

It was the year 1903 when I arrived in Manitoba from Glasgow, Scotland. I had chosen Minnedosa as my destination because a former choir master of mine had gone and settled there. His letters had stirred my wanderlust and when a young man is twenty-one the spirit of adventure is strong.

At Minnedosa I met and became friends with a number of young people who were Glaswegians like myself. The following spring they planned to take up homesteads north of Neepawa. It was 1904 when I arrived in Roskeen as one of their jolly large party.

Of all the tales I might relate of both fun and hardship in those early days, one incident stands out in my memory. It happened in 1905 and concerns a trip to Winnipeg that I could never forget.

Times were hard and the little money we had brought from the old country was dwindling fast. Mine was almost gone. True, I still retained a few treasured possessions such as a revolver I had brought along for personal protection against wild beasts and perhaps marauding bands of Indians. But, I had very little left and no prospect for the future.

Two chums, also from Glasgow, Jim Brown and Johnnie Hart, decided that the three of us should go to Winnipeg and look for work. So off we went.

Not for love nor money could we get a job. Eaton's store was in the process of being built but there was no work for us there either. We wore our shoe leather thin in the fruitless search and vowed we would not give up. Our funds ran low and in desperation we took our revolvers (the other boys also each had one) to a pawn shop where sold them for fifty cents each.

Hope springs eternal and we stayed in Winnipeg too long. There came a day we faced the sad truth. No jobs and no money - not even the price of the rail fare home. Philosophically, we boarded the train, having decided that if luck was with us, we would be a few miles down the track and closer to home before the conductor came around and had us put off.

When he did not show up immediately we began to relax. I still had my violin in its case under my arm and Jim had his mandolin. We would have starved first rather than part with the instruments that went everywhere with us. We all loved to sing. A few more miles swept by and our spirits soared. Soon, we were tuning up and having a little song. Fellow travelers began to applaud and crowd around. We were having a wonderful time.

At the end of it all when we could sing no more, a stranger got up, took my cap from beside me and solemnly began passing it around the car. We three were dumb with astonishment. When he handed my cap back it was heavy with silver coins. I was so embarrassed I emptied it all into my pocket as quickly as possible. When the conductor reached our car I took it out again and counted it. There was sufficient money for three fares to Neepawa.

The stranger turned out to be big Dan Hamilton, owner of Neepawa's Hamilton Hotel. He invited us over to his establishment and gave us each a good dinner "on the house". As if he had not already done enough, he offered us jobs in his hotel at night. We declined the job offer. By profession Jim was a draper, Johnnie a bookkeeper and I was a machinist. Farming we could do at home at Roskeen. However, we did accept his offer of a five dollar loan and cheerfully we set out on foot for Roskeen (about 25 miles).

It was a long hike but all went well until we reached the creek that runs down through the Big Valley near Birnie. As we rested we bathed our blistered feet. We got our boots back on but the water had made our feet tender and after that every step was painful. Johnnie collapsed two miles from home and we almost carried him the rest of the way. Despite it all we made the journey in about six hours.

After our adventure we settled down to farming. In fact it was 15 years later before I returned to Neepawa. When I walked back into the hotel with a five dollar bill in my hand, Dan Hamilton not only did not recognize me but had forgotten about the loan!

(The above is part of an article written by William Whitelock in September 1966 for the "Kelwood Bridges the Years", published for the Canadian Centennial, 1967. William Whitelock was Esme Trotter's father, see Main Line#11)