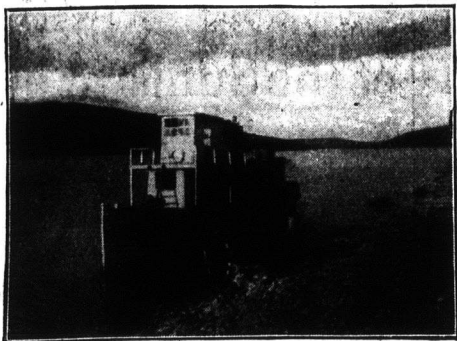


men danced together to the music of mouth-organs—the following morning the trail swallowed them up.

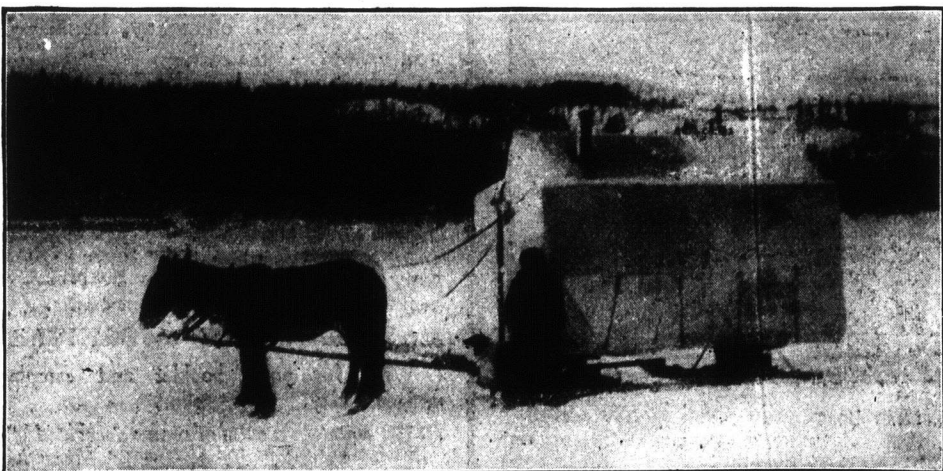
The Valley of the Peace River. That the Wards might gaze on the country spread out below, the tired horses were pulled up before making the descent of seven hundred to the "Crossing." Although the scenes were new to them, yet it seemed as if they had arrived in a homeland. The waters of the Peace and Smoky Rivers were like silver streaks, while the hills and dark evergreens reminded Ada of her own Laurentian hills in far Quebec. Down, down, the horses went until the level of the river was reached, and the main street



House boat on the Peace River

of the little town building upon its banks. A bank in a wooden shack, hotels (of sorts), a small mission church, stores and a few houses formed the nucleus of a place predicted to develop into an importantly placed town "when the railroad came."

The "Peace Hotel" opened its doors



"Caboose" in which the ward travelled

to the weary travellers, who felt it would be better to get to know everyone as quickly as possible, instead of keeping more aloof in their own camp. After a few days prospecting about, arrangements were made to rent one of the houses for the winter, as the owner was leaving for Calgary. No better piece of luck could have befallen the Wards, as with a comfortable fixed up house, they could endure many of the winter discomforts of their surroundings, and were much envied by others who were rapidly pushing into the "Crossing."

Wallace could have had work from first, but refused to be tempted by the high wages offered, feeling that he must keep his own aim and object in view—timber limits and a mill.

With a comfortable home to return to, and good horses to drive, the Wards pushed on to see Dunnegan for themselves. The country was very fine and quite parklike woods were driven through affording a good supply of fuel to the settlers who had already studded the trail with their log cabins. These new homes were just what the different types of women made them; some were desolate, others, while possessing no more worldly goods, had an air of comfort. In one cabin, the Wards found the housewife had made curtains and covers of well washed bagging scalloped with bright wool. Dunnegan in spite of the fair prophecies for it, seemed very blank and dreary, and with only a woman's instinct to guide her, Ada urged Wallace to settle once for all at Peace River Crossing. After returning there, Wallace often taking a man with him, left for harder trips, and Ada's was the weary role of waiting. Neighbors offered to be helpful, the majority of the women being half breed wives.

Food seemed at famine prices to one accustomed to the plentiness of an eastern farm, but on the other hand, the amount of game seemed marvellous.

The Peace River was the highway, a river steamer plying between the Hudson's Bay trading posts, while the inevitable Hudson's Bay store was the centre of life at the Crossing, and a few Northwest Mounted Police held their wonderful sway over their district.

The first Christmas came and found Ada anxiously pacing the floor as Wallace was days overdue from his last prospecting trip. What could have happened? Only something serious to leave her alone on such a day, a box from home had come, and the dinner was arranged as much like old times as Ada could do it. A neighbor begged Ada to leave the house and come to hers, but no coaxing could prevail, in case Wallace should arrive at a shut up house. The afternoon passed, then night came, and Ada was thankful for the company of the neighbor's child. Two days later Wallace drove in with a dead lame horse, and the tears that had not come during the agony of uncertainty, flowed for joy at Wallace's safety. The poor Christmas dinner was warmed again, and eaten as a thanksgiving one.

New Year's Day was to be a grand event in the annals of the Crossing, and a wonderful charity ball was to be given at the hotel, to raise money for a cottage hospital. The little town was full of men in for the holidays, in parties, or twos and threes, but more of lonely men, desperately lonely men, determined though strangers all, to have as good a

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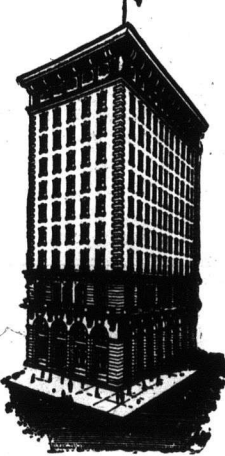
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