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PASSENGERS through Lethbridge, Alberta, on the C. P. R., were greeted with a strange sight from the 28th of March until the 10th of April. Just across from the depot is located the Dominion land office, and outside was to be seen a line of men numbering over 100, who were patiently standing idle doing nothing but maintaining the line. The reason was that on the first of May the government would offer for settlement a tract of prairie land hitherto known as the McIntyre ranch; and it was to be among the first to secure a homestead that these men endured the elements for over two weeks, and practically dared death from exposure. Night and day they kept the line, sleeping only a few hours at a time at irregular intervals, under small canvases. And with the stubborn optimism of the speculator they would have held the fort three weeks longer if something unusual had not happened.

On the tenth day of April came the unexpected, unique in the annals of any Canadian city. The Mayor of Lethbridge, George M. Hatch, issued to those in the line a deed of one square foot of the city of Lethbridge, just outside the land office. The purpose was that the men might thus return to their homes instead of remaining in their positions outside the office, for the next three weeks. The deeds expire on the second day of May, and only those who return them will be allowed to stand in the line that will be formed probably the last day of April. Over 100 deeds were issued on April 10th, and many hundreds more will be issued before the land day, as it is called by the prospective settlers, arises. To each man is allotted his temporary square foot of Lethbridge real estate—enough for a pair of boots—on a public highway; clearly designated on a plan drawn by the city engineer.

UNTIL May 1 this block of public land is owned by private individuals in various parts of the country; all to enable the fight for free land to begin where it left off on April 10.

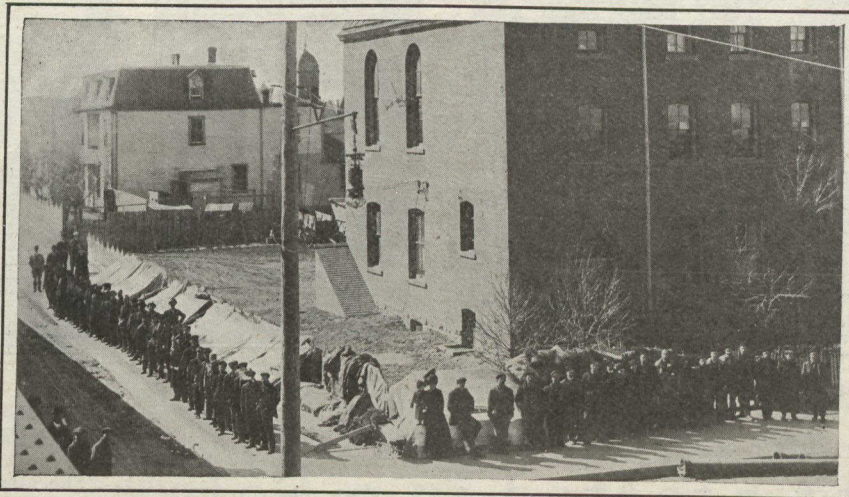
The Mayor's expedient was adopted because of pressure from public opinion. Prominent citizens of Lethbridge, justly proud of their city, grew weary of a spectacle which at its best was only an exhibition of dogged tenacity. In 1908 Lethbridge had a similar exhibition when four men died of pneumonia due to the exposure. Besides the crudest of camp conditions prevailed. The camp was not altogether sanitary. It was a mild relapse to barbarism.

And public opinion, based upon the public spirit of Lethbridge,

The Mad Rush for Free Land

A Practice That Should be Abandoned.

By JOHN M. PEEBLES



A Camp of Land-seekers Besieging the Lethbridge Land Office for Free Land.



Waiting for Hours Already—Beginning of the Line-up.



Waiting for Days, But the Kind of Trail-hard Men That Don't Mind It.



Waiting for Weeks—March 28 to April 10—Till the Mayor Broke Up the Line.

won. The line of homeseekers was broken. The men went away.

The land in question, known as the McIntyre ranch, is situated in the Milk River district, and consists of about 69,000 acres, room enough, it is estimated, for 400 families. In this connection a difficulty will arise. Over one thousand men will be holding City of Lethbridge deeds when the day of distribution comes. What will be done when five or six hundred men file into the land office desirous of securing a portion of the great West and are told that it is all gone. Not only young men, but many middle-aged and one or two elderly men took up a position in the line.

ON March 28th the first prospective settler took up his position outside the door of the office. The next day he was joined by three others, and from then on every day the line continued to extend, and every day brings in from five to fifteen more. Legally it is claimed that the deeds will not entitle the holders to first choice at the land. It is the opinion of some that any man may walk in, whether in turn or not, and ask to file the necessary papers to secure a farm. It is difficult to imagine what would occur if such were done. At present an unwritten law is honoured to the effect that no man may take another's place. But the conditions will be different on the first of May, when some of the tail-enders see their opportunities of securing a farm slipping away. They may rush the office and riot ensue, in which case the police might have plenty to do.

This has brought up the question as to the advisability of maintaining the present system. Business men of Lethbridge say it is a mistake. They argue that the land should be put up at public auction and then all would have an equal chance and the highest bidder would secure the choicest farm. Part of the ranch will be held for homesteads only. Another part will be sold to those who have exhausted their homestead privileges, and a third will be divided into homesteads, those filing being allowed to pre-empt another quarter section.

The greater number of the men in line are apparently sturdy fellows, who will make valuable British subjects and citizens. A large number are from the States. There were also a number of ladies with their husbands. In the little so-called tents stretching from the top of the four-foot fence to the ground they passed the days and nights before the deeding system was decided upon. They cooked and prepared the meals right in the tent, upon little cook stoves. Some