

Boy! Boy! Buffaloes out on the Plains

Written for The Western Home Monthly by J. D. A. Evans.

"BOY! Boy! Buffaloes out on the plains!"

Such were words heard by the factor, his clerk, and sundry customers in the store at Fort Garry, on an October morning in the long, long ago. The st tement buffalo were on the plains emanated from an Indian, to whom the information had been given by two men just arrived from the Assiniboine in the vicinity of Portage la Prairie. In a few minutes the meaning of the Indians words was made clear; men were rushing to the river bank and rear of the store, to make preparations for the chase.

It may be remarked the expression "Boy!" is always adopted by an Indian, that aborigine speaking to any white man, whether priest or prelate, millionaire or mendicant.

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On a Sunday afternoon in March last, the writer was walking along the roadway on the eastern side of Red River toward St. Norbert. From the church of that village on the picturesque slopes of La Salle, came the sound of a bell, ah! as in years ago when scattered populace along Red River's stream were called together to worship after the fashion of their foreparents. In a Manitoba of passed years, many chapters of historical record have been chronicled at St. Norbert, wherein to-day street car from Winnipeg rushes along, Red River cart and dog train forgotten in the abyss of years.

At a cottage in proximity to the main thoroughfare from St. Norwood, through St. Vital to St. Norbert, dwells a man now at the threshold of that journey into distant unknown, inevitable terminus of human life. During the afternoon, the writer had conversed with several residents of the localities. Indeed, at this date, the twentieth day of March a certain intense interest was the prevailing topic of conversation. At St. Norbert was presumed to be existent, a huge deposit of coal oil, boring operations for which would be inaugurated the morning following. Excitement was terse, marvellous developments anticipated; visions of wealth and golden dreams apparently were haunting the residents of the riverside.

But at one humble cottage into which the writer was invited, an aged occupant arose from his couch, and with old-fashioned Red River hospitality, extended a welcome. Upon a wall of the room into which the visitor was ushered, was hanging a musket of somewhat curious description. The butt of this weapon was engraven with marks which in years of early day Manitoba, would be delineatory of the prowess made by the owner of the firearm in the chase for buffalo and moose.

"You appear to be enjoying good health and retain your wonderful age well," remarked the writer to his nonagenarian host, at that moment filling a pipe. A few years only will pass ere this man born on Red River bank, will have merited entrance into decade necessary for eligibility into ranks of centenarianism.

"I try to," was the reply. "People in Manitoba years ago lived according to ways my great grandchild was reading to me about a few evenings ago. Where is that paper, my dear?"

The girl walked to a shelf, handed the visitor a newspaper containing an article entitled "Simple life." It is safe to assume such method of living formed the customary mode in vogue by Manitoba's inhabitants of decades passed by. The physical condition of the yet remaining old-time population, is corroborative of such.

"I always led an outdoor life," said the old man. "Nowadays every one rides, we used to walk. If people around here want to get into Winnipeg, they cross the river and take the street car. We always walked unless it was a very long distance; then we used ponies."

At this moment a motor car whizzed by the cottage. This happening drew

from the nonagenarian the remark, people were rushing to the cemetery at a sufficiently high rate of speed, without the assistance of what he made reference to as "new fangled contrivances."

"That is a splendid sample of skin," remarked the writer, pointing to a buffalo robe upon the couch.

"That's a good pelt yet," responded the old man, as he picked up the skin. "My father killed this buffalo at Stony Mountain; the pelt has been in our family ever since I can remember. You won't find many skins in these years; they all appear to be gone."

"Have you ever chased buffalo in the early days?" queried the writer. At this question the old man immediately appeared enthused; perchance a long silenced chord of the early years had been struck, would now vibrate again. He walked to a cupboard, produced a tin box containing a booklet in which was chronicled the date of his marriage and birthdays of the children.

"Yes. I can tell you of a buffalo hunt I remember. Only last Sunday an old man living near St. Andrews was here, and we were talking about it."

"How many years ago was that chase you are speaking of?" asked the writer. "I am just going to show you, that is why I have brought this," pointing to the booklet. "It was before I was married though several years, and here is the date of my wedding, in 1846."

"Along with father I had ridden to the store at Fort Garry. The time of year was October, at least I know the crop of potatoes along the river had been picked, and this was generally the time of year we did that work. We were standing inside the store, and two men who had just got down from Lake Manitoba, they lived at St. Laurent, drove up in a cart. They stood outside talking with an Indian who, all of a sudden, ran into the store yelling out, 'Boy! Boy! Buffaloes out on the plain!' Father asked the Neche where the animals had been seen. He said they were feeding about thirty-five miles westward from the Fort, and—"

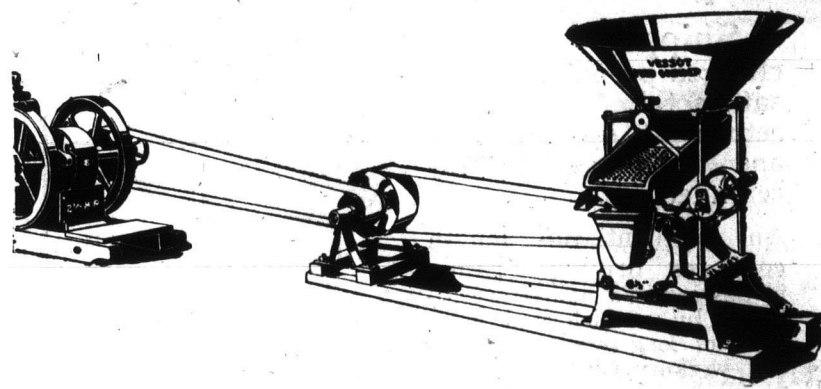
A momentary interruption occurred by the writer remarking the district alluded to would lay between Meadows and Marquette, on the main line to-day of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The localities mentioned were districts celebrated for abundance of grass, which the nonagenarian stated were naturally

sought out by the bison for grazing places.

"Several Indians were in the store getting supplies for winter trapping. Father asked if they were going out to hunt, as late in the Fall many families were usually out of pemmican. The fellows just picked up their things, and told the clerk they would return, then hurried off to teepees on the river bank over in St. Boniface to make ready and start out. As they were going out of the store, father told them he and other men were going, so one of the Indians

said, 'All right, boy, we go get ready.' Some men were fishing with a net on the river; father yelled to them buffalo were out on the plains, and told them to hurry up. We, with other men got our ponies, which were hobbled on the ground behind the store, and mounted.

e rode along the Portage trail, that is what people call Portage avenue now, to Sturgeon Creek, then turned a mile or so north, afterwards keeping in a westerly direction. I think nine men were with our party; the Indians were some distance behind us. We rode about



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