers was set for April and I was one of the four nominated for the office of Warden.

Two of the nominees resided in the north and my opponent on the south was John Moir, who lived in the more thickly settled part toward the east. I realized I would have to exert myself in order to win, for I was a recent settler and not so well known. I decided on a plan to visit my two opponents on the north side and discover the extent of their settlement.

This was on a Thursday, and I wanted to be back on the following g Monday at the eastern polling place to be held at Tom Ring's for my friends would take care of my interests in our district.

I found I could not possibly go to the north end via Portage, and west on the south trail, and return in that time, so decided to strike north over this unsettled region. I reached Smart's crossing on the Assiniboine river twelve miles distant that evening.

Mrs. Smart, a widow, had erected a large building here for a stopping place and also a good stable for horses. They had a ferry barge on the bank ready for launching when the ice would move out. The family consisted of Mary Ann, George and Alexander. They owned a section of land three miles east of my claim, and resided on it during the winter months.

In the morning they went to the river with me, to see me cross over. The water had risen and the ice had parted from the banks and left a space of open water about ten feet wide. I got onto the ice with the aid of a plank, and I carried a pole along and used it to vault to the bank on the other side.

I waved farewell, and struck off on the trail toward Portage for a mile or so, and then left it, and took a course directly north as near as I could determine, for I did not have a compass, but being a clear day, I had no trouble in keeping my course.

I passed along over a rough sand hill country for several miles. The winter storms had swept the hill tops clear of snow, and ha d filled the valleys between. The recent thaws had made this snow wet and slushy, and I wallowed through it waist deep.

After I had crossed a few valleys in this way I discovered I could make better headway by lying down and rolling over them. My progress through this region was slow, and it was hard for me to determine the distance I had traveled.

After some time I came to a long level plain free from snow, and I found an Indian cart trail that led me on in the desired direction, and I made good headway.

When I had followed this trail for a few miles, it began to turn more towards the east, so I left it and kept on due north, and came suddenly to the brow of a high hill or ridge that reached away to the northwest as far as I could see, but I could only see a short distance toward the east an account of timber.

The view before me was wonderfully wild and impressive. I could see away to the northern horizon many miles distant, and apparently the whole landscape before me was as heavily timbered as that which grew along the base of the hill.

I anxiously scanned the country in every direction for a house, or for some sign of a settlement but none could be seen, I had eaten my lunch as I walked along to save time, but now I sat down, and considered what I should do. My situation was rather disquieting. It was now after one o'clock and it would be almost impossible to return to Smart's crossing before dark, and to go forward appeared discouraging with what I could see before me.

I decided to go on, so followed along the brow of the hill toward the east, thinking to find an easier place to enter the woods than that before me, and came onto the Indian trail again, and followed it down the hillside into the woods.

The trail was covered with deep slushy snow. After travelling a mile or so through this, the trees became smaller with clumps of willow here and there, and then a little further on became more open with smaller patches of prairie marsh and ponds. I waded through thin ice that had formed on these ponds the previous night, and in places where it was shaded could walk on it. I crossed several places with tall reeds in them, in water above my waist. I became so thoroughly chilled that I last all feelings in my legs. When I would come to a tree I would grasp a limb and pull myself up and work my legs vigorously to start circulation in them.

As the sun descended toward the horizon I became more uneasy about my prospects of reaching a shelter for the night, for I had no food and my matches had become watersoaked.

Presently I heard a dog barking and then the sound of wood choppers at work. These were indeed joyful sounds to me, and I hastened on, and soon emerged from the bush onto a small prairie about a half mile across. I could see on the other side of it two buildings and several men engaged in constructing another building.

I was not long in making my way towards them, and as I came near they stopped work, and gazed in astonishment at me, for they could not understand how any person could have come from that direction, and they could scarcely believe me when I told them I had come from the Assiniboine since morning.

