

A Walk to Remember...

Dear Diary Part 1

History shouldn't be all about dates and facts and figures. It should be a feeling, a passion, a pride... so join us now as we reflect on these. The excerpts you will hear are a composite of many lives combined, each with their own story to tell – presented to give a sense of what life was like – with a few facts and figures thrown in for good measure.

Dear Diary: Well it's the spring of 1882 and I believe the good Lord is trying to tell me something. I've been a miller for many years here in Pilot Mound, Manitoba and it's been three years since my initial tragedy when I lost my hand at the wrist in that milling accident. My neighbors tried to patch me up as best they could without adequate advanced medical attention available but despite their best efforts they were forced to remove most of my arm to save my life. I persevered and managed the mill as best I could but now it has burned down. Perhaps it's time to move on and try something else. Friends are telling me of opportunities opening up to the west.

Dear Diary: 27th of May 1882... we made it! What a trek. The train as far as Deloraine, and then that long trek with the oxen and wagons of our supplies to this spot. It's been a long journey, we are all weary but excited for what our future will hold. Tonight we'll set up camp here, the six of us, count our blessings, think of our families back home. Tomorrow we'll journey up to the Moose Mountain area and check it out before deciding but I think this area could become a new beginning for my family when I can bring them out to join me. I sure miss them.

Dear Diary: Well Mr. Atkinson stayed in the Moose Mountain area but the rest of us are back. Funny how it worked out. While we were away those 10 days on the trail exploring, those other gents John and Richard Carnduff arrived and staked their claim along the correction land where they figure the train will be passing by next year when it arrives as promised. The rest of us here are going to draw lots for which parcels we homestead on. Once that's done, we'll set to work getting our sod homes built in time for our families' arrival and get out of these tents. A lot of work to do before we depart for winter. It will be worth it to return in the spring. I am so excited for what the future holds.

Dear Diary: A new beginning... well there are bound to be setbacks but we'll persevere. The neighbors have it rough too. I never expected to return in the spring of 1883 to find everything destroyed. Even when I met that other settler on the way back and he warned me that another prairie fire had swept through, I thought to myself, "How bad can it be?" Then I get here and all I see is blackened charred and the smoke in the air. No wonder the area has no trees growing. With the open grassland, periods of drought, storms and winds the fires just sweep through with nothing to stop them. I accomplished a lot I thought... worked on digging a dugout the first day back, then today one of my two oxen I was relying on to break the land for my crop died on the spot. I guess it'll just take a little longer with one ox but I'll get it broke. Challenges just make us work a little harder and make the reward more enjoyable. Right?

Dear Diary: September 1884 and things are starting to take shape. Still no wood around but having learned we could burn those buffalo chips for fuel has made life a little easier on the cold nights. Still no sign of a railroad. I know it'll bring more people and make life a lot easier for selling our crops. Maybe next year. They had promised it would be here by now. I think with the \$110 I got from my crop I'll head back to Pilot Mound and buy some extra supplies like flour, sugar and

tobacco. I'm sure I could sell these staples to the other settlers and make a little extra money. I might even trade some to the Indians in the area for furs and buffalo horns.

Dear Diary: Time flies. It's 1886 and our little community is taking shape. Still no railway but most of us are making the best of it although a few have abandoned their dreams, frustrated with the lack of progress on that front and headed back east. But with each one that leaves, two more seem to arrive. The little general store seems to be doing a good business and now we've got that harness shop in town and blacksmith business going as well. It's great to see more women and children in the community as well. Mr. Connell has become Justice of the Peace for the area, although I think he has designs on being a member of the territorial government in a few years when it's organized. He also just opened up his home to the Northwest Mounted Police who were looking for a headquarters. I think that'll be a long term relationship for our community moving forward.

It's nice to have a little contact from back home on a regular basis now that mail is being delivered once a week from Deloraine. It was good of John Carnduff to agree to run the Post Office until next year when Preston's new wife arrives to take over. There's not any money to be had in running it what with having to stock stamps and money orders but it's one of the things that make us a community and Preston's already opened up his home to hold the church services. Funny how it doesn't seem to matter what denomination arrives in these little towns. Faith is important to get through our challenges and everybody comes together to support whatever congregation there is. There's a Sunday School now too, and rumor has it when Preston's new wife comes next year - she's bringing an organ all the way from Ontario, first by train and then on a wagon from Deloraine. I'll bet with the arrival of the Methodist and Anglicans as well as the Presbyterians, they'll open their home up to three services each Sunday and Mrs. P will play for all of them!

Dear Diary: 1888 and we've built a frame school for the children after having started them in the second storey of that old log granary. It cost \$450 but is worth it and with the lumber merchant now hauling in wood to sell construction has become easier. Would be easier yet if that railway ever came through. Seven years of promising. Guess this is why us farmers are starting to get a reputation for talking about next year country. Oh well, can't complain - our little community is doing well. Preston still treks to Moosomin for store stock on a regular basis. It's got to be a lonely journey. Oh well, he has his white faced pony Schokey to keep him company and protect him from the prairie wolves by snorting and pawing at the ground as they camp on the bald prairie. I'm sure it was a sight when he returned home that one time to be greeted by Indians camped by his place and running out to meet him shouting "Papoose", "Papoose". Luckily the neighbor lady that's been working as a midwife for the women folk arrived in time to help deliver his first child.

Dear Diary: It's 1891 and believe it or not it's finally happening. We were beginning to wonder if we'd ever get a railway but this is the year!! The CPR is going to build right through to Oxbow before the summer is out and even further west next year. Unfortunately, it's put the community in a bit of turmoil. I know our water supply hasn't been great here, but we've made do hauling it in by the barrel on stonebolt with oxen from along the ravine. Now the CPR says they need us to move our town about 2 miles to the east! They need better access to water they say. That's true but we know as well that they want to sell lots to the settlers on their own land. That's a big reason for why we'll have to move as well. Oh well, some of us came from across the country or half way round the world to be here. A move of a couple of miles won't be bad. Hard to believe our little hamlet of Carnduff is only nine years old and has gone through so many changes. I wonder what the next 100 will bring?