

#1

Homesteaders' shack

Photograph taken in 1897 with a string attached to the camera, shows two homesteaders, Bruce and Jim Hunter, in their shack in the Dog Pound area of Alberta.



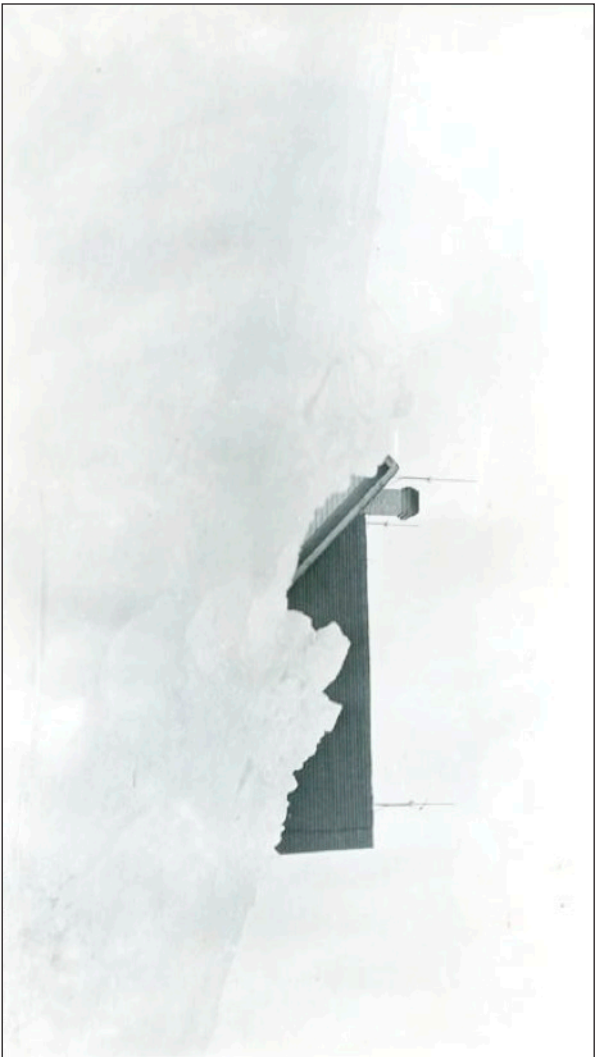
**PRIMARY
SOURCE**
Daily life for Pioneers
1890-1914

Glenbow Museum Archives NA-3961-4

#2

Snow drifts

Photograph taken in 1916 shows snow drifts on a farm near Lewvan, Saskatchewan.



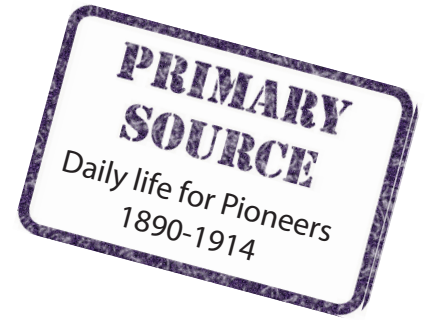
Saskatchewan Archives, The Saskatchewan settlement experience,



#3

Summer leisure activities on the Prairies

Excerpt from an interview with a homesteader who describes a summer picnic in Calmar, Alberta, in the early 1900s.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Interview with a Homesteader:

"I used to love the picnics. They were big events in those times. There would be about two a summer, one at our place and one over at Sangster's, which is about four miles south of Calmar.

Everybody went to those picnics for miles around, and everybody wore their very best. Everybody had pride of appearance and it didn't matter how poor you were, whether you only had a dirt floor in your hose, you went to the picnics in your finer.

This is where the young girls met the young men...The girls wore long white dresses and bows in their hair, and their hair was done up in the latest fashion. We had the magazines from the city, of course, and we knew the latest fashions. The boys all dressed up too.

There were games, baseball, and a lot of tennis. More houses than you would think had a tennis court laid out. Tennis was a big thing in the early 1900's. I was pretty good at hitting a tennis ball myself.

There was always a big feed. Maybe they'd just spread everything out, the sandwiches and the pies, and the cookies, the lemonade and the iced tea, and everybody helped themselves. You all brought your own plates and cutlery.

Then when the picnic was over, everybody would pack up and go home. To the chores. Over those trails, over the hill and dale, back to our farms. We were slaves to our horses and cows. A farmer always is."

