

Our Prize Homesteaders

The following article was awarded the Fifth Prize in our recent Homesteaders' Competition

How An English City Man Made Good

By William Hordern, Dundurn, Sask.

Not to win a prize, nor because of wonderful things accomplished do I write, but it is interesting to recall the way one has gone. My experience may interest, since I am one of many Englishmen city born and bred who have come and are coming here quite innocent of any knowledge of agriculture and have to begin at the first rudiments of farming. Others I hope may learn from our experience and profit by our mistakes. I had been a draper or dry goods man for twenty-one years, almost wholly spent in my native town, Leicester; but the last seven years it was a losing game. Having six young children and seeing little prospect then in England, I and my eldest boy, age 14, came out West to spy out conditions for the future. I was 49 years of age, and far from strong and an indoor life, the wear and worries of business and being unaccustomed to laborious work ill-fitted me for farming in the West. We quitted England on a suitable day (April 1) on SS. Manitoba with Barr's colony to solve the mysteries of pioneering. Arrived at Saskatoon after five days' railway journey, in middle of April. We lived for some days in militia tents, kindly furnished by the government, and water in our tent often froze an inch at night. But we enjoyed the big change and the freedom. After seeing nearly all the Barrites off to Lloydminster we came down to Dundurn, not thinking it necessary to trek 200 miles from a railway to a farm. We brought down a wheelbarrow which two young Londoners had bought in Saskatoon, proposing to wheel their baggage to Lloydminster on foot. A one-mile journey in that fashion sufficed them. The day we arrived in Dundurn was bitterly cold with a strong wind, and we were glad of the warmth of the fire in the depot. Here were a group of men who enquired of us many things. They pitied our prospects of sleeping in a tent and Mr. David Whiting kindly took us to his shack that night. We do not forget how good he and his wife were to us forlorn strangers for the three days we were with them. Having tented a few days more at Dundurn we bought a second hand hickory wagon, some household goods and yoke of oxen at a reasonable figure, and moved May 6 on to a small homestead, 5½ miles away, containing 105 acres. Knowing no one we could not hear then of a better homestead. Those who did know of them kept it to themselves, but later we found that if you would buy a quarter section you could be put on a homestead adjoining or near, or you could be put on a homestead for \$50 or \$100. They were "blanketted," apparently.

A Green Hand

We lived in the tent for some two months on the homestead. Whitsun week was a "corker" for bad weather, sleet, rain and stormy winds. The tent blew down several times and the bed got wet and we were forced to seek shelter elsewhere, though neighbors were few and far between. I bought a walking plow and a boy gave me my first lesson in plowing with oxen. I did not catch on to the plow regulations very well for some time, and a neighbor passing, seeing the labor I was making of holding the plow in the furrow, gave me a further lesson. He also broke eight acres for me later on, and he has frequently chaffed me at my greenness in not knowing how to grease the wa-

gon. I broke four acres, but seeing little prospect of seeding I put in thirteen bushels of potatoes, making a hole in the sod with a pick and covering the hole by hand. I found myself ill-fitted for plowing or hard work and especially in the hot sun, and my work did not exceed six hours daily. Often I rose at 2 to escape the heat. My son was only a stripling of a boy, and though he was very willing, neither of us was "up to much." I brought out a little capital, but any man with average strength and some knowledge of farm work without capital was better fitted to start farming. We plowed in two bushels of potatoes, but did not dig it. The sod was dry and hard later, and only a few of these seed found their way through. We sold 100 bushels at the fall for a fair figure, however, digging them up with a spade.

I believe it a good plan for a new homesteader to buy second hand machinery at first if capital is scarce, so long as the machinery is in reasonable form. Oxen are also good to begin with. I advocate a man keeping out of debt all he can. Do without all you can. Get a good name for honesty and for paying your way at all times. I believe it is better for a homesteader to employ

my son here with Mrs. Thom, who was very good to him. I was not able to return to Canada till the end of the next July and then it was too late for breaking. I had sold the oxen on time and never got paid, which was a loss I felt. I now bought two horses and some second hand machines—mowers, disc and harrow. I put up some hay and built a stable, 16x30, of rough lumber, with poles from the bush for posts, and a sod roof. I also bought a cow and calf. I had broken myself thirteen acres in the first year and a neighbor had put in the crop. Unfortunately it was badly smutted and I only got 45c per bushel for it. Here I learnt the lesson to treat the seed by bluestone and later I found formalin as good and less labor. My young son was now the better man for the field work and with the two horses he was able to backset the twenty acres I had had in crop.

The third year we seeded the twenty acres with wheat and plowed some 17 acres for oats that spring. That fall I bought another horse, a new binder (on a three-year payment plan), a second hand seeder and rake. So far (except for the binder) I paid cash, but by July our last penny was gone. My

the land (144 acres) for \$8 per acre, for I soon foresaw that my small homestead could not possibly maintain a family of eight.

This fall, too, (the third) I reserved a homestead two miles away for my son till he was 18.

