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Notes of a Trip

TO NORTHERN AND
SOUTHERN

MANITOBA.

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NOTES OF A TRIP TO MANITOBA.

Guelph Mercury, Dec. 15th, 1887.

IT was my pleasure to be one of the party who went out to Manitoba with the Farmers' Excursion on September 20th, and believing that my conclusions may be of some interest to the readers of the *Mercury*, I purpose to give them as briefly as I can to make them interesting.

Leaving Toronto by special train we were soon landed at North Bay, where we reach the main line of the C. P. R. We at once resume our trip and pass rapidly through the rocky country along the North Shore till we reach Heron Bay, where we first get a glimpse of Lake Superior, which is a slight relief to the eye, then on through rocky passes and around quick curves, the red granite towering away above us, through tunnels and over trestle work of great height, showing great engineering skill, till we reach Port Arthur, which is now a busy town and great shipping point, then on through the disputed territory till we reach the Summit, which divide the waters here. The country is thickly wooded with small pine, spruce and tamarack till we reach Rat Protage, with its large saw mills and excellent water privileges. There is an immense quantity of lumber turned out here, which is such a boon to Manitoba and the Northwest, making lumber quite reasonable to the settlers. Now we are rapidly going down the gentle descent, which is soon to land us in the fair Prairie Province of Manitoba. We now feel the cool bracing breezes of the prairie as we run into Whitemouth, and are soon in full view of the boundless prairie, which is so welcome a sight after the rocks and woods through which we have passed. My first impressions on seeing the prairie were favorable. Its rich, luxuriant grass, fine level appearance,

which continue till we reach Winnipeg, the famed City of the West. Here all is bustle and activity—a truly live city and active people—well knowing they have a bright future before them.

At Winnipeg there was a special train in waiting for us to convey us to Southern Manitoba. We had the good fortune of being accompanied by the members of the Local Government and other gentlemen well qualified by their general knowledge of the country, and also by their uniform courtesy in answering our enquiries, to make our trip enjoyable and profitable.

These gentlemen, with the agents and Mr. Carman, editor of the *Emigrant*, had made arrangements with the settlers to have exhibits at the different stations through which we were to pass, to better enable us to see and judge for ourselves the quality of the products which are grown in the sections through which the railway runs. On leaving Winnipeg very little of the country is cultivated, being held by speculators and being railway lands for some distance, although the country is in every way adapted for successful agriculture, being a fine level prairie as far as the eye can reach, not a shrub or bush to impede the plough. But as we approach Morris it is settled, and there was here a nice exhibit, and on going south we come into the Mennonite country, a fine farming section, but scarce of timber. These people live in villages and work the land for several miles around. Then Rosenfeldt is the junction, where a line runs to Gretna on the boundary. The country around here is very good, and continues so till we reach Morden, a smart town of good pretensions, with two large elevators. On the platform here was as grand a display of agricultural products as ever I saw at the Provincial at Toronto. The wheat was an excellent sample of No. 1 hard; barley plump and a little colored, owing to rain in harvest, but it weighed 55 lbs. to the bushel. Oats good, potatoes something immense, numbers

weighing from three to five lbs., and of excellent quality. I never saw such potatoes, the yield being as high as 500 bushels per acre. I think I may fairly say this locality cannot be beaten for potatoes in the world. Turnips large and solid, cabbage and cauliflower immensely large and firm, tomatoes large, ripe and luscious, Indian corn grand—in fact everything was first-class and surprised us all. The collection and station was adorned with game and dressed buffalo, moose, and elk antlers, which made this exhibit very pleasing. The settlers were here in great numbers to greet us, and were neatly dressed, with an air of contentment and satisfaction on their countenances, which showed they were well pleased with their lot.