Broadfoot, Barry. "Picnics meant fun and food." *The pioneer years 1895-1914: Memories of settlers who opened the west.* Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1976, p. 324.



#4

Barn raising

Photograph taken in 1912 of prairie settlers taking part in a barn raising on a farm in the Cottonwood district, north of Pense, Saskatchewan.



Saskatchewan Archives, The Saskatchewan settlement experience.

#5

Sitting on a Thresher

Photograph taken in 1918 shows a farmer and wife sitting on a thresher in Arbakka, Manitoba.

**PRIMARY
SOURCE**
Daily life for Pioneers
1890-1914

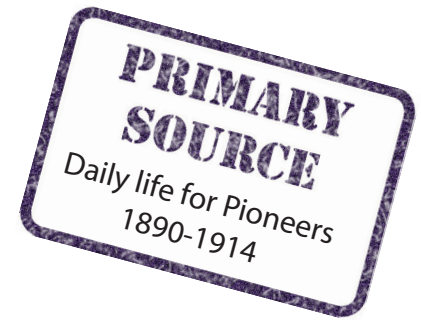


University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections - Michael Ewanchuk fonds (PC 96, A.04-129)

#6

Clearing a homestead near Westlock, Alberta

Excerpt from an interview with a farmer who describes the process of clearing land on a homestead.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Clearing land on a homestead:

"Then we got to the homestead. Bush. That's what we called it then but bush today means little trees and willows. I mean big trees. Pine trees and cottonwoods, poplars, every kind of tree seemed to grow on that homestead up in the bush, and they weren't small. A man is five foot eight, right? An axe is three feet long. A day is as long as you want it to last but say, say 10 hours. And do you know how big 160 acres is? And then look at those trees. Some were only six inches through but lots, many, many, many were a foot through.

And there was one man with an axe and a team(of horses) going at it and the government regulations said you had to clear five acres a year for three years to prove up, but there was no way one man could ever do that. One man doing his best lick, providing he didn't break or lose or dull his axes, might, and I say might, clear two acres in a year. Out on the prairie, why, it was just plough and chop willow roots. But in the bush it was cut, cut, chop, chop, all day long. Then you got the team to pull the logs to a place where you were going to burn and when rainy weather or cold weather came along you burned. I can remember my dad coming in to the shack at night and he'd say, 'It's hard, Mother, it's hard.' That's all he ever said.

All day for Dad it was chop, chop, chop. Down, up, down, up. It never ended. He got strong though. Those wrestlers on television are positively flabby compared to him. Muscles that stood out. He certainly felt healthy. Wouldn't you? Outdoors all the time ...

You had to be a strong man to beat the bush. I think my father found out something and it was that he was a lot stronger and tougher and a better man then he ever thought he would be. At home he was always kind of a dreamer and not much at holding a job. In Canada he found he could clear the bush and when you stood in the doorway at evening and saw what you had done, the pasture and the cow and horses and the oats, then you saw that you had done something. You knew you had done something."

