

About the Farm

A Pilot of the Pioneers

Written for The Western Home Monthly by J. D. A. Evans, Crystal City.

It was the guiding star to the intrepid pioneer who in the spring months of 1879 emigrated from Ontario homes to Manitoba's prairie land, selecting for himself a habitation upon lands which in these times represent well settled and prosperous districts of Southern Manitoba.

The eye of the pioneer scanned the horizon as he trekked forward. He longed to obtain a first glance of the butte of land situate two miles northward of the Pilot Mound of today. To the settler of 1879, the eminence was a prominent feature of the landscape, the welcome guide post into the fastnesses of a lonely land. With eager gaze he awaited its appearance, to him it would be as the lighthouse marked upon the chart delineative of his course, the bearings by which he had been directed to undertake his journey.

Today the traveller upon the southwestern branch of the Canadian Pacific Railway observes the "pioneer's landmark" after his train has emerged from the defiles eastward of Wood Bay; to his gaze the butte is as a mountain miniature in dimension. To the contrary, it may be termed as the beacon hill of an upland country stretching in a northerly direction to Swan Lake and the Pembina Valley.

The butte of Pilot Mound is somewhat unique in character. Upon its summit today a cluster of trees are visible; in days of autumn a forest of shocks adorns its eastern slope; the home of a farmer is situate at its base; and at a distance of five miles in a southwesterly direction the town of Crystal City appears in bold relief.

The dimensions of the butte cannot be designated as of great area. Its lengthy graduating slope from crown to base furnishes a difficult problem to arrive at any circumferential size with accuracy; it is but the terminal of an upland ridge from a wooded and broken country at its northern side. To the casual observer the "lone mountain" conclusion is at once arrived at, and he may be pardoned for so erroneous an impression, but in reality the butte is the last elevation of land from a continuation of peaks of much less altitude and area, a fact at once apparent from the highways of the adjacent vicinity. As corroborative testimony of this, there can be observed creations of similar characteristics to its northward, whilst an eminence known in topographical records as Star Mound is situate southward possibly eighteen miles distant.

The question is asked, it will continue to be so, to what source can the origin of Pilot Mound butte be traced? Much discussion has ensued in the solution of this query. By no means has this enquiry confined itself to those who dwell within the radius of its view. Even the scientific world has not been dormant over the matter; various conjectures have emanated from various learned bodies. Perchance there may have arisen one idea for the butte's formative basis in one aspect of the subject which undoubtedly possesses its adherents. It is that in the age during which the Mound Builder is credited with his laborious tasks, his operations were directed in creation of this sentinel upon the prairie land; however, this theory has received strenuous denial. Would it not be closer to a correct solution of the matter to credit the butte's formation as resultant of an upheaval of the land, possibly volcanic in its origin?

In the plan of creation it was not given to man but to surmise upon such matters; an age prehistoric might have witnessed the butte's formation at the hands of its supposed builders. Who amongst us can even conjecture?

It can be remarked, however, that whilst the creative opinion regarding Pilot Mound butte may assume differential attitudes, it is an authentic

fact that this pioneer's landmark has performed its part in the drama of Manitoba's past history. Upon its summit many councils of the once mighty hunters of the plains have taken place, and the idea is yet current amongst the Indians of a reserve in the not distant neighborhood, that beneath the sod of the butte more than one brave warrior of now defunct tribes awaits the summons to another hunting ground. There is without doubt much connection of Pilot Mound butte with historical Manitoba if the story could be unfolded.

