was rough lumber and flooring, so we took five inch flooring for the sides of the shacks, and three inch for the floors. At first we used only one ply of boards, putting thick felt building paper outside the studding, tar paper over that and then the boards. For roofing we used paroid, a tar material costing about the same as shingles, and much easier to put on in cold weather. It was cold, too, and I don't think any of us really enjoyed those first days on the homestead. In June, when I went over the land, the prairie looked its best. The grass was green and luxuriant, wild flowers grew everywhere; an occasional bluff of poplars gave a welcome shade from the sun, and each of the little sloughs dotted here and there on the rolling prairie had its family of wild ducks that had never heard a gunshot and were not afraid of men.

A Changed Scene

Now in November all was different. Prairie fires had burned off all the grass for miles around, leaving the earth bare and black. The bluffs looked thin, and many of them contained but the charred remains of young trees. The sloughs were dry or frozen to the bottom, and the cold wind swept a chill to one's bones. While we were putting up the first house we slept in the tent, but as we had fur coats and lots of blankets we kept warm at night and in the day time we kept our blood in circulation by hard work. I was cook, and operated in an outdoor kitchen equipped with a heating stove, tea kettle, pot and frying pan. Beef, beans, frozen potatoes and frozen bread made by the Doukhobors, who had a village two miles away, were the chief items on the menu, but working outdoors all day supplied the relish the cook failed to impart to the fare. In four days we had Shepley's house, which he made 14x20 feet, with ten foot walls and a peak roof, near enough to completion to move in, and we then had a little more comfort. Shacks similarly constructed were put up for each member of the party in turn, I being content with a modest structure, 12x14 feet, with eight foot walls, two large windows and peak roof, with a ceiling of stout building paper.

Winter Building Costly

At $22 a thousand for rough lumber and $30 a thousand for flooring, this cost me $75 for material, the lumber costing about $50 and the roofing, sash, doors, nails, paper and other finish $25. My own labor, and that of my neighbors, which I repaid by helping them, was worth about another $50. The work could probably be done for half that cost in warm weather, but driving nails and tacking up tar paper is slow and unpleasant work in zero weather with a forty mile wind blowing. When all of our party had shelter over our heads, I settled down to put in the winter as comfortably as possible. My shack was quite warm as long as I kept a fire going, but as I did not attempt to keep the fire on during the night the temperature was often down to zero by morning. I had at first only one stove, a small cast iron box heater with two holes in the top, on which I could boil and fry, and above this, fitted into the stove pipes, was a tin drum oven in which I baked small things, such as pies and biscuits, and which also helped to warm the shack.

Lazy but Comfortable

The stove stood in the centre of the room, and it was my custom before retiring at night to cook next day's porridge in a double boiler and leave it and the tea kettle on the stove. Then I prepared shavings, kindling and stouter wood, and left them handy to the stove. In the morning everything in the shack would be frozen solid, but I could light the fire without getting out of bed and so stayed under the blankets until the shack was warm, the kettle boiling and the porridge steaming hot. As I had no animals to care for I had no outdoor work to do except to provide myself with fuel. For while I got sufficient dry wood from the bluffs near the shack, which I hauled home on a hand sliegh which I made from willows, and when I had used up all that was within easy distance I bought a big load of dry poplar for $6.00 from a neighbor, who cut it from unoccupied land about 16 miles away. At first I carried water from a neighbor's well, nearly a mile from home, and when I stepped in a badger hole just outside my front door one dark night, and fell and spilled a pail of water, I am afraid I said something that would not look well in a Sunday School paper. Later I got water by melting snow. It takes about ten pails of snow to make one pail of water, so I was pretty busy on washing day, but there was plenty of time.

No Need to be Lonesome

My city friends have often asked me if I did not feel terribly lonesome, living all by myself in my little shack all winter, but I did not. Some men, I know, feel the lonesomeness, and to them a winter on the prairie, even though they have company, must seem interminable. I have read of such men going insane, though in a pretty wide acquaintance of homesteaders I never knew one who lost his reason. People also go crazy in town, and I doubt if there are not just as many in proportion become insane through dissipation in the cities as through loneliness on the prairie. I know, too, that many who were on the high road to ruin through drink and drug habits who have been regenerated and become new men through the wholesome surroundings and healthy life of the farm. There is no reason, however, why a homesteader should pass weeks at a time, as some do, without seeing a friendly face. I made it a rule that winter not to stay at home alone more than one day at a time.

Continued Next Week

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