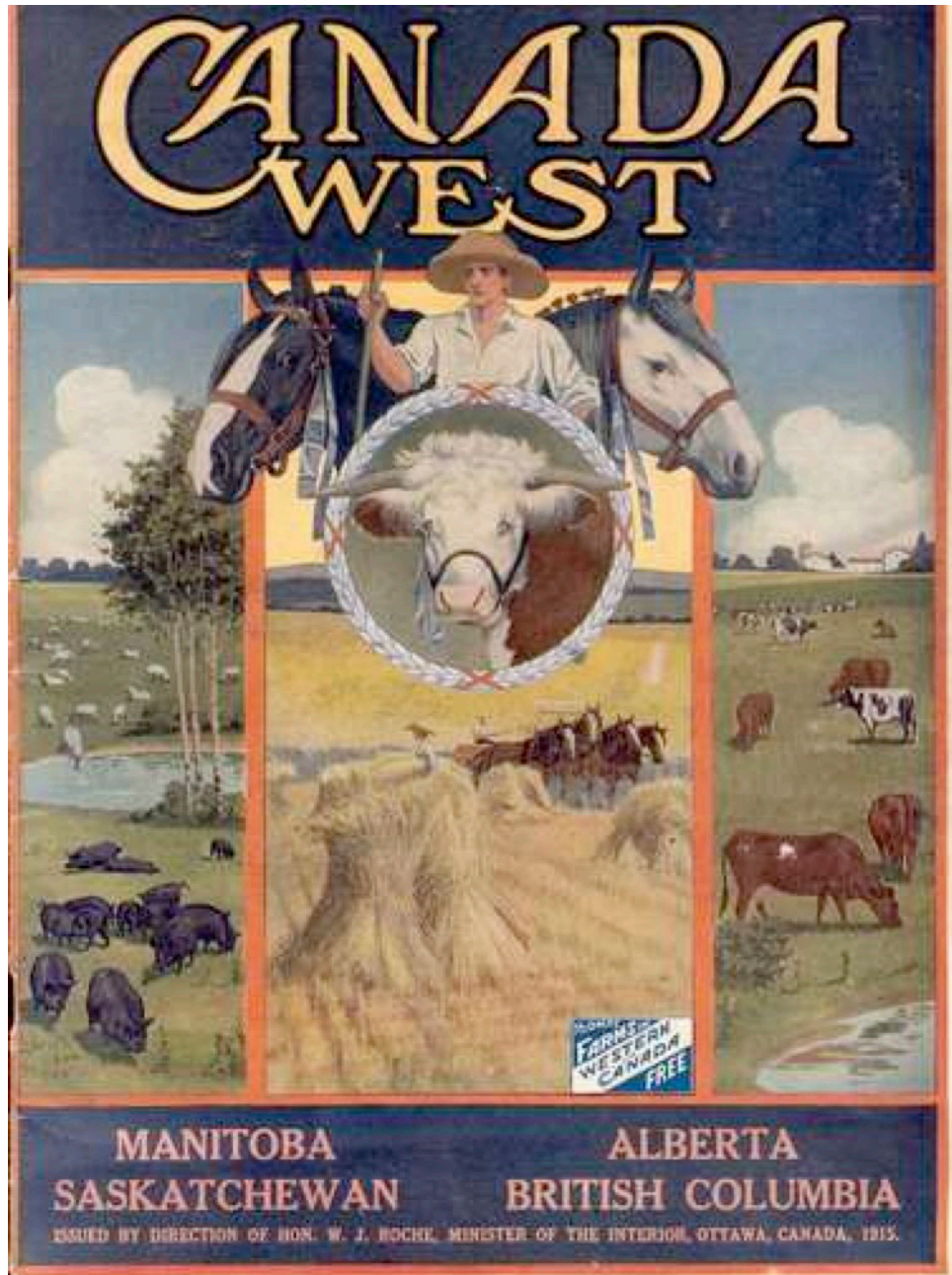
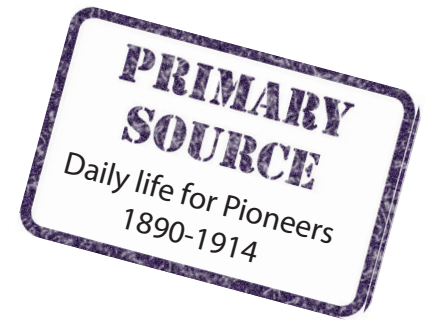
Broadfoot, Barry. "Clearing the bush was hard". The Pioneer Years 1895-1914: Memories of settlers who opened the west. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1976, pp. 44-46.



#7

Canada West poster

Advertising poster used by the Canadian government in 1915 to promote immigration to the Canadian west in the United States.



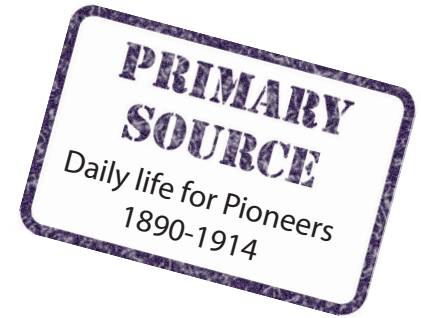
University of Saskatchewan Library Special Collections – Shortt Library of Canadiana



#8

Battling the weather

An excerpt from an interview with a farmer's in which he describes prairie weather in his early homesteading years.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Battling the weather:

"Well, we got a fine crop. Finest in the district. That crop would go 30 bushels (60 pounds) to the acre. And two weeks before I was to cut, you know what come along? Hail. The worst hailstorm you ever did see. I didn't get a cent out of that crop. That crop would have been worth over 3,000 dollars...