The train moved out from here amid the cheers of the people, which met a hearty response from us, and we ran down over the Pembina Mountains to Manitou. Here another fine collection greeted our eyes. The country here is undulating and there are a few nice lakes in the vicinity. The land is well suited for wheat. Here I met my old friends James Stirton, formerly of Guelph, also Dr. Grain, of Fergus, and W. Kennedy, of Erin, who kindly drove me round the country, and to farmers where they were threshing, which enabled me to see the yield from the machine. The wheat here turned out 30 to 40 bushels to the acre and of fine quality. The exhibit here was grand, similar to Morden. Then on to Pilot Mound, a nice section, settled by Huron and Bruce farmers, who are doing well and quite satisfied with the country, as I learned from conversation. A good display here also and a fine country around. At Crystal City there was another good display, which included cheese from the factory, which is here doing a flourishing business. All this section of country through which we have passed is well adapted for mixed farming, as grass and hay abound in abundance. The country from there to Doleraine is level, but good for grain growing, although hay land is scarce. To the south is

Turtle Mountain, to the north and west the Souris River, on the banks of which is abundance of wood for present wants. Doleraine is the present terminus of the South Western Railway, and therefore does an immense business in buying wheat, which is here a great crop and fine and plump, weighing 63 lbs to the bushel. Lots of good land here at \$4 to \$7 per acre. There is not so deep a deposit of alluvial soil here as on the east of the Pembina Mountains, but the land is fertile with a good subsoil.

Returning I took farewell of the party at Manitou, from which place I was to ride across the country to the east of Pembina Mountains on a broncho. These are magnificent saddle horses of great endurance and speed. The country on my way to the mountains was very fine and the day delightful, which made the ride very enjoyable. On approaching the mountains the country begins to be covered with scrub, and as we passed rapidly on to near the summit my eye was gladdened with the sight of two magnificent specimens of the elk standing on the trail in front of us. They are noble looking animals, but very timid and soon bounded from our sight. On we went to the summit, where I drew up to behold one of the finest sights that I ever beheld. Before me I could see a distance of seven or eight square miles, the prairie green and dotted over at the base of the mountain with hay stacks, the after grass thick and luxuriant. In the distance the country was covered with stacks of rich grain, giving unmistakable evidence of its fertility and adaptability for grain growing. At our feet on the slope of the mountain were small oaks, covered with their yellow autumn leaves in striking contrast to the green prairie below. This, as the sun was just setting, formed a picture I shall not soon forget, and enchanting in the extreme. I am again off and soon reach the comfortable residence of Mr. Wm. Kennedy, formerly of Erin. His buildings are in a nice oak grove. He has a fine farm of

480 acres, and has a grand crop of grain and roots, also a fine herd of fifty head of cattle.

From here I cross over to John McCullough's, formerly of Eramosa, who has a magnificent farm and good cattle and sheep, also a great potato crop. His yield he estimates at 500 bushels per acre and some as large as 5 lbs. weight. From here I next came to George Lawson's, whose house is situated in a cosy nook on the edge of a poplar grove, a very pleasant location. Here under this hospitable roof I made my home while in this locality. Starting with almost nothing he has done remarkably well. He and his boys now own 1,120 acres of very fine land. This shows what unity, energy, perseverance and thrift can accomplish in this fair land. The crop this year is 4,000 bushels of wheat, 2,000 bushels of oats, and 1,000 bushels of barley, with a fine root crop, a herd of 30 head of cattle and six horses. The McKerlies and Thompsons are also here—all doing well, and all of these I have mentioned worthily representing the township and county from which they sprang—Eramosa and Wellington. The land round here is a deep rich alluvial deposit, gently undulating, good water and good oak timber near the mountain, amply sufficient to supply their wants for some time to come. The only pest here are the prairie wolves, which are very plentiful and destructive, especially on the fowls—as George says—"vera sair on Jenny's hens." I have singled out these to show what men with ordinary means can do and have done in eight or nine years. They have fought against adverse circumstances, but are now reaping the benefit of their pluck and energy. I had the pleasure of seeing the Agricultural Show at Carman while here and was struck with the roots and vegetables; I myself weighed a pumpkin which turned the scales at 56 lbs., citrons 22 lbs., Swede turnips at 24 lbs., and Greystones at 28 lbs., cabbage and onions in like proportions. This gives a practical idea of what this soil and country can produce. The settlers here

are contented and comfortable, the great drawback being the large amount of unoccupied land, which makes it difficult to support schools and churches.

I shall reserve for another letter Central and Northern Manitoba, as I have already occupied too much of your valuable space.

Yours, &c.,

Eramosa, Dec. 3, 1887.

A. JOHNSON.

Notes on Central and Northern Manitoba.

Guelph Mercury, February 9th, 1888.

