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Peace River Pioneers of 1914

By Q. Fairchild.

WALLACE WARD had experienced the lure of the more settled parts of the west and after a return east and his marriage, he felt even more certain that only in the west he could satisfy his full belief in his capacity of "make good," and use his knowledge of logging and sawing learnt in the timber lands of Quebec, to be the first to set up a mill in the new country opening up, and known as the Peace River District.

To Ada Ward, the west meant nothing beyond a vague idea of rolling prairies, wheat, horses and "getting rich quick" talk, but to offset her merciful ignorance of all before her, she had a good stock of common sense and adaptability, and an all-round knowledge of household and farm management. Both young people possessed health, and with that essential qualification, they had a little money to start out on.

After the wrench of parting from the old home, the journey to Edmonton was full of interest, and it was not until leaving the train that Ada realized the only connecting link with the life she knew was vanishing with the trail smoke. A few days rest, and on the pioneers started by train to Athabasca Landing, for the autumn was rapidly overtaking them, and Peace River Crossing still to be reached by any and every means they could command. Wallace was commencing to have misgivings as to how a woman would stand the rubbing shoulders with all sorts, and the difficulties of securing any privacy

far as Mirror Landing, where shore lodgings consisted of wooden windowless stalls of bedrooms. From Mirror Landing, those going further on, drove over a rough portage to Saulteau, but no boat having yet arrived, Wallace pitched their tent, and arranged their belongings and food; it was their first western "home," and such as it was, it afforded hospitality to travelling companions less fortunate than themselves.

Crowded on the steamer once more, they huddled about the boiler for comfort, until Sawbridge was reached at the lower end of Lesser Slave Lake. Across its broad waters the boat ploughed all the next day, and it seemed exhilarating after the intricacies and uncertainties of river navigation.

Grouard, at the opposite end of the Lake, ended their voyage, and from here to Peace River there was no one to look to but themselves, to help them on their way. Although Grouard boasted of being a "town," with shops and streets, to the Wards their own tent again seemed a much preferable shelter. After two days bargaining, a pair of horses and a buckboard were bought. With tent, blankets, groceries pots and pans, tin stove, gun and small trunk packed on behind the buckboard, they started away from Grouard, no one knew them, no one cared, and a mile out they might have been Adam and Eve, so alone were they, but for the companionship of the big dog bounding along beside them.

A night alone on the trail! Wallace announced that it was no use attempt-



A Peace River game bag

while travelling. But Ada laughed at his fears and reminded him that she was now an old married woman.

Athabasca seemed quite a centre of civilization, and there was enough excitement in the arrivals and startings out of there to keep up Ada's spirits, and make her feel that at least she would have human companionship, even if only that of the old saying, "Misery likes company."

No heavy luggage having overtaken the travellers, they decided to trust to luck to getting it forwarded, and bought a supply of provisions, as nothing but actual transportation could be counted on from Athabasca to Peace River. A fine collie dog shared their fortunes, but rough as the conditions might be to his owners, to him anything was better than flying express trains.

The Athabasca River steamer was crowded with freight and passengers, and its navigation in the low water reminded the wards of "Old Times on the Mississippi," and the leadman making the soundings should have called out "Mark Twain." Only the laziness of the South was lacking, and there were no picturesque darkie loafers to amuse them. Rafts also were being floated down on which "Huckleberry Finn" and "Old Jim" might have lived. Freight was unloaded at lonely spots, where some settler was eagerly awaiting the arrival of something to make life more bearable. At night the boat was tied up to the shore, and the passengers who had no bunks arranged to sleep as best they could.

At Moose Portage travelling conditions did not improve, for the river here grew shallower, and a more desperate packing than ever was necessary to get all on board a still smaller steamer as

ing to reach the rest house kept for wayfarers, and they must hurry to make camp before darkness overtook them. The work of preparing a meal, kept Ada from thinking of the loneliness of her surroundings, and it was not until rolled up in her blankets, that the dread of it all seized her. The snufflings of the tethered horses nearby, seemed comforting sounds, but "Sport" stirred restlessly at the tent door, and once far away Ada felt sure she heard a weird cry. Tears scalded her cheeks at the thoughts of home and their concern if they could see her now, but Wallace, poor fellow, was so tired, she had not the heart to wake him.

Breakfast next morning in the crisp air was the most appetizing one ever eaten, while the horses got their porridge too, for there was nothing to add to their grazing, but a feed of "Quaker Rolled Oats."

Prairie and poplar bush, poplar bush and prairie, for eighty miles, marked only by the rest or "bunk" houses every ten miles or so, kept by half breeds, or a white man sunk to the level of a half bred wife. Water, wood and fodder for the horses could be depended on at these places, but travellers had to cook their own food, and put up a screen of a blanket to make a domestic division from others occupying the room. The only picturesque features of the lodgings were the big open fires in the mud chimneys across the ends of the cabins. Poor as these stopping places were, they were eagerly looked forward to at the end of the day's journey, and there was a queer gathering in of people from the four corners of the earth, and much exchange of experiences. Sometimes from sheer delight at being among a small crowd again, the young