

Homesteading in the Hand Hills

By HARVEY HANSON, Balzac, Alberta

IN a previous article in the "Canadian Cattleman" I told how a portion of the Palliser Triangle in Alberta at one time had people on nearly every quarter section and how you can now drive for miles and not see a soul. It is that part of Alberta that the Dominion and Provincial governments hope to rehabilitate by the use of irrigation water from the Red Deer River. How this exodus came about can probably be told with my own experience thirty-eight years ago.

I had been a two-horse skinner on the streets of Spokane for some time and, seeing no future in it, I quit my job and enrolled for a short course in Animal Husbandry at Washington State College in Pullman, Washington, to become a herdsman. The late W. T. McDonald, who later became Livestock Commissioner for the Province of British Columbia, was my teacher and a Mr. Charles F. Monroe was his assistant. I liked the work, particularly when they took us to see herds of cattle and also fine Percheron horses. Their course finished, they offered to give me a lift in getting a job as herdsman, but by that time my only thought was to get a piece of land of my own. Returning to Spokane, I was attracted to a huge sign on Post Street telling how you could get 160 acres in Western Canada "free". Inquiring inside, that did it. All you had to do was buy your ticket to the nearest port of entry and you could travel for a cent a mile to any place in Western Canada thereafter.

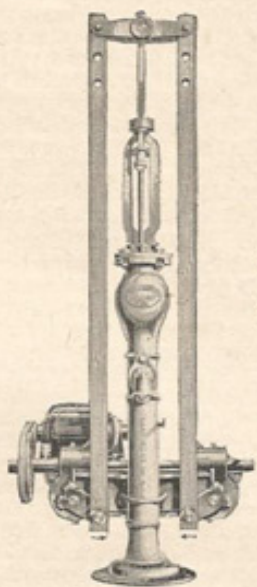
On making my wishes known, which were to go up and get a job on a farm somewhere and then look for a homestead, I noticed another applicant for settler's rates looking me over. He was served first and when I returned out on the street he was waiting for me. He said "I hear you are thinking of going to Canada to get land." I said "Yes." He said "I am going to Calgary on Monday and when I arrive there, unless I hear anything to the contrary, I am taking two men out to our place. We already have two homesteaders working for us and I have an idea if you come along they will help you get one too." I agreed and he wanted to know if I had any farm experience. I said "Two years in the Dakotas," also showed him my card from the Agricultural College. I gave him my city address and he gave me his. The results were when the Spokane International pulled out on Monday noon late in March, 1912, we were both on it. Some of the ladies wore their Easter bonnets and people were making gardens. When we arrived in Calgary a day later it was snowing hard, actually a blizzard, and the bonnets were not much in evidence.

There had been a heavy crop in places in Alberta in 1911 and my first two weeks' work for my new boss was helping thresh heavy oats and flax. Some of the oats had never been stooked and the bundles were nearly as long as myself.

However, I soon struck up a friendship with the other two men who had home-

steads and as a result I sent to the Land Office at Calgary for a map showing available quarters in the same township as theirs, and as soon as the work had slackened off a little so I could be spared and also had earned enough money to make the trip, I went out to look the land over. And here an interesting experience started. My new-found friends advised me to take the train to Bassano, Alberta, which boasted it was the "Best in the West by a dam site" at the time. Arriving around midnight, I found no beds available, everything taken up. Even a huge horse tent was full of laborers going and coming from the Irrigation Works. I killed an hour or better walking around the streets with the town policeman, whom I told where I wanted to go and he told me there was a stage leaving for out across the river at 8 a.m. from the Exchange Stables, so I went down there and flopped down on some hay to await its departure. My Scandinavian friends had told me to take a quart of Scotch along and to contact Mr. Blank, who was also a Norwegian, give him a drink and get him to go along and show me the land. So I had to skirmish around early to get it and be back in time to take my place up in front with the driver high over the four-horse team on the stage. Col. Warren operated the stage at the time. Pete Killarney was the driver. The fare was \$3 to Hutton ferry. They averaged seven miles per hour.

As we drove up a steep hill on the other side of the river, I had told Pete, the driver, where I wanted to go and when we stopped at Louie Field's store, Pete pointed out a man who ran the livery stable sitting in a buckboard buggy with a long-legged driving horse. He said "Get hold of him. He goes out close to where you are going." So I contacted him. He had a quarter of land which he operated on the side along with his livery barn. I told him who I was, who had sent me and where I wanted to go. He looked me over critically and then said "I don't want any more single 'fellas' coming out here taking up land." I lied



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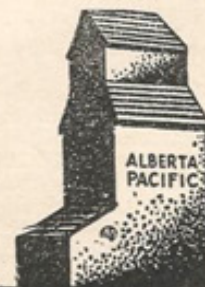
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and said "I am married." "Well you got to show me" and I said "That will be hard to do but I am married just the same," but I could not crack him. He was waiting for the mail to be sorted. I walked away in disgust. Then I had a brainwave. I looked him over, then suddenly I thought "I got your number." Unbuttoning my coat so it would flap in the wind, the cork showed up. It was like a puddle to a duck. "Where did you say you wanted to go, mister?" I told him. "Well, I'll take you out and I'll take you out — quick too." I said "That will be fine." We started out, the horse just stepped along the prairie trail. About a mile out I apologetically inquired "How about it, ever take a drink?" He said "Well, I have." "Better have one with me." He hoisted the bottle to his lips, and glug, glug, glug, just like pouring it down a gopher hole. He had me out near my destination in a few minutes and cautioned me to hurry and not get lost before dark.