My first-breaking now grew abundant buckwheat, and I learnt the necessity of fanning the seed to clean it. I got some outbuildings put up this year, including a hen house, hogs' place and run, and one or two granaries, but found the high price of lumber crippling for doing what I would have liked. Each year (if not fast) was a steady advance. I was very careful against debts, for at this time I was plagued by agents wanting me to buy all kinds of machinery, wind mills, grinders, etc., which induces so many homesteaders to get into a hopelessly involved position. I was also getting along at last in learning to farm properly.

I have now twenty head of cattle by natural increase, nine work horses, besides four colts, and a double set of nearly all farm machinery. I have two movable granaries, which I can recommend others to get, for they are very handy, save throwing grain on the ground and can be placed handy to the threshing rig, which saves hiring help for hauling. In 1910 drought struck this district badly and I judge I only earned a bare living that year in consequence.

In 1911 again we had early frost, and grain is going No. 3 and 4. Late threshing and car shortage have been bad around here and price of grain is down. My son and I have agreed on a gasoline engine plowing this spring. The late threshing has left us with practically no land backset, and it is a choice of an engine or land not properly prepared for seeding. We will have 400 acres to seed this spring, and we shipped four cars of wheat, have our seed, and thirty-five acres not yet threshed (January 10) with 2,200 bushels of oats and barley in bin. My son got a pre-emption next his homestead on which he has now proved up. I also secured a pre-emption three miles away and bought another quarter within two miles at \$15 per acre two years ago. So we keep "inching" along, though the land is not all paid for yet.

I never burn the stubble, as I believe it should be returned to the land it came from to make humus again. I get all the straw I can used up for bedding and get roughage for cattle, and return all the manure I can on to the land. You see I do a bit of mixed farming, and find the money from a steer or butter sold very useful at times. I learned the necessity of following to keep down weeds, and believe in working the land well for fallowing and for seeding.

The last 7 years I was in business in England I was losing \$500 a year. Here the contrary process is going on; and we are healthier and happier and with a life of greater freedom and variety. Except for the mosquitoes and the winters, nothing can be better than Canada for an enterprising man. My account contains nothing wonderful, only steady plodding work to the one goal, success; but I think I can claim that there is "something accomplished, something done."

Take away affection and goodwill, and all pleasure is taken away from life.—Cicero.



THE AUTHOR AND HIS FAMILY

a neighbor to break the necessary land and seed it, etc., than go into debt for machinery. The man can then go out to work until a fair amount of capital is obtained and he is little likely of getting into financial difficulty or a forced sale.

After the spring work I set about to build a one-roomed shack, 14 feet by 16 feet of lumber, dug a cellar under it and put a well down 23 feet for water. Till then we had drunk slough water, but remembering the British soldiers in South Africa we were careful always to boil it well, for it was alive with red creatures which we strained out. Later we carried water first half a mile and later a mile or more in a pail daily from neighbor's wells, for the sloughs dried up as summer advanced. Cooking was a difficulty, for we could not get eggs and milk, meat, butter, potatoes and bread were all hard to get, settlers being few and stock scarce.

Starting in Earnest

In November I sailed for England to sell my business, settle my affairs and bring out my wife and family, leaving

son now got a job to break thirty-five acres, which brought in some \$95. This was handy to us, but we now know it would have been better to have broken this on my land, for the succeeding year I could have shipped a car of wheat. It pays to have the land broken, for till then it brings nothing, and hiring it done pays I find, if one cannot do much himself. We also broke another twenty acres, more than completing my own thirty acres required and I proved up. I had managed to buy another house, 14x20, of a man who returned to the States, which was joined to the one I built.

Making Progress

This same year I borrowed \$250 at 5 per cent. interest on two life insurance policies I had running in England. There was much red tape to get this deal put through, papers crossing the water three times, and the land I was trying to buy next to me was put up \$1.50 per acre by the land company in the meantime, the first payment of \$250 only just about making up this advance. I bought

the corn harvest disastrous failure. ber the fear of aient and Peel e only effectual of the tariff on being a duty of Ireland. There and a marked Lord Aberdeen, and Sir James Premier; Lord of Wellington, members of the sides were well could be to re- once they were of November without coming vember 22 Lord of the Whigs, from Edinburgh his constituents out the dilatory it and declared e asked all the it an end to a proved to be a bane of agri- bitter division of penury, fever, ng the people. as the formal I John Russell round to Cob- ng of free trade esion made the in. Peel again sider the whole ad adopt some rd Stanley was ere almost as felt it his duty s, and for a as without a l.

ng

ained, and

received from ven it a high markets of the s been able to eeded for new nt at very low

plained

money in the e company has "melon cut- o date has enders to gather figures in addi- uring the past it can produce thoroughly un- d it looks very d robbery, but y governments so it must be n brief, it con- g to yourself ss than it is t us take the e C.P.R. The issue \$60,000.- k in 600,000 investing pub- at least \$250 tal of \$150,-

000,000

f the stock at e directors of ed their inten- 20