

Navigation on the Saskatchewan

An Interesting Interview with Capt. Deacon, of Prince Albert.

A representative of The Western Home Monthly, having been present at the banquet to celebrate the incorporation of Prince Albert as a city, and hearing, among other speakers, Captain Deacon make some remarks about the Saskatchewan river, called on him the next day. After our representative had explained the object of his visit, Captain Deacon expressed his willingness to give any information at his command that would be of interest to the public.

In answer to the question as to what length of time he had resided in the district, the captain replied that he had been in Prince Albert and vicinity for the past twenty-eight years.

"What was the cause of the migration towards this country at that time?"

"The grasshopper plague in Manitoba in the early '70's, when the crops were destroyed three times within six years. Some of the older settlers from Headingly, knowing of the Saskatchewan valley and that the grasshoppers had never troubled this portion of the Northwest, sold out and moved to Saskatchewan.

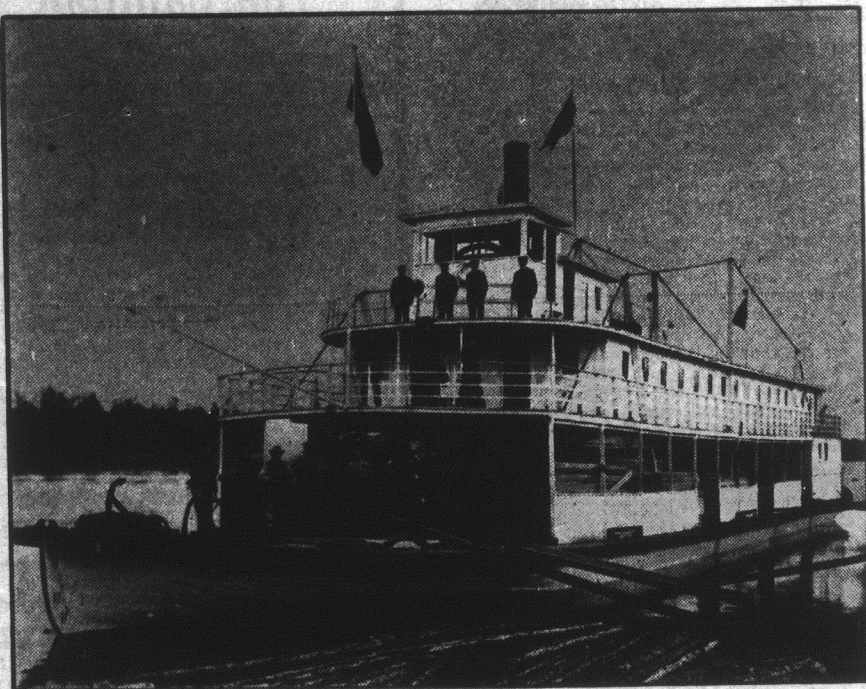
"Such a move was surely a big undertaking in those days of poor travelling facilities?"

"Oh! It was only five hundred miles and there was always the trail and a Red river cart. We simply loaded our outfits on the carts, hit the trail and got here. In our case leaving Winnipeg by the Portage trail, and continuing on for thirty-five days, our backs to the rising sun, driving our carts into the eye of the setting sun, we arrived on the banks of the North Saskatchewan, on the site of the present City of Prince Albert."

"You say there were no steamboats in those days. Were you the first to build a boat on this river?"

"No; the Hudson's Bay Company built a boat named the 'Lily,' about the year '76, I think. They were followed, a few years after, by the Winnipeg and Northwest Transportation Co., who operated a line of boats from Selkirk to Grand Rapids via Lake Winnipeg, then up the Saskatchewan

"Although the river drains a vast tract of country, rainfall appears to have but little effect upon the volume of water, the



"The Alberta."

currents being very rapid. The highest stage of water comes in the hot summer months, when the snow melts in the mountains. Then a sudden rise of from three to five feet may occur at any time. We

driven my boat alongside of River Street, the cabin above street level.

"As the water falls in the autumn, navigation is very difficult, the river being impeded by boulders and sand bars. It is then we have to work—steam winches, jack-spars and tackle all working to get the boat over sand bars, sometimes several times in a day.

"Prince Albert is situated about midway between Lake Winnipeg and the Rocky Mountains. The country to the north is densely covered with timber. There are two good streams flowing from the north and joining the Saskatchewan in the vicinity

of Prince Albert. They are used to bring the logs down in the spring to the saw-mills of the city where they are manufactured into lumber etc., and shipped by boat and rail to the prairie sections of the Northwest.

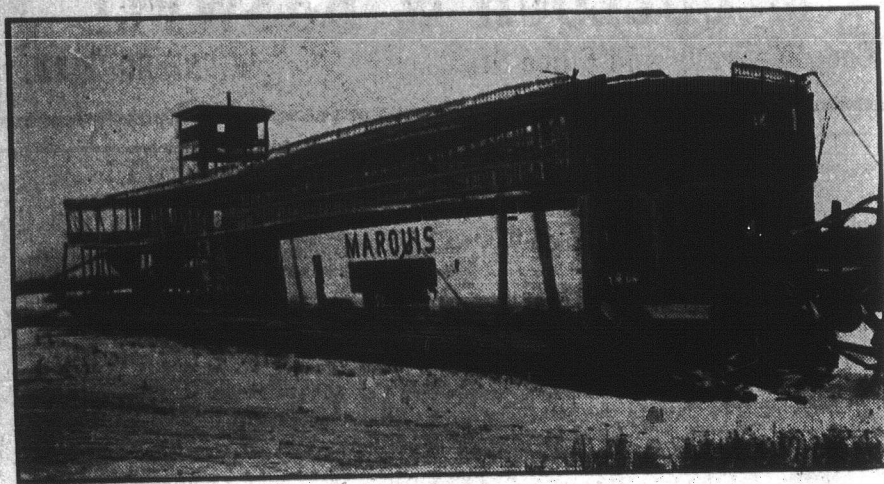
"Immediately below Prince Albert we have the rapids known as Coal Falls, where the river narrows down and rushes with great force between high banks. These rapids, I think, will yet be utilized to supply electrical power to the City of Prince Albert. Farther down, at the Grand Rapids, where the river rushes through a gorge in the limestone formation, there is sufficient power going to waste to grind all the wheat that could be grown in the Saskatchewan valley, and as the rapids lie in the direct route of the future Hudson's Bay railroad, I have no doubt they will yet be utilized to manufacture flour to be exported to Europe."