They took me into the house and the women soon had a fine warm meal prepared for me, and I became warmed up a little.

This was on the south trail at a stopping place owned by Mr. Cook, and he had a toll bridge over a stream nearby.

I told them about my mission and was informed that Mr. Hudson, one of my opponents, lived six miles north, and Mr. McKinnon, the other, lived twelve miles west, on the south trail.

There was still some daylight to spare so I thought I would cut short the distance to Mr. Hudson's, so they directed me how to reach the trail and after going along a mile or so became confused by trails leading to clumps of timber, and on seeing a house a short distance away, I turned towards it and reached it at dark. The boys had just fed their stock and they took me into the house and gave me dry clothing to put on, and mine was hung up to dry.

This was Mr. Atkinson's place. He was away but his wife, two daughters and two sons were home. They had a piano and were all good singers, but I was unable to join them for I had lost my voice, and could only speak in whispers, owing to my ice water baths during the day. They were all so exceedingly kind, and I spent an enjoyable evening with them.

I fully regained my voice by morning. A small stream flowed by the house, and it was now overflowing with the melting snow. We were all puzzled to know how I was to get across it. A hay rack was nearby and we put it into the water, with a rope attached to it so to pull it back, but when I got on it and pushed away from shore it sank and I was pulled out thoroughly soaked.

I then procured an axe and went along the stream to where there was some trees standing in the water, and I felled one so that when it fell across the stream the trunk would stay on the stump. I then crawled across on it, and hurried along the road towards Mr. Hudson's. I found him at home and when I explained to him what I was after, he went with me to several of the neighbors, and held a meeting, and they agreed to give me their support, and gave me a letter to give to Mr. McKinnon which explained what they had done, and advised him to do likewise.

I figured that I would have to reach McKinnon's that night in order to keep up my schedule, so they prepared a meal for me and I then started back the six miles towards the south trail.

It was dusk when I reached the trail, and I turned west for the twelve mile walk to Mr. McKinnon's. This south trail was the main trail leading to the Saskatchewan, and the west, and was well marked. The trail along here was a series of ponds with a little land between, and sometimes after wading through one, I would have to look for the trail for it had changed direction in the water. It was a good clear night, and ice was forming on the ponds. After walking about six miles I crossed over a toll bridge, at a stopping place. From here conditions on the trail changed and led into poplar woods with numerous bog holes, and I had to pick my steps among the trees on the side. I began to hear the sound of rushing water in the distance ahead, and I began to wonder what new troubles were in store for me, and as I advanced the noise became louder.

I then emerged from the woods at the base of a hill, and turned to the right and soon came to a rushing stream of water across the road. I thought I might be swept off my if I attempted to wade through so followed along up the hill side to where the water had cut several deep channels in the

ice, and I found poles had been put across them, and I easily crossed over. The trail was now on dry land, and had numerous ridges formed by cart wheels that had traveled along here for years past.

When I reached McKinnon's it was midnight, and a traveler had just arrived with his team. There was only one vacant room in the house so this traveler and I occupied it. I was thoroughly chilled when I retired to bed for there was no fire on in the house and I spent a miserable night.

The place was known as "Seven Creek McKinnons" for the trail crossed sevencreeks on his land, and he had constructed a toll bridge on each one.

I met Mr. McKinnon in the early morning and gave him Mr. Hudson's letter, and he agreed with what they had done, and that he would call a meeting of the voters and instruct them to give me their support.

I then started to walk to Portage a distance of about 35 miles and after walking about two miles, a man with a wagon and team overtook me and he offered to give me a ride if I would pay the bridge tolls, and this I gladly agreed to do.

This gave me quite a rest but I did not make much better time than if I had been walking.

My escort turned off the trail at Rat Creek. This left me nine miles to walk, and it became dark when I was about three miles from Portage.

The returning officer lived there, and he was to drive out with a horse and buggy to Tom Ring's in order to take charge of the polling place there, so I was up early to go along with him.

