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## The Border

[TODAY]



The Neche town siren sounded last Easter Sunday afternoon for the third spring in a row. Once again the Pembina River ran swift and wild across the sugar beet fields, and all night long the men stacked sand bags.

Neche is in flat, unfrequented North Dakota, twenty miles south of Gretna, Manitoba, and between them is a small stretch of the long, long U.S.-Canadian boundary line.

The cliché, "the longest unguarded border in the world" is true, but misleading. It suggests flower festivals and flowery speeches, and the people of Neche and Gretna are not garden clubbers or luncheon orators, but mirror images of each other — hard toiling farmers with big farms, sharing clean air and loneliness. They share the pleasures of the summer Pembina when it runs peacefully south from Swan Lake to Red River, and they share equally and with outrage the spring floods when the warm air melts the snow too fast. By the nature of the river, the Americans often get the greater share — this spring 35,000 American acres were covered. On both sides of the border there are resentments and dikes. The dikes, homemade, divert the flood water from one man's land to another man's downstream. There was particular resentment this year south of the border, but the Grand Forks, N.D. newspaper noted that there were dikes on both sides and that "indiscriminate diking pits neighbor against neighbor, relative against relative and friend against friend."

It is, in the 126th year of a fairly friendly border, an important and real dispute involving in varying degrees the farmers and the governments, in Winnipeg and Bismark and Ottawa and Washington.

It is another chapter of the long, joint, human history that has given the two nations many disputes and many settlements. The greatest of the settlements is the border itself.

It is 5526 miles long — 3145 miles over land, 2381 over water. It has fifteen major Turning

Points connected by straight lines, which zig zag from coast to coast. The last curves were eliminated in 1925. The shortest line, separating a bit of Maine from a bit of Quebec, is twenty-three and a half inches, the longest, running all along Alaska, is 647.1 miles. The border is marked with 8100 monuments and range points put up at widely different times in widely different places by a variety of men. It is crossed each day by Canadians and Americans, almost as if it didn't exist. They are going to work, going to fish or hunt, going to do business, going to visit.

It begins, on the East, through rivers which read like a calendar of saints, St. Croix, St. John, St. Francis, over the barren highlands to the Connecticut, through Lake Champlain, the St. Lawrence, Lake Erie, the Detroit River, St. Mary's, Pigeon River, more lakes, Rainy River, Lake of the Woods, then the Prairies, then the Rockies and the San Juan Islands, up the edge of Alaska from Dall Island to the Beaufort Sea.

The sun takes five hours to make the trip.

The border itself is remarkable. It is almost exactly in place, fixed by coordinates of longitude or latitude, accurate to inches, to a hundredth or a thousandth of a longitudinal or latitudinal second.

But the people, particularly those in the past are remarkable too, and there have been some reasonably dramatic disputes.

On the Fourth of July, 1827, John Baker, an American living on the upper St. John, attempted to resolve what was then the confused border question by hoisting a home-made American flag inside Canada. He was subsequently arrested in bed by a posse and carried off to New Brunswick. The dispute was settled by an almost too amicable man, Richard Oswald, a Scot, appointed by the British Government to argue its case. Mr. Oswald agreed with Benjamin Franklin that Britain might as well abandon the entire North American mainland. London, surprised, said no, and the border in the East, the only part that counted then, wound its way around the rivers