"Do you find the Indian pilots the best?"

"As for Indians, they have a good memory for landmarks. When they learn a channel they can keep in it, but, as the shifting sand often fills the channel with which the pilot is familiar, I do not find him any better than a white man in finding the new channel. I have had considerable to do with the Indian on the river, on the trail and in the camp. I have worked with him, travelled with him and know him pretty well and, I think, that what an Indian can do, a white man can do and do it better."

"When I first commenced running on the North Saskatchewan, fifteen years ago, having had some experience in deep water in the East, I started out confident that I could steer a boat. The river looked all the same to me, but in the very first trip I struck a sand bar so hard that it took us a day, with the aid of a powerful wind-

(Continued on page 16).



"The Marquis."

During the Riel rebellion, 1885, she carried stores from Prince Albert to Fort Pitt for use of the troops.

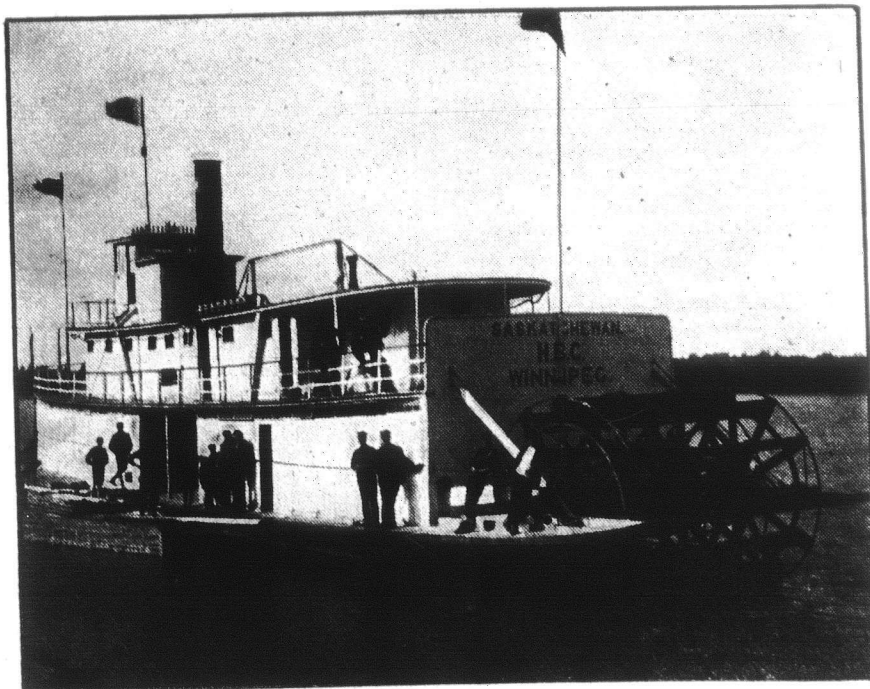
to Edmonton, calling at way ports. They had four large boats, stern-wheelers, and for several years, until the arrival of the railway in 1890, did a large business. Upon the completion of the road to Prince Albert they had to lay up several of their boats, but they kept the 'Northwest' running until about three years ago, when she was swept away by high water at Edmonton and broke up on the bridge, becoming a total wreck.

"I built a boat, the 'Josie,' in the year 1890, and worked her in the vicinity of Prince Albert up to this last season, when I replaced her by the 'Pathfinder,' built in 1903. My son, coming into partnership with me this season, we built another, the 'Marion.' Our business is principally rafting and towing of logs to the saw-mills.

"This past season there were three other boats built at Prince Albert, one for a fishing company was built at the town and floated down the river to get her machinery in; the 'Saskatchewan,' built by the Hudson's Bay Company, a stern-wheeler, and the 'Alberta,' built by Captains Coates and Moshar. The two last-named boats are cabined and fitted up for passenger traffic as well as freight, and are run to up-river ports.

"Prince Albert is well situated for the boat-building industry, having abundance of timber near at hand and being the headquarters of the lumber industry of the Northwest; also having among her citizens men who have proved their ability to build boats second to none.

"As to the river, you see by a glance at the map that it takes its rise in the Rocky Mountains, flows from West to East, a distance of about one thousand miles, then it discharges through the Grand Rapids into Lake Winnipeg. For the greater part of its course it is about one thousand feet in width, but in the upper reaches, above Carlton, it widens out in places to as much as a half mile and contains a great number of islands and sandbars.



"The Saskatchewan."

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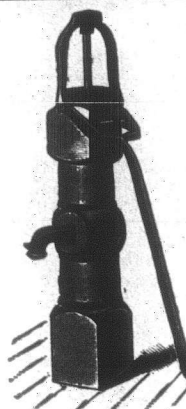
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