He was also the deputy postmaster, and this being Sunday, I was enabled to get the mail for our settlement from him.

We reached Fortney's shack about 2 p.m. and found that a Mr. McKenzie had bought out Fortney's interests there. He prepared a lunch for us, and told us the ice was breaking up, and that it would be impossible for us to cross. We told him that the election could not be held unless we did, and that we would have to make an effort to do so.

We went to the river to investigate, and it certainly did look like a tough proposition.

There was a stretch of about 40 feet of open water between the shore and the solid ice. We then returned to the shack and secured a new boat that he had just made, and took it to the river and launched it. A rope was attached to it, so it could be pulled back.

I had a pole to paddle with, and the boat leaked so badly that it was about to sink when I reached the ice. I then pulled it onto the ice and got the water out of it, and it was pulled back for my partner, and he crossed safely over.

All this time McKenzie was pleading with us to give up the attempt, for he said he did not want to see us drown before his eyes.

We then started across the ice feeling ahead with our poles so to avoid dropping into a hole, and when we reached the edge of the solid ice, we could see that we had the most difficult part of the crossing ahead of us. It was over 100 feet to shore, and the water was filled with cakes of ice of all sizes, rushing along and crushing and grinding against each other. Some cakes along the shore would strike a tree and slide up on them a little, turn over and make a great splash back into the water.

The cakes of ice were not all of sufficient size to permit us to jump from one to the other. I noticed a larger one than usual coming along, so made a jump for it and landed on it all right but I could not stop my momentum and slid into the water. My pole reached across the cakes of ice and prevented me from sinking. I felt I was in great danger of being crushed between the cakes and as I was being carried along, I struggled and made every effort to make my way towards shore, and presently my feet touched bottom and this greatly aided me and I was soon in shallow water, and onto the shore. I had the mail tied to my head and resting on my shoulders, and it was only partially wet.

My partner with the election papers tied to his head the same as I had, repeated my performance, and we saw McKenzie standing there, and I suppose he was well pleased as we were that we had landed safely.

The ice water bath had thoroughly chilled us, and we hustled along for about two miles to Mr. Delf's stopping place, where we obtained dry clothing and hung ours up to dry beside the stove.

This was ten or twelve miles from Tom Ring's. So in the morning we reached there about fifteen minutes late, so we set our watches back to nine to show we were on time, and as we had just come from Portage, they did not dispute our time.

It was several days before the results of the election were known, and it was somewhat of a surprise when it became known that I had been elected by so large a majority for at the time it was not generally known that I had been over to the north side. I was elected the following two years by acclamation.

I designed the seal for the municipality, and when the municipality became divided into North and South Norfolk, this seal was given to North Norfolk and I designed the one for South Norfolk.

There was no town hall, nor school houses for the council to meet an at that time, so we met at any convenient farm house. During the summer months we met at Smart's crossing as it was convenient for the councilmen on the north side to come across country on horseback.

The Provincial Government had allotted each municipality the sum of $400.00 to assist them until taxes could be collected. I transacted the business of receiving this money with the Hon. John Norquay and Judge Walker, the Attorney General.

When the Southwestern railway was organized a few years later, and had built a bridge across the Assiniboine at Headingly and on towards Carman, Mr. Scammel, a councilman, and I were appointed delegates to interview the railway officials at Winnipeg, and see if they would divert the railway through the Tiger Hills settlement.

When we reached Portage a storm came on which detained us there three days. Mr. Scammel became discouraged and returned home, and I went on with my mission and laid the matter before the President of the road, who afterwards made an investigation, and had the railway diverted at Elm Creek to run west through the Tiger Hills settlement.

Publisher's Note: It is stated on page 32 that Mr. Little was accompanied by a Mr. Scammell on his trip to interview Mr. Norquay regarding the railway. The publisher is credibly informed that he author is in error in this matter; that no Mr. Scammell was a councilman at the time nor was identified with representations about the railway.--- Fifty years have intervened from the event to the writing, which readily explains an error of this nature.