LEAVING Winnipeg by main line for the Portage, we pass over a level prairie for some distance, good land but will require drainage till we reach Poplar Point, when the country becomes more rolling, as we are now close to the Assiniboine river, which runs along just south of the railway all the way to the Portage. As we run rapidly to High Bluff the country improves in appearance, and as we approach Portage la Prairie it becomes truly grand. In all my travels I have never seen anything like the country around here. The gentle roll, the large unbroken expanse of beautiful land and nothing to impede the plough, the rich soil, fertile in the extreme, well settled and well cultivated by a most energetic and practical class of farmers, gives this part of the country an appearance second to none in the West, not excepting the great and broad prairie lands of the great American Republic to the south. On that beautiful morning, as I passed along over this beautiful prairie, my eye was for the first time the victim of a mirage, the trees to the south along the Assiniboine seemed to be floating in mid air, and the clear atmosphere seemed to tremble with its great load. It is a beautiful and awe inspiring spectacle to behold, and makes a vivid impression on a traveller who witnesses it

for the first time. Glancing my eye over this broad expanse, I could count seventeen steam threshers at work at the same time, giving a good idea of the immense amount of grain grown here, perhaps more on the same area of land than on any other on the face of the globe. Wheat here was grown at 45 and 50 bushels to the acre, and every acre arable and under crop, so that the output of grain here is something enormous. To the north is Lake Manitoba, and for some distance from its shores the country is low and capable of producing immense quantities of hay and pasture. Here there are great herds of cattle, well bred and in fine condition. Several Wellington farmers are doing well here. Passing on, the country is well adapted for grain growing, as may be seen by the immense stacks everywhere. It is somewhat broken in places till we reach Carberry—another great centre for wheat, and fine country round about—and till we reach Brandon, a lively brisk town, doing a splendid trade. The country south is broken with the Brandon hills, but farther south and west there is a grand country with fine crops this year. To the north also is rich prairie land. Here will most likely be located one of the Government Experimental Farms, and a good selection it would be from its central location and good surroundings.

But I return to the North Western line and leave the Portage by it. For some miles we pass through a fine country, and as we approach Westbourne, which is quite close to the shores of Lake Manitoba, the land here becomes flat and wet and strongly impregnated with alkali. The surface of the prairie is covered with small scrub, and it is not so desirable for settlement, although large herds of cattle are fed here, as there is abundance of grass and hay. About Gladstone the country is improving. To the south there is a fine stretch called Beautiful Plains. The farmers here are doing well. On to Neepawa,

with its pretty lake and fine town hall—a busy little town. Then on to Minnedosa. There a branch of the railway runs down into Rapid City. I found some frost here in the valley of the Little Saskatchewan. Although the land is rich and fertile, up those valleys there are currents of cold, and there seems to be greater danger of frost. At Rapid City is a fine roller mill, run by Mr. R. S. Armstrong and belonging to Mr. McCulloch. This mill is of modern construction and machinery, and turns out an excellent quality of flour of 150 barrels per day. There is also a woollen mill, all doing well. The country round here is high and somewhat hilly and broken, although there is a great amount of fine land. The water is good, which is of great consequence here in this country.

Leaving these towns, I go northwest through some nice country, although somewhat more broken and more sparsely settled till I reach Shoal Lake, a pretty place and fairly good country, which is well supplied with wood, till we reach the metropolis of this part of the Province—Birtle. This was for a long time the centre from which all the settlers moved north and west, as the land office was here located. It is a brisk town and a good country round, a fine rolling prairie, with considerable small timber. Close to here, Mr. Farrow, of Guelph, has a fine section of land, and who may yet go out there and teach the natives practical husbandry. From here I go due north till I reach Binscarth, famed all over the world for its fine herd of Shorthorn cattle, with Mr. George Smellie, of Fergus, as manager. This may be said to be the model farm of this part of the country—fine buildings and beautiful grounds—having care and neatness in arrangement—with a nice spring creek running just below the buildings. Mr. Smellie kindly showed me over the place. He had a fine crop of turnips, which do well here; wheat 42 bushels per acre and a good sample.

The cattle were a superior herd of Shorthorns, with strong bone, showing great development. About 300 are kept, and as they came in at night to be corralled I noticed they were in fine condition, in fact fat. They are corralled at least 13 hours out of the 24, only having the other nine hours to feed. They get nothing while in the corral and I was surprised at their being so fat and large. This herd is a great boon to the farmers of this section of the country, and the stock all over this settlement and to the north for thirty miles show its effects. Mr. Snellie is a live, energetic, painstaking manager, and is bound to give this industry a fair trial, and he must succeed. My best wishes are for his success, as on this stock-raising the future of this part of the country must largely depend.

