

Fifteen Years Ago

From No. 12 of St. Peters Bote

At last a train again. Friday night, April 30, at 9 o'clock it arrived and brought new settlers for the Colony. Rosthern had been without a train for 14 days, owing to the flooded track of the C. P. R. in Assiniboia. The joy to see a train come again was so great that even the town's brass band was on hand to welcome the stranger. Among the new arrivals were the Walby brothers, Henry Ebbing, Aug. Waldschmidt and Aug. Ecker. On the 3rd of May another train arrived. It brought the following new settlers: Bohnen, Kenl, Clemens Kuemper, Fleskes, Fuerstenberg, Karels, Arnold Ruef, Bernard Tondorf, Koelsch, John Groh, etc.

Since two days the weather has been cloudy, with an occasional warm rain, which is of great benefit to the wheat fields. Monday, May 2nd, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Pascal came to Rosthern and started for Leofeld the same day, staying over night with the Oblate Fathers in Fish Creek. In Leofeld he blessed the fine new church. Owing to the poor train service, the new bell had not arrived to be blessed as originally planned. The following new settlers left on April 20 for the Colony where they have homesteads: Anton Benesch, Adam Fabeck, P. H. Rositch and D. Landon.

About 6 to 7 miles of track in Assiniboia is under water. Last winter such great quantities of snow fell that the Qu'Appelle river, which in summer has only about as much water as an ordinary brook, was changed by the melting snows into a raging torrent. The river bed being narrow, it could not contain all the water. It flooded the prairie for miles in extent.

John Bittmann writes from Dead Moose Lake that he is well satisfied with the land the Catholic Settlement Society selected for him in T. 39, R. 25. The black soil is about 12 inches in depth.

Bernard Haas writes from St. Benedict that he came to Rosthern last year on May 8th and filed on a homestead in St. Peter's Colony. During summer he lived on his homestead for a time, and then went to work in Assiniboia on the experimental farm. He came back around Christmas and has been living in the colony ever since. His nearest neighbors are Schaefer, Hackl, Mutter, Huhnstock and Diederichs.

Nic. Schuller writes from St. Anna that he likes it much better in the colony than in Washington or Minnesota. He has fine land, high and level, with a slight declination towards the north and south. The black humus is 6 to 8 inches in depth. Beneath this is yellow clay. He has 90 acres open prairie and the remainder is covered by poplar bush. He is 7 to 8 miles from Dead Moose Lake church. As soon as a church will be built at Lenora Lake, he will only be 3 1/2 miles from a church.

A reader of the paper asks for the first issue of the paper as he intends to have the paper bound in book form at the end of the year. (Are you saving the paper?)

On the 25th of April the farmers were busy everywhere sowing their grain. Today, May 17, the wheat sown in April is well up and of a beautiful green. The farmers are now sowing oats for which they first had to prepare the land after the sowing of wheat.

The building of the steamer at Prince Albert, under the direction of Captain Coates and Robert Mosher is progressing satisfactorily. It is 185 ft long and 31 ft in width.

ADDENDA:

On the 11th of May there was a very heavy rain. The next day,

Sunday, was a fine day. Father Chrysostom went to Dead Moose Lake early in the morning to hold services there. After services when driving over to Lindberg's for dinner, he got stuck with his buggy in the creek-like depression between church and store. He unharnessed the horse and left the buggy sticking there. The Rau boys came along shortly after, pulled it out and towed it to the store. On the 13th he wanted to look up Matski, living west of Long Lake (Dirty Water Lake) on S. 6, T. 40, R. 22. But the creek between Philip Fleischhacker and Jos. Matski was so swollen by melted snow and the recent rain, that it was a regular torrent, and could not be crossed. After taking dinner with Phil. Fleischhacker he started for home again. From this the reader will see how wet the spring in 1904 was and how difficult it must have been for the settlers to haul their provisions from Rosthern, a distance of 50 to a 100 miles, all depending in what part of the colony they lived.

How "Old Wives' Lake" Obtained Its Name

Many years ago, long before any white settlers arrived in the country, a prairie fire swept over the Qu'Appelle region in spring, leaving the country a bleak and desolate wilderness. Antelope, buffalo and deer galloped westward before it, and the Indians of the Qu'Appelle and Touchwood region realized that they would have to go far out into the plains for their annual buffalo hunt. The Crees, and Saulteaux, although as a general rule a peaceable people, were in a chronic state of war with their Blackfoot neighbors, who held inviolate the prairie country west of the Moose Jaw creek. The Blackfoot were usually the aggressors and the Indians of this territory regarded them as formidable and dangerous adversaries. The Crees and Saulteaux could usually take care of themselves amongst their native valleys and wooded ravines, but the advantage lay with the Blackfoot horsemen out on the naked plains.

However, Indian life, without the annual buffalo hunt was inconceivable, and a big band of Cree Indians started from the vicinity of "Fishing Lakes" to follow the buffaloes out on the plains. They travelled through the Qu'Appelle valley until they came a few miles west of where Lumsden is now situated, and then went by way of the Wascana valley until they reached the place where Fred Tate's farm is at present situated; but there was still no sign of the buffalo. The fire had swept away every bit of vegetation, and there was nothing for it but to strike boldly out across the plains to the westward. The fire had burnt itself out among the gravelly ridges of the dirt hills, and the scouts reported the presence of buffalo, along the shores of the "Big Lake" which lay to the north of Wood Mountain. The hunting was good, and under the stimulus of their danger the work of cutting up and packing was rapidly done. The carts were loaded and the procession had started on its way back to the Qu'Appelle and safety, before the note of alarm was sounded.

The buffalo hunting party carried with it a number of women. They were the real workers of the hunting camps. The mounted hunter considered his work as done when he had laid low a number of buffaloes. He left the animal the way it had fallen, and the work of cleaning, cutting up and packing the carcass, was always done by the women.