Transcriber's note; I believe the publisher misread Mr. Scammel (l)'s role. His name is not connected with that of Mr. Norquay and the meeting with the railroad president took place "a few years later". – jhl

CHAPTER 7.

Prior to 1880, Portage la Prairie had been the head of navigation for the steamboat line. Now with the rapid settling of the country further west, they planned to make Grand Valley the terminus.

This boat line was a great aid to our settlement. Freight rates were high but they were cheap in comparison with the cost of hauling by team.

The settlers in our community had laid in what they had considered a sufficient supply of provisions to tide them over the breakup period when the roads became impassable and the river ice would break up and melt out.

This period was much later this year than usual, and their stocks of supplies were becoming exhausted and some were on short rations before the first boat arrived.

I had set up a camp at the sawmill site on the river, and had several men engaged in making preparations for the machinery that we expected would arrive on the first boat with our food supplies.

When the first boat came along, it was heavily loaded for points further west, and we were told our machinery and supplies would be along on a boat the next day.

We were then on short rations, so work was suspended and the men went out hunting for prairie chicken or other game, to supplement our rations.

The boat did not arrive the next day and each day that followed we looked eagerly down the river valley for the tall smoke stacks of the steamer to appear. At last when it did arrive, it was four days after the other boat had passed.

We were in weakened condition when we received our machinery and supplies but in a few days we were back to normal again, and the machinery was being rapidly prepared for business.

When we began operations the lumber was taken away by the settlers as fast as it was cut, and it was some time before we could obtain a sufficient supply ahead to erect a building to live in.

My brother, Nathan, resided on the farm and cared for the stock and the teams were employed to haul lumber there for buildings for we had to vacate our winter home that had served so well before the rainy season began.

The mill help were recruited from among the settlers, and they usually worked to obtain lumber for buildings on their farms.

Jacob Diehl was our first sawyer. He homesteaded that year in 7-12.

There was very little cash in circulation in those days. Settlers without money would furnish me with food supplies in exchange for lumber and shingles. Some were given time and if hail or frost destroyed their crop the account had to be carried for another year.

When harvest or haying time came, the help who had farms had to leave and attend to them during hay and grain harvest, and those who remained with me, went to our farm to put up hay, and the mill was shut down for a time.

There was a large hay marsh near Tom Hingston's place in 7-12 where we usually put up hay. There was such a heavy growth, it did not take long to stack great quantities of it.

When prairie fires raged during the fall much hay was often destroyed even when protected by fire guards, as fire brands from the rank growth of grass would be carried long distances by the wind.

In 1880 all desirable homestead land in 7-12 had been entered on, and several new settlers had come in, and the land to the west was being rapidly taken up.

Our farm was on the trail, and we became acquainted with many who settled further west. Travelers would usually call on us as they went by, and they would give us the latest news from the outside world.

It was ludicrous to see what some land seekers would sometimes bring along with their wagon and teams before they had found a location. One would have a fanning mill, another shingles, and so on with things that they might not have use for, for a year or so.

One day the boys saw two men coming along the trail, so the four of them planned to play a joke on them. They entered the house the house, and placed a couple of pistols and dirk knives on the table, and were excitedly playing cards, when the strangers arrived. They were asked to sit down, and the boys kept on with the game which became more exciting, and it appeared there was going to be a fight, so the strangers quietly sneaked out, and went on their way. They told a settler what a gang of desperados they had seen, and thought they had surely reached the wild west.

Many homesteaders at first had insufficient funds to remain steadily on their claims, so would obtain employment elsewhere for a time. They would have to be on the watch for fear their

claims would be “jumped”. Jim McDonald had a claim a mile west of McLeod’s and he was told it had been jumped.