From this point north to the base of the Riding Mountains, and west to the Assiniboine and Shell rivers, the country produces an abundance of rich, luscious grass, perhaps about the finest country for grazing purposes I have seen, with streams of fresh water and small lakes, which make it naturally adapted for cattle raising. All the cattle running on the prairie here were in excellent condition, and as it is thinly settled they have a great run to feed upon. From here I go to Russell, the terminus of the branch from Binscarth. At Russell, Dr. Barnardo has selected 5,000 acres of land to establish his colony, where he proposes to send the boys which he brings from London, to teach them farming. It is a fine section of land, and we hope his very laudable undertaking may be highly successful. This, too, is the home of the noted scout commander, Major Boulton, a live, pushing, energetic fellow, who is doing his best to build up this part of the country. He is one of its earliest pioneers, and watches with pride its rapid development. He proposes starting a dairy in connection with Dr. Barnardo's farm, which should do well in this magnificent grazing country. Twelve miles north

of here is the prairie home of Edwin Armstrong, formerly of Guelph, a nice rolling prairie. Through here the soil is a rich alluvial deposit, mixed with sand, with a strong solution of lime, which makes it early, stimulating vegetation and hastening the ripening, thereby making it as early as the south, and thus the danger of frost is not so great as it would otherwise be from its very northern latitude.

A little to the north is the Big Bush, stretching away back in one unbroken forest for 80 miles, timbered with fine tamarac and spruce, many of the trees $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter, and with 12 foot logs in them. This makes lumber here very reasonable, and there will be an abundance of wood for many years to come. Then I travel over a fine prairie country till I reach the Shell River, with its high, rugged banks, covered with small timber. The river here makes a complete turn, forming an elbow. In this elbow is the most beautiful valley or glen I ever beheld. At my feet is the little village of Asessippi, with its flour and saw mill; over the glen, on the lee, the comfortable residence of Mr. James Smith, formerly of Eramosa—an extremely pleasant location—the beautiful clear waters of the Shell running just below his building—the picturesque banks rising up 200 feet. Above is the old Pelly trail crossing. Just here and in this cove was the resting place for the traders with their musical carts as they passed on from Battleford, on their way to St. Paul, with their loads of furs in years gone by. To the north the valley rises by gentle and pretty natural terraces till it reaches the level of the prairie beyond. This must be an enchanting spot in the summer. The wheat and other grain were a good sample, cattle in prime condition. Mr. E. Armstrong's wheat turned out 35 bushels per acre all round, and of fine quality.

Before I leave this northern country with its pleasant associations and kind people and return

to Winnipeg and close my most enjoyable ramble. Here I must sum up and give my practical conclusions. This country is settled with all kinds and nationalities of people. Many have had no experience in farming, and it cannot be supposed they can do well for some time. But I believe with a proper system of Government drainage to carry off the water from the sloughs and low marshy lands, and with the mixing up by cultivation of the rich black soil with the subsoil underneath, the danger from frost will be almost entirely removed, and the principal causes that make farming somewhat doubtful will vanish. This year the harvest has been a bountiful one, and farmers are now reaping a rich reward for their perseverance and courage. From the beautiful appearance of the country and the general adaptability of the soil for grain raising, the small amount unfit for cultivation, the ease with which it can be prepared for a crop, the small amount of capital required to start, it is and must be a most desirable country for farmers, especially of ordinary means. I believe our friends in Ontario who are now (and I think unfortunately) carried away with the wave of discontent and are changing their homes for ones on the other side of the line should consider well if we have not in our own Dominion and under the old flag, as good a country and as fair a chance of success as elsewhere. I believe it to be our duty to cultivate a strong national sentiment and resolve to make our Dominion worthy of the country and ancestry from which we have sprung. Nothing impressed me so much in this country as the general appearance of its people, especially those from Ontario—healthy and well dressed, kind and hospitable, wearing an air of that grand and noble old principle of self reliance and honest industry, full of energy, pluck and perseverance.

Yours truly,

ARCHIE JOHNSON.

Eramosa, Jan. 16, 1888.