For some reason or other this party had an unusual number of old women attached to it, in addition to the squaws and families

of the hunters. The straggling procession was wending its way on its homeward journey along the shores of the big lake, when the videttes of a Blackfoot war party were observed surveying them from a distant butte. The procession closed up its ranks; the women and children were placed in the centre, and the hunters with loaded flintlock and arrow on string, protected the flank and rear in anticipation of the attack which they knew would soon follow.

Late in the afternoon, a party of mounted Blackfoot dashed from a draw and galloped down on the hunters. As they approached they were met with a scattering volley of balls from smooth ball muskets and arrows. On being fired upon, the attackers threw themselves down on the far side of their horses and discharged their firearms and arrows at the unfortunate Crees, from beneath the necks of their horses. They executed this trick, which is said to have been borrowed from the Comanches, the best Indian horsemen of America, with skilled precision, and before the hunters had time to reload, they wheeled about and skinned away over the prairie, until they were lost to sight, like a flock of predatory birds. Protected by their horses, the attackers apparently suffered no casualties. But it was different with the hunters, who had one man dead and two or three wounded. A halt was called, and there was a hurried consultation of war. The situation was desperate enough. There were indications that this was no straggling war party but merely an outpost of a large body of the Blackfoot nation.

Whilst this consultation was going on, one of the very oldest of the women approached the leader of the party and spoke to him: "My son," she said, "you have a large party that travels slow, and encumbered as you are, with many squaws, you can never reach home in safety. The old wives have talked with each other and have made a plan. We are old and no longer fit to be the mothers of men. We will make camp here, and when darkness falls, take your young women and children and travel fast and light towards safety. We will kindle our fires, and the enemy, seeing them, will think the whole camp is here. The Blackfoot, like the wolf, never attacks until the dark hour before dawn, and by that time you will be well on your way towards safety."

The plan was carried out to the letter. The old women made many little fires of buffalo chips and sat around them in their blankets all night, waiting for the death that they knew would come with dawn. The hunters with their young women and children reached the Qu'Appelle in safety, while the old women were killed with great circumstance and detail by the Blackfoot, who were enraged at the trick that had been played upon them.

The place was named "Old Wives' Lake," in commemoration of the heroic and self-sacrificing exploit of these women, and it was long shunned as haunted by the people of the plains. Even today a wandering Indian will not make his bivouac by its shores, and a half-breed freighter will so arrange his journey that he is not in its vicinity at nightfall, for fear that he may hear the spirits of the old women crying from point to point, or from island to island. The story now only lingers amongst the old people of the plains; but the heroic sacrifice of those old Indian women deserves to be perpetuated in the annals of the country.

In the 'Sixties, Sir Frederick Johnstone and the Rt. Hon. Henry Chaplin, both British Parliamentarians, visited the plains of Saskatchewan on a buffalo hunting expe-

dition. The late Archibald Mac Donald, who, as the chief officer of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Qu'Appelle, had all the functions of a potentate over the western plains, named "Old Wives' Lake" in honor of Sir Frederick Johnstone, and it appears on the maps of the region as "Johnstone Lake" to this day. Surely the old name is the better one. It commemorates an act of supreme self-sacrifice, whilst the occasion of Sir Frederick Johnstone's visit to the country was, at the most, a pleasant summer holiday.

The Saskatchewan A Century Ago

"The River Saskatchewan flows over a bed composed of sand and marl, which contributes not a little to diminish the purity and transparency of its waters, which like those of the Missouri, are turbid and whitish. Except for that, it is one of the prettiest rivers in the world. The banks are perfectly charming, and offer in many places a scene the fairest, the most smiling and the best diversified that can be seen or imagined: hills in varied forms, crowned with superb groves; valleys agreeably embrowned, at evening and morning by the prolonged shadows of the hills, and of the woods which adorn them; herds of light-limbed antelopes, and heavy colossal buffalo—the former bounding along the slopes of the hills, the latter trampling under their heavy feet the verdure of the plains; all these champaign beauties reflected and doubled, as it were, by the waters of the river; the melodious and varied songs of a thousand birds, perched on the tree-tops; the refreshing breath of the zephyrs; the serenity of the sky; the purity and salubrity of the air; all, in a word, pours contentment and joy into the soul of the enchanted spectator.

"It is above all in the morning when the sun is rising, and in the evening, when it is setting, that the spectacle is really ravishing. I could not detach my regards from that superb picture, till the nascent obscurity had obliterated its perfection.

"Then, to the sweet pleasure that I tasted, succeeded sad, not to say a sombre melancholy. How comes it to pass, I said to myself, that so beautiful a country is not inhabited by human creatures? The songs, the hymns, the prayers of the laborer and the artisan, shall they never be heard in this fine plains? Wherefore, while in Europe, and above all in England, so many thousands of men do not possess as their own an inch of ground, and cultivate the soil of their country for proprietors who scarcely leave them whereon to support existence; wherefore do so many millions of acres, of apparently fat and fertile land, remain uncultivated and absolutely useless? Or at least, why do they support only herds of wild animals? Will men always love better to vegetate all their lives on an ungrateful soil, than to seek afar fertile regions, in order to pass in peace and plenty, at least the last portion of their days?"

The above was written by Gabriel Franchere, who, in 1814, travelled down the North Saskatchewan River on his way from the Pacific coast to Montreal. It is to be found on pages 321 to 324 of his book "Narrative of a Voyage to the North-West Coast of America," of which the English edition was published in New York in 1854.

It took nearly ninety years for the longings of Franchere for a settlement of the West to be fulfilled. What would he say if he could return from the other world to view the same country now?

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