So then we planted another crop of wheat, all 125 acres of it—and we got a whole bunch of (grass)hoppers that year. And when they was finished there wasn't much left but enough for us to get by. And wouldn't you know it, goddamn it, but about two weeks before cutting starts, frost! Frost! Went out in the morning and every kernel was black. Well, that wasn't another 3,000 dollar wheat crop, but it probably was a 1,500-dollar one and, let me tell you, even 1,500 dollars was one hell of a lot of money in them days.

...and next year we seeded again and we got good rains in late May and good rains about two weeks later and a good rain about July 1. And let me tell you, that crop was just coming on like a house afire. She was a jim-dandy. Then we got no more rain and it got hotter and hotter, hotter until she sizzled, and then this wind come along, a wind from the south and west, and it sort of snapped your head back a little if you took a deep breath of it. It was that hot. You could stand at the door and see these acres of waving wheat, and then there comes a time, and you notice it, and it looks like the wheat is curing on the stock like buffalo grass and you walk around it at near dark. Hell, it's too hot to walk out in the full daylight. When you cut through it and you can see that that wheat is just burning up. You don't have to be farmer all that much to know that the crop is finished. Just burning up like a youngster with a bad fever. So there went a crop that would have went 30 bushels to the acre and that meant there was another 3,000 dollars or more that we were never going to see. In three years, hailed out, froze out, and burned out."

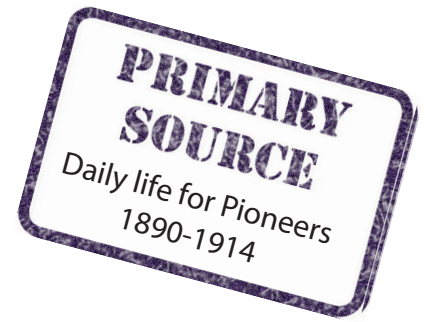
Broadfoot, Barry. "Three-time loser." *The pioneer years 1895–1914: Memories of settlers who opened the west*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1976, pp. 50–51.



#9

A homesteader's life

Excerpt from a 1910 diary entry of H. F. Copeland describing life as a homesteader in Saskatchewan.

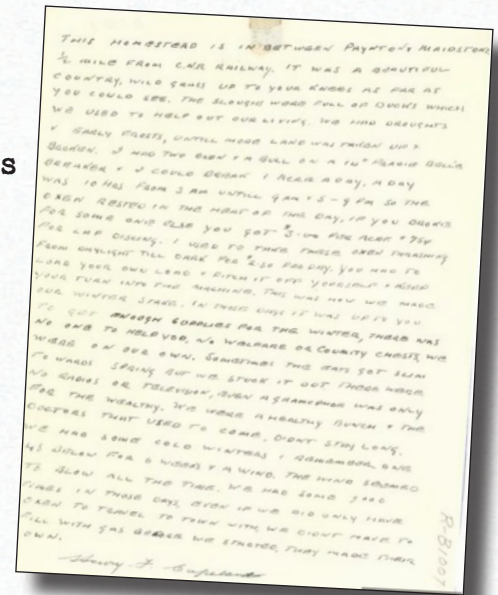


Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

A homesteader's life

"This homestead is in between Payntony + Maidstone, 1/2 mile from C.N.R. Railway. It was a beautiful country, wild grass up to your knees as far as you could see. The sloughs were full of ducks which we used to help out our living. We had droughts + early frosts, until more land was taken up and broken (cleared). I had two oxen & a bull on a 14" (14 feet) prairie breaker (for breaking the prairie soil) & I could break 1 acre (per day). A day was 10 hrs from 3 am until 9 am & 5-9 pm so the oxen rested in the heat of the day. If you broke for someone else you got \$3.00 per acre and 75 cents for discing. I used to take these oxen threshing from daylight till dark for \$2.50 per day. You had to load your own load & pitch it off yourself & keep your turn into the machine. This was how we made our winter stake (money for the winter). In those days it was up to you to get enough supplies for the winter, there was no one to help you, no welfare or coumity (community) chests, we were on our own. Sometimes the eats got slim towards spring but we stuck it out. There were no radios or television, even a gramophone was only for the wealthy. We were a healthy bunch & the doctors that used to come, didn't stay long. We had some cold winters & remember one 45 below for 6 weeks & a wind. The wind seemed to blow all the time. We had some good times in those days, even if we did only have oxen to travel to town with, we didn't have to fill with gas before we started, they made their own."

