

Early Days in Southern Alberta

First installment of experiences in the life of the late Harold Banister who settled near Okotoks, Alberta, in 1884, as related to his daughter before his death in 1934.

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I was eleven years old when I sailed for the North West Territories with my father, A. E. Banister, and my three older brothers, leaving mother and eight younger children in Bridport, England, to await instructions to join us when we had found a home for them in the Canadian West.

The passage was rough in the S.S. Sardinia and it was a 13-day trip before we landed in Quebec, Canada, on September 17, 1884. The slow train trip for the West which followed was enjoyed by us boys with all the eagerness of youth. It was Fall and we had great fun scampering off to the fields to taste the products of the abundant harvest. A shrill whistle would bring us flying back at the last moment and thanks to the good-natured engineer none of us were ever left behind.

Our only stop-over was for two days at Winnipeg where we transferred from the Grand Trunk Pacific line to the Canadian Pacific. With the only street a bog after heavy rains, and Red River carts stuck to the hubs in mud, we were not impressed.

By September 17 we had reached our destination — Calgary. Our first impression was a small shack town with one general store and one hotel. Suddenly down the Blackfoot Trail (now Ninth Avenue) we beheld a crowd of several hundred Indians advancing towards us. I was terrified. The "savages" were painted brilliantly — half red, half yellow. They wore only breech cloths and the most wonderful regalia of colors I had ever seen. They arranged themselves in circles with a few braves in the centre and we witnessed our first pow-wow — a noisy Indian dance to the beat of tom-toms. At each intermission the settlers would extend gifts of tobacco and the Indians would dance on for their amusement. We had, it was revealed, arrived in Calgary on a festive day.

After this excitement Father found a temporary shelter. For \$20.00 a month he rented a tiny shack, one board thick with a mud floor. In this we lived until he had located a homestead.

The site of our homestead, purchased on the advice of Sam Livingston, one of Calgary's earliest white settlers, was at the Big Bend of the Bow River. It was a picturesque valley where the buffalo grass rippled softly in the breeze and one caught a glimpse of the winding river beyond the trees. Father had purchased the land — one section — from the railroad, and it was with great excitement that we left Calgary for our new home. Our possessions were loaded on a Red River cart which we boys had the experience of driving, while Father drove ahead in company with two other early Calgary settlers, Jack Innis and Dave Kennedy.

The 22-mile trip was full of interest. Along the banks of the Bow River we saw hundreds of hides and bones and assumed they were of buffalo, but learned later they were the remains of cattle

belonging to the Cochrane Cattle Company that had died as they were brought out. Actually we never did see a live buffalo at large; we did find close to our shack the bones of one to which the flesh still clung.

We arrived in the evening; our belongings were thrown on the ground and we were left alone to camp for the night. Our first move was to clear away some of the long dry grass which grew several feet high, so we could pitch our tent. With a carving knife (our only equipment) this proved slow, so someone suggested burning a space. In our ignorance we did this and saw our first prairie fire. For some time we fought for our lives but finally succeeded in extinguishing the blaze and pitching our tent.

It was October, and our next step was to build a shack. We were fortunate in having an ideal Fall with clear sunny skies and temperatures, until December 31, never dropped lower than fifteen degrees of frost. The first shack was built from floating logs which had escaped the boom in Calgary. It was about 20 feet square with a mud floor and roof, but crude as it was, it spelled home to us.

We had just moved in when we experienced the full intensity of an Alberta winter. Temperatures dropped to 30 below zero, the mud froze solid in the logs and at night the interior of the shack gleamed with hoar frost. A large cook stove (used in the first Royal Hotel in Calgary) kept us warm.

Spring finally broke and we stocked our homestead with one cow, a team of horses, a load of straw and a one-furrow walking plow. With hard work, we broke 25 acres that first Summer and felt that things were going well.

The following Spring we added 1,600 sheep to our assets, and on our newly broken soil we planted oats which grew beautifully and by late Summer the rippling, golden grain stood ready to be cut. The same afternoon that we admired our Summer's labor, ominous, white-edged clouds blew up with amazing rapidity and in the wake of a frightful wind, came hail. Huge stones, like eggs, bouncing as they struck the earth, cut our glorious crop to the ground as we watched in horror. The garden suffered a similar fate, till all that remained of that Summer's hard work was a blackened field.

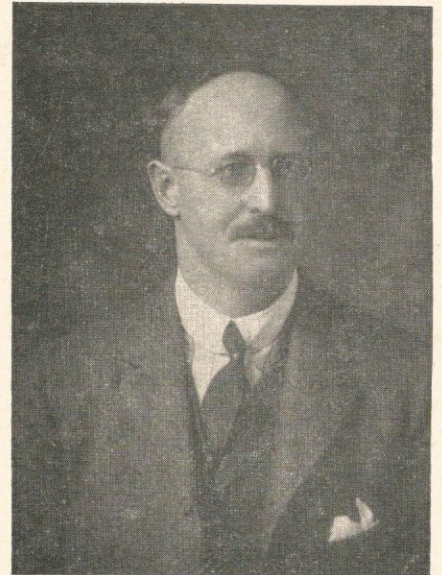
Father then purchased four hogs and turned them into the damaged field and that was the beginning of the pig industry in Davisburg.

