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FROM QU'APPELLE.

A Graphic Letter from a Goderich Boy—
Roughing it in the Far West—Looking
for the Empire City—A Hard Road to
Travel—How They Build Houses in the
Qu'Appelle District—A Fratricide.

The following lengthy letter from Mr. John Robertson, late deputy-sheriff of Huron, to Mr. Robert Reynolds, the present incumbent, gives a vivid description of life in the Far West, and enumerates some of the vicissitudes of travel in that far-off land. Robertson's philosophic reflections on the trip will be duly appreciated by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance during his residence in Goderich.

Qu'Appelle, May 28th, 1882.
We called at the house of Mr. Lang, late of Tuckersmith and stayed overnight. He homesteaded and preempted 320 acres on which he lives, and bought, I think four sections from the Syndicate. His house is the best I have seen this side of Brandon, a good sized, frame, story and a half, and when finished it will be quite comfortable. The part of his land which he saw is very good, but I would not care for the locality, as there is a good deal of land around it which, I think, will not be worked for a long time, his land stretches down to Lake Ok, which would be a very pretty lake if the beach was sandy or even clean, but instead, it is covered with the coarsest kind of grasses or weeds which spoil the appearance of the eye, although the water is pure. He has two teams of horses and two of oxen at work breaking, and has quiet fields of oats down. They sow the oats on the grass and then plow them under, when put in this way they do not expect a large crop, but say they usually get a medium one. He will have a great field ready for crop next spring if everything works right. There is a ridge of sand hills about two miles from his place part of which is covered with poplar trees, 40 acres of which he has secured, so he is all right for fuel if he can keep the prairie trees out. We had to strike off the trail a few miles to his place, and on the way back crossed the sandhills. It took us some little time finding a pass through them and through the timber. They appear in places in the pure sand, and look as if they would blow away were it not for the protection afforded by the timber. It is very tedious driving over the prairie where there is no trail, as the ponies seeing no road ahead do not want to trot at all, and the prairie is also full of holes made by an animal they call the badger, but I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing one. Their holes are about eight inches in diameter and the earth thrown out of them is a guide to the quality of the soil, as half of them appear to be quite fresh, in fact, they look as if the earth had been thrown up the night before and in some places they are not more than a few feet apart, a person expects at first to see the ponies step into them and land on their heads, but they seem to understand them so well they never do, no matter whether walking, trotting or galloping. I would not take a good deal and cauter an Ontario horse where they are plentiful. Native ponies are in such demand now, that they ask \$100 or \$125 for miserable looking little things which if a man rode into Goderich on such a horse he would be laughed at. Some of the Montana ponies are splendid looking when properly wintered. Some are as heavy in the body as a fat pig, but not quite so tall, and more real horse than the two or three common horses. The great advantage of ponies over horses is that they can do a fair day's work on the prairie grass, even at this season when the grass has not half its strength. We had quite a little load on our backboard and tent, provisions, clothes, etc. and all the grain we took for them was one bushel of oats, a couple of handfuls of which we gave them every night. Parties who started out with common horses and oxen had to take out half a load of feed which of course made their wagons so heavy they would get through in sloughs where we could get through with no difficulty. The ponies also seem to understand the nature of the ground in wet places much better than horses. They avoid all holes of their own accord, where horses feet out through, and no matter how deep it may be, they seem to know how to avoid it. Several times I thought we were going to be stuck, and if they had stopped and let the wheels settle for half a minute they could not have started it again. This they seem to understand of their own accord, and are determined to bring the load through with them. On the sand hills through which we passed there was a bird called a sand-hill crane. We did not get close to one but in the distance they looked to be about the height of a man. We got along with our own troupe to Gopher's creek, about 40 or 50 miles from the border camp of the Hudson Bay, and then a half dozen teams were there buying unloading their goods and carrying them over on the railroad bridge, and swimming their horses an oxen, and then drawing their wagons through. One party neglected to take down his wagon box and when he got into the deep water the wagon box raised up, taking the front boiler with it and drawing out the king bolt, which allowed the hind wheels and box to float down stream, two or three half-breeders who were there, stripped off an oxen after it, and succeeded in rescuing it, but the boiler came off and the oxen were left to sink when it was left. We had four goods over, and then ran over on the ties in the railroad bridge, we got over without any mishap, and then from Brandon to the west, full of holes and mud, and I succeeded at this season in getting a little wood to go into it, they would catch the