He was driving a team for us at the time, so the boys went to work one night and took a part a small portable house that we had, and set it up on Jim’s place, and put a stove and a few things into it. When the neighbors saw the house in the morning, they could scarcely believe their eyes, and some went to the house to make sure, and there found Jim attending to his household duties. This house was the means of saving Jim his homestead.

I had to make frequent business trips to Portage and Winnipeg during the summer. As I was Warden of the municipality of Norfolk some of these trips were in its interests.

When the stage of the water permitted steamboat navigation, I traveled that way. When the water became too low for that, I would make a raft of logs and poles and float downstream. I secured a box on it for a seat, some hay to lie on, some reading matter and a supply of food. I made two trips to Portage on rafts, and once I went through to Winnipeg in a skiff, which I made from our mill lumber.

Mrs. Smart, at the ferry crossing a little below our place, was horrified to see me go by on such a flimsy contrivance, and pleaded with me to come ashore for I would be surely wrecked and drowned. Their ferry man had been drowned there a few days previously and this may have caused her to be unduly nervous, and alarmed at my raft venture.

I had a rudder to control the raft in order to prevent it from being swept close to shore where the current was eating away the river bank at bends. This action of the water would cause trees to become undermined, and fall into the river.

Some trees would fall and remain in a horizontal position with their limbs projecting from the water.

Sometimes in spite of all my efforts the swift current would draw me towards shore and sweep me beneath these branches, and I would have to lie flat, and cling to the raft to prevent myself from being dragged off into the water.

At night I would become caught on snags and sand bars and I would have to get into the water and push off. I found this means of reaching the Portage much easier and a little faster than walking.

I might have used horses for these trips, but they were much more useful on the farm, and then the poor roads made travelling with horses about as slow as on foot.

* * *

I had intended to confine these articles to events that had occurred during the first year of settlement, but it may be interesting to add a few items regarding conditions during the following year or so.

A weekly mail service was established from Portage to Mr. Holland's farm in 1881, and a little later on was extended to our place, and the P.O. named Littleton.

Mr. Denby, who had opened a store in one of Nathan's buildings was the post master, and W. Sissons carried the mail to and from Holland

Those who had grain or produce to sell during this year found a ready sale to the new settlers, but the following years an outside market had to be found for the surplus crops. At first Portage was the only market and 50 bushels was about the average load that could be hauled, and wheat at 65 cents per bushel did not leave much of a margin of profit after the expenses of the round trip were deducted.

When the CPR was extended west, a road was opened up to Carberry, and then another to Manitou. These outlets assisted the settlers greatly, but it was not until the railroad was built through to Holland, and Glenboro, that grain growing became somewhat profitable, and placed our settlement on an equal footing with other grain growing localities in the province.

I removed from Cypress River in 1889, but since then wherever I have resided, my mind often reverted to the strenuous pioneering days that I had spent there.

Being young and vigorous the so called hardships that I had endured were scarcely thought of as such, and in a way a person with vision took pleasure in seeing the wilderness grow from year to year into a prosperous community.

I visited Cypress river in 1909, and noted the great changes that had taken place since I had left. I missed seeing many of the old timers who had passed away and those who had removed to other parts, and who had shared with me their efforts in developing the community, and paved the way for those who followed.

Very few of the old timers of 1879 and 80 may be alive at this date. To those who are, I trust these articles may be doubly interesting in recalling to memory our pioneering experiences.

THE END

Transcriber's footnote:

While still residing in the Cypress River area (Littleton), Bob invented the wire staple and was eventually hired by the Sinai Institute of Chicago as an inventor, according to an article in the Pahokee News (Palm Beach, Florida) in 1938, he had some 50 to 75 invention patents registered at the patent office in Washington, DC. He lived out his last years in Ritta, Florida and died in 1938 in Lake Harbour, Florida at 85 years of age.

In 1995 a cairn was erected and dedicated by the Cypress River Agricultural Society on the site where "Littleton" once was.