Our new home, we named "The Grotto", which stuck with it through the years.

Rebellion of 1885

One peaceful Sunday in 1885 while church service was in progress in Calgary's one little Anglican Church, a breathless messenger opened the door and shouted, "The Blackfeet Indians are on the warpath, and are approaching Calgary."

The congregation was in a panic. The



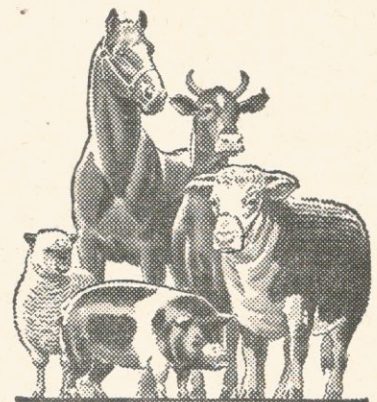
Harold Banister

service was quickly closed and the people rushed to the street. Stores were thrown open and guns, ammunition and revolvers were placed in the hands of every able-bodied man. Women and children were rushed to the police barracks and the settlers waited agonizedly for the attack. Fortunately it proved a false alarm and by the next evening the little village was back to normal.

In our isolated location, it was some time before we heard that the Indians were in rebellion. Newspapers were scarce and most of our news came from English publications or the Manitoba

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Free Press. However, as conditions grew worse, all white settlers were provided with guns and ammunition to act as scouts and report to the government any unruly conduct on the part of the Indians.

Our first real fright came when Father had been detained in Calgary due to floods and we four boys were in charge of the homestead. An excited rider galloped in one afternoon announcing that the Blackfeet were on the warpath and massacring all white settlers along the road. Badly frightened, he rode off, leaving us to our own resources.

What were we to do? Father had the horses, so escape was impossible. We resolved we would not give up without a struggle so we carefully began preparations. First seeing that our guns and revolvers were loaded, we worked on another scheme. Opening the cellar door which lay in the direct path of our bunkroom, we securely tied mowing machine knives below. Then we barricaded the doors and window with anything available, and went to bed — but not to sleep. The attack would come in the night and we planned exactly what we would do. The savages would burst through the barricades, inevitably stumble on the jagged knives below and we would shoot from above. What heroes we would be! After a night of dreadful suspense, day finally dawned and the attack had not come. We were much relieved when father arrived home saying there was no real danger. Our neighbor had unnecessarily alarmed us through his own personal fears.

The Rebellion also had its amusing incidents. The Government was paying \$8.00 a day to volunteers who with their own horses would go to the scene of the Rebellion. One of our neighbors volunteered. Fully six feet tall, he mounted a miserable looking cayuse not more than twelve hands high. With his long legs dangling nearly to the ground he rode over to bid us good-bye. His parting words, so decidedly English, I shall never forget: "Tot! Tot! Old Fellow! I'm off to the wa-h". His horse, however, played out a few miles north of Calgary and he had to return to the mundane task of farming.

Little more of the Rebellion affected us though for months after the treaties had been signed, the Indians who visited our shack wore huge cardboard placards on their foreheads or bore notes from headquarters which read, "Friend of the Whites."

• A Prairie Fire

Prairie fires were the dread of early settlers. The worst one in my recollection was in the Fall of '86 just after the Government treaties had been signed with the Indian rebels. Treaty money had been paid to each Indian in crisp one dollar bills, and they immediately set off for Calgary to spend what they had received.

One evening we watched a tribe of Indians encamp across the river from us; forty or fifty teepees were pitched in full view of the shack. As we prepared for bed, we heard the monotonous pow-wow. The Indians were making merry.

About two o'clock we were aroused by a pounding on the shack door. Father opened it to five Indian bucks who had swum the river on cayuses. "Mutton! Mutton!" they demanded, each produc-

ing a \$1.00 bill. So Father went out and picked a fat sheep in return for the \$5.00. Tying its neck and body with their lariats, whooping and shouting, they dragged the sheep to their camp. Soon the smell of roasting mutton pervaded the air. This must have made others in the party envious for soon five more bucks came to the door and Father sold another sheep. This was repeated a third time before morning while the feasting and revelry in the Indian camp continued all night.

Next morning we boys, ploughing on our side of the river, watched with interest as the Indians decamped. Soon after they left the smell of burning grass reached us, and we realized with horror that a prairie fire had started from their camp fires.