had to carry enough wood to keep us for a day, as we had to cross a plain about 40 miles. Some of the land over this plain looked very good, but the soil was light and for quite a part of it there is a great deal of alkali in the low places. To a person not accustomed to them these plains are the most unsatisfactory places to drive over you can imagine. You cannot make yourself believe because of the going up hill all the time. I was the teamster and led the ponies, walk more than half the time continuously, thinking that when I got to the top of the high land ahead we would have a long down grade. When we would get there, there was another hill ahead, and so on all day. On looking behind, the ground over which we just passed, seemed to be as much up hill as what we were coming to. In fact we appeared to be in a hole all the way across with high ground on every side. A person could not be convinced that he could see more than a quarter of a mile in any direction, and yet no doubt he could see a great many miles. Sometimes a team and men would come in sight apparently about a quarter of a mile ahead and yet it would take sometimes an hour to come to where they were. After a while I could judge of the distance pretty accurately, but it was almost impossible to see the object. Sometimes you could see a man driving a team; the former would appear to be about the size of a 4-year-old boy and the oxen about the size of calves. You have no doubt often heard of the alkali bed in this country, but I would require to see them to believe in their existence, before having a proper conception or respect for the nature of the material of which they are composed. On the surface it looks quite firm and smooth but the instant you drive into it and break the top, down the boxes and wagon, and it is such a sticky, clinging nature, and besides having no bottom, that out of it, it is impossible for horses to get their feet. You might as well try to drive them through a bed of slacked lime 10ft deep and the smell of it will be simply disgusting. It is about the color of soft soap. I drove into one bed and of course the horses got down. We managed to get the harness off them, when one of them managed to struggle out; the other was in deeper and could not move. We managed to get the rollers on his side on a place where the crust had not been broken, but if she would attempt to get on her feet they would cut through and down she would go again. We succeeded at last in rolling her to the edge when she got up none the worse for the struggle. Then we had to turn out at a distance of about eight miles, and I did not get in very far when the horses went down. When we would lift on the wheels the extra weight on our feet would cause them to break through. I would pick a man with small feet who would attempt to cross it. My good horse came in very useful that time. At last we succeeded in getting it out, and after picking a good solid looking place, thought we would draw it to where the horses were ourselves, but before we went a rod the wheels cut through and we were stuck again, this time we had to unload our freight before we could get it through, after that I would drive around half a mile before I would attempt to cross a piece of it. Before we got here we caught up to dozens of teams and had the satisfaction of knowing that everyone of them got into the same fix as we did, only in a much greater degree. I have no doubt if I had left the ponies to their will they would have kept clear of it. However we got over the plain without any further accident or misfortune and very thankful we were when we struck the timber land again. When you hear people speaking of the alkali bed in this country you must not imagine it is bushlike Ontario forests. It has the same delusive effect on a person as driving up hill on the plain, only that it takes a different form. You can see what you suppose to be a dense bush in the distance, but as you drive towards it, it keeps moving away. In the end you will come to little clumps of poplar trees covering probably from 1 or 2 to 10 or 15 acres of large open spaces of prairie between. After driving through for a distance and the thick bush still continuing as far ahead as ever, on looking back you find the bush is a great deal behind you. It is caused by the several clumps forming themselves in the distance into what appears to be a solid bush. Timber land of this kind is the only kind I have seen in this country and I am sure is the only kind they have unless it may be out near the Rocky Mountains. Some people imagine it is such a fine thing to have timber on their land in this country, and so it is for the time being, but if the country ever grows to the proportions which it bids fair to now, it is only a matter of a few years until they have to depend on some other source for their supply. A person would imagine on coming to a timber belt that a roadway must have been cut through which the trail would pass, but instead the trail winds around the clumps without the necessity of cutting a tree down. Even had the one plain the trail curves around, avoiding bad holes and sloughs, so that the distance by the trail must be a quarter further than a direct line. The regular freighters and Hudson Bay men who first made these trails all use carts; sometimes as many as a hundred in one trail, and from that down to 3 or 5. Two or three men can drive as many horses as they wish. A good horse with a driver is put on the lead and all the rest follow in his tracks go where he will. They have usually a number of loose horses to rest the others. The man riding on horseback and keeps any which might be inclined to lag and the loose ones from straggling off. In this way the tracks made by the wheels and where the horses walk between are in some places worn down to the depth of 8 or 9 inches. They then form new tracks to the side and so on until in some places there are as many as a dozen tracks. We met several teams coming down empty, some with ponies and some with oxen hitched in the carts. Both ponies and oxen have a peculiar swinging gait, between a walk and a trot, which takes them along, taking good roads and bad together, at quite a fast rate. We met one train right at a very bad mud-hole, when two men jumped right into it up to their middle and as each cart would go into it, they would catch the

wheels and help them out, remaining there until the whole train was through. We had to go around nearly a quarter of a mile to avoid it, thus they make so much better time than any person else. We did not think we were making very good time, but still we caught up to and passed dozens of teams on the road here, some of which had been on the road several days. On account of our having no grain we had to travel differently to the others. We usually got up at 4 o'clock, as we could manage and drive about 2 1/2 hours; then rest and have breakfast until about 10 o'clock; then go until about 1 o'clock; have dinner and start about 1 1/2 hours, and drive until 3 o'clock. The others would usually start about 7.30 and only stop once during the day. I often heard it said a yoke of oxen would tire out horses in a long drive, but as we passed so many I was beginning to doubt it; but on Tuesday morning we caught up to and passed a yoke of oxen which had made out a long drive. When we stopped for breakfast they passed us; from then until Tuesday night we passed them when they stopped for dinner and they passed us whenever we stopped, but they always succeeded in getting a few miles ahead of us on Tuesday night. One of our horses got stuck in the mud, and I do not think we could have passed them, but on Saturday they had to put their oxen on two feeds of grain a day and on Monday on one. Under this treatment they weakened a little, and on Tuesday night we camped in it. On Wednesday we saw the same yoke of oxen and did not see them since. There was quite a little friendly rivalry between us, and I think they forced their oxen to much in trying to keep ahead and had to take a day's rest when they could no longer stay with us. One of our horses got stuck in the mud, and I do not think we could have passed them, but on Saturday they had to put their oxen on two feeds of grain a day and on Monday on one. 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