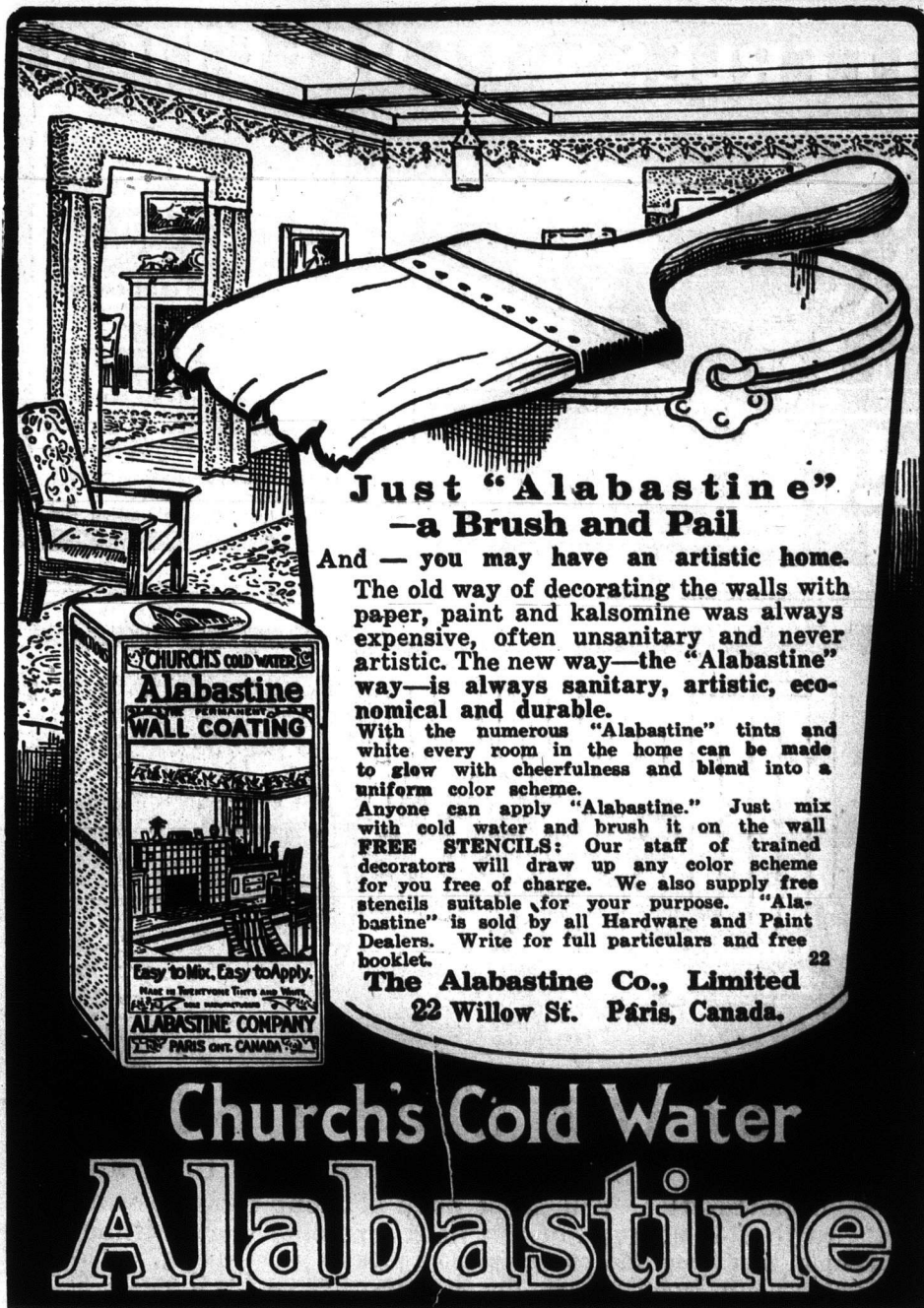
In the vicinity of the butte is another similar formation of land. Upon its slopes in 1862 a bloodthirsty conflict was engaged in between several bands of Indians. But the story of this fierce encounter as related to the writer by a man actually engaged in the fight, and to whom today the octogenarian years have passed into memory, may be related at a future date.

Let the history of Pilot Mound butte be as it may, and its creation a matter of conjecture alone, the presence of this landmark upon the prairie was a welcome sight to the pioneer, one of the earliest of whom in relating his journey into Southern Manitoba in 1879, made the remark that even in the old home town in Ontario, and the railway destination of Manitoba's emigrant at that time was at the frontier town of Emerson, for the highway of steel had not at this date entered into Winnipeg, the butte in close proximity to the town of Pilot Mound was alluded to as the guide post into the then unsettled wilderness into which the pioneers of 1879 were about to penetrate.

And today this ancient landmark stands forth in suns of summer and winter's boisterous days as in the time when the smoke of the Indian's teepee curled over its summit.

Silent witness of that great transformation scene through which this once land of the hunting lodge has passed, today Pilot Mound butte rears its height above a gigantic area dotted with the homes of a prosperous people, at whose firesides are a scattering of those who in the long years ago glanced across the trackless prairie for the landmark to which they had been directed.

Pilot Mound butte is the sentinel standing upon a fertile plain of the Southern Manitoba of today.



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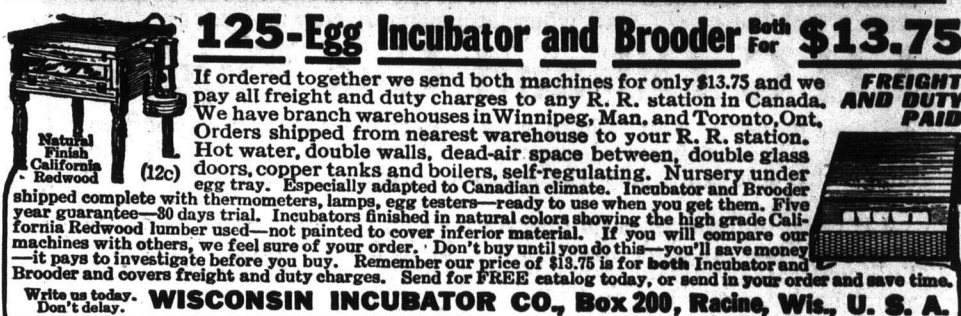
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