We hastily unhitched our team, sprang on the horses and, brandishing sacks, hastened across the river. We were too late. The fire was already out of bounds. General Strange, manager of the Military Colonization Ranch Co., seeing the flames, hastened to the scene with thirty men. We fought day and night, but before it was extinguished that fire had burned nearly all the country from Sheppard to Gleichen between the Bow River and the C.P.R. tracks.

As a result, the M.C.C. Ranch suffered the loss of all their haystacks for winter feed, besides much farm equipment. Consequently they were forced to turn loose about 1,600 head of cattle to take the chance of rustling through the winter on the range. Next Fall, at the annual round-up, only six or seven head of the original herd could be found.

Entertaining a Murderer

It was in the early summer of 1886 that a shabbily dressed, strong, capable young lad drifted in, looking for work. He called himself Gilbert and said he was a good axeman. This was opportunity, for we were sawing logs 5 inches thick to build the house that was to receive Mother and the rest of the family whom we expected early in '87. There was still much to be done so Father gave the boy a job hewing logs. He proved a good worker and Father was satisfied.

Four or five days later as we sat at dinner in our temporary shack a neighbor, Jack Cousins, rode in. He whispered something to Gilbert and we had no reason to suspect then that it was a warning that the Mounted Police were after him.

Mosquitoes were bad that evening and we had lit smudges to keep them off the horses near the shack. Suddenly Gilbert leaped on one of the horses and tried to escape. It threw him and he returned to the shack mumbling incoherently. He was noticeably restless all evening, at times thumbing over the pages of the Family Bible. He said nothing and we asked no questions.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by a loud knocking. "Who's there?" asked Father. A voice replied that they were from the Indian School; they had a sick horse. (Father was a Veterinary Surgeon.) My oldest brother, being in the lower bunk, opened the door and was surprised to have three guns thrust into his face. There stood three Mounties. "It's not you we want," they apologized, "it's a man working here."

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Gilbert had sprung from his bunk and was hastily drawing on his clothes. "We'll wait on you now," said Chief of Police Ingram, as they handcuffed him. "There is \$500 on this man's head, dead or alive, for murder," he explained to Father. The police had already ridden 85 miles from Fort Macleod that night, so borrowed a buckboard and team to convey their prisoner to Calgary.

We learned that Gilbert, just sixteen, had murdered an old man in Wisconsin for a watch and five dollars, had fled from U.S.A., stolen horses in Winnipeg and been arrested in Calgary for the latter crime, escaping from the Barracks by leaping into the Bow River in full flood and evading police bullets by swimming under water. He had reached Cousins' ranch, where he traded his shoes and a buckskin shirt which bore the fatal bullet hole. Police had been detained by washed-out roads and bridges for several days before they finally captured the boy. We never learned his final sentence, but heard he had been sent back to Wisconsin to be tried for murder.

Without the help of any more murderers the spring of 1887 found our 8-room house ready for occupancy and it was a happy reunion when Mother arrived with the rest of the family to begin a new life at "The Grotto". Our first Christmas together was a joyful one, so different from the one three years before when we were all desperately homesick, more so since few of the settlers had made any pretence of observing the festivity. We did our best

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EARLY DAYS

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by stirring together what we called our "plum pudding" and cooking an especially good dinner. Our main beverage those first months was an unpalatable concoction of tea and coffee mixed, necessitated by caddies breaking open on our trip from England, and the contents becoming thoroughly mixed. In time we came rather to enjoy it.

The Christmas remembrances that first year, after a 22-mile trip to Calgary for our mail, were certainly appreciated and a letter from England brought the news that Mr. Stork had just dropped the thirteenth baby at our home.

How happy we were, then, three years later to have Mother and the girls to cook all the good things that go with Christmas. We boys brought in a large spruce from the nearby woods and although we had few of the ornaments that adorn trees today, there has never been one since that meant more to us than our first Christmas tree in Canada.

The day was bright and beautiful and after breakfast and the excitement of opening our gifts some of us rode over the river to the '76 Ranch with a warning from Mother to be back at one o'clock. That Christmas we forded the river instead of crossing it on ice as was usual at that time of year. Dinner was just ready when we reached the ranch, and our host insisted we join him. Our own was ready to serve by the time we returned to The Grotto so we fared well that day.

What a jolly meal it proved. Fifteen of ourselves and some of the bachelors from neighboring farms made us a party of twenty-four. Incidentally, this dinner marked the only occasion that circumstances permitted our entire family to be together at one time.

When the feast was over we had charades and games, singing and dancing. Mother played the piano and with a violin we were not at a loss for music. It was a happy Christmas, typical of many that we enjoyed later at the old Grotto in those early days.

