

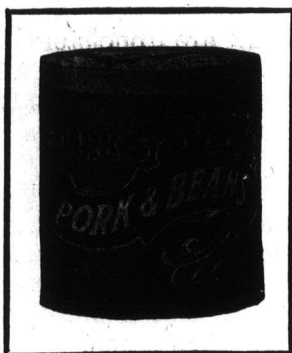
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The Patriot

By Francis J. Dickie

THE sun was already an hour high, and peering over the tops of the spruce trees back of the little clearing, when Morris came out of his cabin. Without bothering to close the door he shouldered his pack in true woodsman style—the straps slipping over shoulder and forehead after the fashion of northern packsacks—and with odd limping gait set off down the little pathway that led into deeper, all encompassing woods.

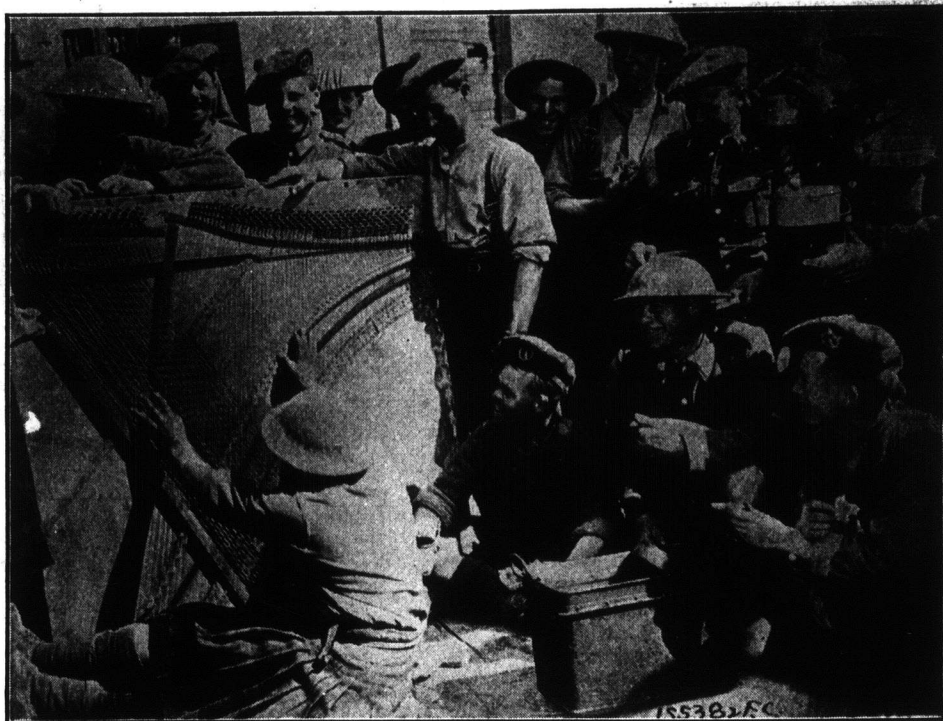
Only once he turned, just before a point where a bend in the trail shut off sight of the shack. A long moment he stood gazing at the scene. The half open door, caught by a breath of wind, creaked on its leathern hinges, as if to accentuate the desolation—there was no other sound.

Slowly the man raised his fist and shook it in slow motion that took in the dwelling, the open doorway and all the silent surroundings. There was no malice in the action; rather it was a farewell, harsh, uncaring, in keeping with the stern cruelty of this land.

"Thank God!" he said, and turning, disappeared down the little trodden trail. He moved forward slowly, what of the

line, soft with kindly bits of varied woodland—old, tall, standing maple, beech and hickory, and many limbed, far reaching elms all shedding an umbrous pleasantness which the trees of this northland never did. Again, his dreams had to do with clean, well kept barns, or fat cows chewing gravely from recent cropped clover fields.

For Morris, in spite of his five years in the Northland, was an agriculturist. The placid ways of an Ontario farm should have always been his. Twenty-eight years of his thirty-three had been spent upon one. But, swayed by strangely come dissatisfaction, a longing to travel, to see new lands, things imbued by ten generations of sea rovers, land pioneers and trail blazers of sturdy British stock, Morris had followed this bent; started to see the world. And, because his mind worked in simple grooves, the beginning took form of a harvest excursion ticket that led to the wheat fields of the great west. From here he had drifted on into harsher northland. He had washed gold on the headwaters of the Peace, freighted scow boats on the Athabasca, and on even to distant Fort Resolution. But always



Accomplished Highlander plays tuneful melodies on "Inside of Piano" while his fellows dine

seventy pounds on his back, and one bad leg? It was with light heart, for the load consisted of three almost black fox pelts, fifteen silvers and forty other skins—mink, marten, lynx—result of an extra good season's catch.

During the past winter months the ever growing pile of sleek, glistening hides had become almost an obsession. He had fallen to playing with them during long winter nights, as a miser does his gold; but not from any hoarding instinct, only because they represented fine clothes, wonderful food—at least at first till the assurance of the viands' ever nearness made palate less desirous. And, too, and above all else, they represented train fare back home, and the possibility of ownership of that quarter section, right next the "Old Man's," a quarter well kept, with snug barns, a bit of bush and zig-zag rail fence still solid and sound after almost a quarter century.

Seven thousand dollars, Morris had reckoned his catch to be worth, a valuation based on last year's prices. Perhaps he might get more, he thought, for good fox skins had been going up when last he had visited the fur post.

So, through the long winter days, he had toilsomely journeyed over his trap lines, the loneliness and hardships minimized by thoughts of the rewards in store. And during long nights when the Arctic wind howled out among the spruce trees and sent loads of snow crashing down from their overburdened limbs on to the roof of the little cabin, he had sat and dreamed of the sighing of a softer wind through apple orchard; and dreaming, relieved happy days of earlier life in kinder land, where neat, small fields of roots and grain stretched to near sky-

had his heart been empty, a continual homesickness lay upon him. Yet he could not go home broke; the sturdy provincialism that was his forbade. So, after three profitless years, he had turned to trapping—a trade for the poor man, the rewards of which are proportioned by skill and luck.

The first year had furnished the experience making for skill, and, too, brought enough to grubstake him a second season. Then the second element, luck, had come to him in the finding of a virgin field teeming in fur, a place lying a hundred miles to the north and east of Fort McMurray.

Now, with his reward assured by heavy fur pack, the agriculturist that was the real him leaped into being. He had but one thought: "Back to the East, and buy a little farm."

With this thought before him, he now moved on light heartedly. Presently the short little trail of his own making leading away from the cabin door, was no more. He walked on through pathless, silent ranks of spruce and poplar growing up from springy muskeg, and again upon rolling stretches of higher, sandy land.

The lengthening hours brought oppressive heat, a still humidity from sun kissing too moist earth. Such April days occur occasionally in the northland. Morris, burdened with the weight of seventy pounds, cursed the unusual weather, cursed the wilderness and the few early mosquitoes already come to life. Still he pressed on doggedly, intent on making a point on Sutton Creek, thirty miles beyond, where lay his cached canoe.

After that the going would be easy—