I spent the night with Joe who had gone back to his land earlier to do some breaking. He started me off next morn-

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ing to the man I was to contact to show me the land. I found him peeling poles for a stock shelter and after a short visit, and some Scotch, I asked him to show me the two vacant quarters. He said "I guess I might as well." The first was suitable but the second one turned the trick. There was 20 acres of flax growing along side that I had never seen better. I could throw my Stetson (style Graeco) hat and it just rested on top. I felt I could not get back to Calgary fast enough to get the land before someone else grabbed it, and I told my guide so. We parted company there. I left him my Scotch and started back on foot to Hut-ton. I estimated I walked 20 miles that day and here my luck or guardian angel looked after me. My friend with the driving horse was back on the job. There was a widow who had a cattle spread (I believe her name was Brown) up the river. She also had a son who came out to visit her. He had hired a team of ponies and a democrat to drive out from Bassano and left the team and paid expenses on the chance the livery man got them back to town. As I had told the livery man I would be back the next night, and having me in mind agreed. It saved me waiting a day for the next stage, also \$3 stage fare. I took a room for the night at the hotel. A Mrs. Jones ran the place. She also had a quarter a couple of miles east. She had been out to it in the afternoon and brought back garden stuff, beets, carrots, peas. One could not ask for nicer. Again I felt I could not get back fast enough before someone took the quarter I had selected.

The next morning at breakfast a man eating with me asked "Going to Bassano?" I said "Yes." "How you going?" I said "A team and democrat." "How's chances for a ride?" I said "Good, but maybe you better slip down the hill first. I will pick you up." This he did, and he also bought my dinner at the halfway house. We arrived at the Exchange Stables by mid-afternoon, my passenger stepping out at the edge of town. Col. Warren was so tickled to have his team back, he told me "no charge". Again my luck held out. I got back in town early enough to catch the first section of the afternoon train, stop off at Gleichen, Alberta, pick up some more money, and catch the second section to Calgary in the evening.

The next morning gloom settled over me when I saw the Land Office steps. Several were camped under a tarpaulin waiting for the office to open. I wondered if any of them could be after my quarter. There was a small lineup, but eventually I was at the desk, was sworn in, paid my \$10.00 and walked out with 160 acres under my control. What a happy young fellow I was!

Returning to Strathmore on the afternoon train, I bummed a ride about 6 miles of my 13-mile trip. The 7 miles I had to walk facing southeast, and the mosquitoes were so thick in the prairie grass I could brush them off in handfuls. But I arrived back on the job just as the teams were unhitching at the barn for the evening. All the teamsters, including the boss, seemed excited and asked how I had made out. I told them "fine". All said "good", and I believe they meant it.

The one and only good crop that district had (1915) was, I believe, a bad thing for the country. I am what the



Cattle by Road Trains

Specially Designed Vehicle Popular
In Australian Outback

By CHARLES LYNCH

CONSTRUCTION of new roads through the outback regions of Western Australia and Northern Territory is opening the way for increasing use of road transport for the movement of cattle over long stretches of waterless country. Cattle owners are now using road trains made up of a big prime mover and two or three semi-trailers.

These vehicles are capable of transporting large loads of cattle over long distances of up to 500 miles on good roads. In the Northern Territory they are familiar on the Stuart Highway which runs for over 900 miles between Alice Springs in the centre, and Darwin in the north.

Cattle stations are located within convenient reach of the Highway, and the road trains convey the cattle loads to the rail-head at Alice Springs. The road trains are increasing in popularity as their advantages are weighed against the heavy loss of condition in cattle inevit-

haberdashery salesman would call tall and slender, 6 feet, and I wore at the time a wide cowpoke's hat. I saw standing wheat out there that just slid past my ears under my hat. The people who came out there with a little money were the worst off. They hung on the longest, while fellows like myself (they called us suitcase farmers), we came out with a suitcase and left the same way and were best off. I kept this land clear title until 1932. I could have sold it for \$1,000 cash one time. I went out and looked it over in 1932. There was \$60 back taxes against it. I sold my cabin for \$50 cash and a nice little shingled pitch roof barn for 4 horses for \$25. The fence I left. It became part of what is now known as The Special Areas.

If the Central Irrigation System becomes a reality, it will be, I believe, money far better spent than the millions they spent in the thirties to relieve the distress and provide relief camps for the

able when they are "overlanded" for hundreds of miles over barren regions. One road train operating in Northern Territory consists of a truck and two large trailers and has a total length of 135 feet. Powered by a Diesel engine it will carry 90 bullocks at 20 miles an hour. This vehicle was built and constructed by Freighters Ltd. of Moorabbin, Victoria, which specializes in this type of work.

In June the company completed the construction of a road train for a Western Australian station owner which will carry 570 sheep or 60 bullocks over long distances. It consists of a Mammoth diesel prime mover and three trailers, each 22 feet long. The trailers are of a double-decker type and the framework was welded at the company's plant at Moorabbin.

There are 12 wheels on the prime mover and 24 on the three trailers. This solidly constructed vehicle will be used in the remote areas of Western Australia for the transport of cattle to market centres, and as Australia's road development expands, it is certain to be followed by other similar vehicles, designed to assist the cattle owner who is separated by long distances from his markets.

unemployed. They would at least have something to show for the money. It would provide a place for folks to earn their own living and jobs for people to service them. It is the only salvation for that country. It should never have been thrown open for settlement. The writer lost three years' time and four years' savings and got very little in return, except perhaps some happy memories.

They have made a start to bring water to this district with a huge dirt fill dam at Carolside, to catch spring runoff water in Berry Creek, and if the parent project on the Red Deer River is completed to supply further water needs and with the advent of overhead sprinkler irrigation, which I saw working on my own place in 1949, and which I believe will revolutionize irrigation in Western Canada, who knows but what the district will some day yet blossom like and with the rose, even if it is nearly a half century later.