Local Feud With Indians

Sometimes the white settlers had trouble with the Indians in their own communities. This happened in Davisburg when, in one day, three shacks were boldly entered by red men and robbed of their contents. The authorities seemed to pay little attention so Bill Thompson, one of the victims, took it upon himself to intervene. Returning from Calgary one night he found his shack robbed and Indian travois tracks in evidence. Leaping to his horse, and borrowing a revolver en route, he followed the tracks across the Highwood River, on down the Bow and finally just above the old Tucker Peach place came upon Indians encamped for the night. (Tucker Peach was later murdered.)

Entering the tepee he found three bucks and three squaws and beside them he recognized his possessions and those of other settlers he knew. He calmly picked out his own things but each time one of the bucks snatched them back. This aroused Thompson, a quick-tempered Englishman. He jumped forward and fired, shooting the Indian through the kneecap. The others scurried from the tepee and the two bucks

began to fire at Thompson from the long grass. He returned the shots, but finding his ammunition growing low he took after one of the Indians, on foot, chasing him round and round a willow tree. The buck proved the faster, so Thompson suddenly reversed his position and shot him through the lungs. There was no sign of the others. Thompson picked up his belongings and rode off.

Tucker Peach, who had heard shots, hastened to see what was taking place. As they rode back to Peach's place, the third Indian suddenly galloped up from behind and fired a parting shot, which wounded Tucker Peach. Thompson retaliated with his last bullet but no more harm was done.

He then rode to The Grotto, told Father the story and asked his advice. Father advised him to give himself up to the Calgary police immediately. He did so and the R.C.M.P. began investigations at the Blackfoot Crossing. The Indian who had been shot through the lungs died, the second had his leg in splints, while the third was taken to Calgary Barracks where he and Thompson were detained for trial. A month later the case was tried by Colonel Herchimer and General Strange, with Bill Livingston acting as interpreter. After a lengthy session, Thompson was acquitted and the Indian was sentenced to 60 days' hard labor.

(To Be Continued)

Annual Meeting Calgary Exhibition and Stampede

THE Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Ltd. enjoyed another successful year in 1952. The report of the Directors and Manager to the 67th annual meeting of shareholders, held in the Stampede Corral indicated the week-long fine weather not only enabled all time attendance records for the week at 433,140 but also four individual daily attendance records to be broken. For the year ended September 30th, there was a gross revenue of \$639,455.08, and the Company had a surplus of \$257,261.33. However, of this \$195,856.22 was spent in rebuilding the pari mutuel plant and other improvements to the Exhibition grounds.

Expenses for the year were \$382,193.75, roughly \$30,000.00 higher than in 1951, revenues were up \$28,000.00. Indebtedness by bonds on the Stampede Corral had been reduced to \$340,000.00 against

the original cost of \$1,389,974.93. The balance for 1952 of \$56,083.44 was allocated against the remaining debt and for capital improvements.

Plans for 1953 include further paving, improvements of entrance gates to minimize congestion, improved sanitary facilities for the grandstand enclosure, reroofing the livestock pavilion and expansion of space for commercial, industrial and agricultural exhibits.

No change was made in Directors, those elected being D. E. Black, M. L. Brown, W. A. Crawford-Frost, C. C. Cross, R. J. Dinning, M. Dutton, Geo. Edworthy, H. G. Love, F. C. Manning, J. Angus McKinnon, J. W. Moyer, I. V. Parslow, M. M. Porter, P. J. Rock and Howard P. Wright. Following the annual meeting, the Directors re-elected Geo. Edworthy as President, W. A. Crawford-Frost and R. J. Dinning as Vice-Presidents. The Directors named Mr. D. E. Black an honorary Life Director. The vacancy left on the Board was filled by Jack Grogan of Calgary.

Two widely known Stampede officials have been seriously ill. But George Edworthy, President of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, and Vic Stuckey, of Stettler, President of the Central Alberta Rodeo Circuit and a Vice-President of the Stampede Managers' Association, are both reported making good progress. Back on your feet, boys! . . . Don't be thrown by a hospital cot.

The Edmonton rodeo, only indoor show of the Western Stampedes, will be held June 15th to 20th, 1953, according to Herman Linder, Manager.

Yule to Select Herefords

Directors of the Alberta Hereford Breeders' Association, meeting in Calgary prior to the Cattle Breeders' Meeting, settled a contentious issue, by engaging Mr. J. C. Yule, livestock authority, as selector for the Hereford Breed for all contributor sales to be held in Alberta during 1953. Mr. Yule, who selected Herefords for the Calgary Fall Sale, intends to visit as many herds as possible prior to the Calgary Bull Sale, to make the selection of Bulls before the animals are shipped for the sale in March.

Warren Smith of Olds was named to replace the late Mr. E. A. Price as one of the six Hereford Directors of the Alberta Cattle Breeders' Association, and Victor Watson to replace Mr. Price as Vice-President of the Cattle Breeders.

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