-H.F. Copeland

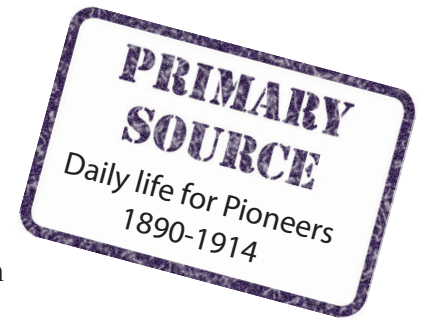


Saskatchewan Archives, Saskatchewan settlement experience.



#10

A married woman gives advice to unmarried women



Excerpt from a letter to the editor published in the December 1909 Western home monthly, one of western Canada's most popular magazines. Letters to the editor section often focused on topics of courtship, marriage and the qualities men and women sought in potential marriage partners.

Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

December 1909

Sir,

...I would say this corresponding is alright for friendship and to help pass the time, but to be in earnest I would say take the advice of a lonely woman who is married. These men who write can say anything on paper but when it comes right down to it, keeping house on a homestead is not always the good apple on the tree...We are poor, and I have to do any kind of work, feed pigs, hens, milk cows, help to make hay and feed calves, and that is not all, chop wood and make my own fires and so on. I can't sit down to the piano for we have none. It is mostly work all day and when I ask anything from my husband, he is generally too busy to afford me going away with a horse. No time to waste for a woman's amusements. If I want any money I have to earn it myself, and I have often gone to my father's home to earn it. Some men have the heart of a stone. They never stop to think about how they ought to treat women. They will treat outsiders better than their own wife, and I am a good cook and know how to economize, do my own sewing, make butter and have a garden. I do everything to get along for a poor farmer, but I get no reward, no thanks, not even in his heart...I am sensitive and feel it keenly. Now it is too late. I dress very plainly and do not spend any more than \$5 a year, if that, and that out of my own earnings. Now girls, I hope that I have not led you to believe that most men are ignorant of the fact that they have a good wife and don't know how to treat her. Stop to consider the grave situation that may be before you. Correspond for friendship and company, but that is all. What you want to look for is good, kind, generous, helpful, self-respecting men. I think there are some fine young men in the West, who, when they had a good sensible woman would know how to treat her, that she would not grow stale in her love for him.

(Signed)

An Unsatisfied Wife.

Azoulay, Dan. Only the lonely: Finding romance in the personal columns of Canada's Western home monthly, 1905-1924. Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2000, p. 142.



#1

Farming in the Canadian west

Excerpt from the 1987 book *The illustrated history of Canada* edited by historian Craig Brown and written by seven different Canadian historians.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

From the earliest years of prairie settlement low and unreliable levels of rainfall had been recognized as a serious problem. The lands of the Palliser Triangle, on the south Saskatchewan-Alberta border could be farmed profitably only in years of high precipitation...western wheat farming...in the years before 1921, was at best precarious, at worst a gamble. Given the varieties of soil, extremes of temperature, and unreliability of rainfall, it is hardly surprising to find yields varying from 9 bushels to 25 bushels per acre in Saskatchewan...The farmer also found himself subject to what appeared to him to be the arbitrary freight-rate structure, the whim of the railways, the power of the grain-buying companies, and, not least of all, a protective tariff which increased prices on everything from his ploughs to his children's clothing.

Brown, Craig (ed.). *The illustrated history of Canada*. Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1987, p. 382.

#2

Textbook summary of the immigrant experience

Excerpt from a BC social studies 10 textbook that describe living conditions for Canadian homesteaders on the Prairies.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

For the homesteading family, living conditions were primitive. Comfort was sacrificed to raise the first crop. The first house was often made of mud-covered sod on a wood frame. Affectionately known as a “soddie,” it usually featured open windows covered with sacks and a thatched roof. Walls were created by stacking strips of sod-like bricks. Soddies were full of flies and fleas, and smelled in the summer Other hardships included the long, bitterly cold winters; the monotonous diet and landscape; and natural disasters such as drought, hail, and grasshoppers. Still, most immigrants to the prairies managed to succeed. After a year or two of often very harsh conditions, the settlers would replace the sod hut with a more substantial home and outbuildings.

Cranny, Michael, Jarvis, Graham Moles, Garvin and Seney, Bruce. Horizons: Canada moves west. Pearson Education Canada, 1999, p. 254.