

## Life on the Prairie.

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*Extracts from my Diary.*

Winnipeg, May 24th, 1881.

We felt sorry to leave the poor, miserable fellow with no companionship but his oxen, but it was necessary to move on, for we still had ere nightfall six miles to go across the trackless prairie. Thus far, it had been comparatively easy to keep a straight course, but now we must attempt to travel without a trail, and without a single visible object to guide us. Of course we had a compass and we were not afraid of getting lost, but the difficulty of finding our claim on such a flat, treeless, uninhabited plain seemed to us almost insurmountable. However, we did not wish to express our fears or betray our ignorance, so we boldly started out. We had been informed by our friend, the homesteader, that section mounds were thrown up at every half mile, and that wooden stakes were placed in the centre showing the numbers of the sections. This information was no doubt very definite, but the trouble was to find the mounds, for they were mostly overgrown and hidden by long grass, and it was possible to discover them only after coming close upon them.

As it was very essential to find each mound, we resorted to an expedient which answered admirably, and which, as far as I am aware, remains unknown to most land prospectors. We measured the circumference of the off front wheel, which we found was twelve feet. By a little figuring, we found that the circumference was contained just two hundred and twenty times in half a mile. We then tied a handkerchief securely to a spoke to facilitate counting the revolutions of the wheel. One used the compass and drove the horse, the other watched for the handkerchief and counted the turnings of the wheel. When the requisite number was made we stopped the horse, jumped out, and hunted for the section mound. This we repeated every half mile with uniform success. In some cases the wooden stakes were charred by prairie fires, and it was necessary to go on to the next before we could read the figures carved on the stake.

As we drew near the stake we were most interested in, viz, section twelve, we became quite excited, and when we actually saw the figures, xii, iv, iii west, we felt as pleased as Christopher Columbus when he discovered the continent of America.

We planted a long pole on the mound and then ran up a flag. This was not done simply to denote possession, but to make it easier to find our land when we came back. Next we pitched our tent, then strolled proudly over the rolling acres, among fragrant pea-vines and rose bushes and sun-flowers, sure indications of good soil. We dug a hole about four feet deep, and found that about twelve inches on top was rich black loam, and that underneath there was a thick bed of yellow clay. Buffalo bones were scattered around quite plentifully, showing that it had been a favorite resort years before. There were badger mounds, and fox and skunk holes. We found prairie chicken and duck eggs in abundance, and helped ourselves liberally to them.

Our journey westward was now at an end. We had found our claim. Our happiness was well nigh complete. We had been so intent upon our discovery, that up to this time we had given very little attention to the swarms of mosquitos which continually surrounded us. Once or twice I rubbed my hand over the back of the old horse to rid him of the pests, when I was appalled to see my hand dripping with blood. Now that we had a little leisure we began to critically inspect each other before returning to Winnipeg, and we were somewhat alarmed with our finding. The mosquitos had without much objection on our part, been feasting for two or three days on our fresh eastern blood, and not content with taking all they could get, they added insult to injury by leaving their vile poison behind, and we were fast swelling beyond recognition.

Curiously enough, it is only the female mosquito which is so cruel and venomous, the male being perfectly harmless. I watched one bold, bad huzzy under a microscope, and this is what I saw. First she selected a tender spot, just over a blood vessel, then shoved down a sharp pointed lance. Next, two tiny saws were placed in position back to back, and set in rapid motion, and the aperture was soon widened; the saws were then withdrawn, and a tiny pump was inserted, and I could see distinctly the blood being pumped at an alarming rate into madame's transparent body. I always thought of mosquitos as all legs and wings; now I saw the emaciated body become distended like a pudding bag, and it was not until she became apparently satiated, and after squeezing a drop of poison into the wound, that she reeled off and fell into a deep stupor.

TO BE CONTINUED.