

Creek On 'Promised

This is another in a series of articles on the pioneers of Red Deer and district. The articles are being contributed by the Archives Committee as its centennial project.

(The Archives Committee is indebted to Mr. and Mrs. George Fitch of Sylvan Lake for this history of the Michael John Quinn family, written by Alberta Quinn Miller)

MICHAEL JOHN QUINN By ALBERTA QUINN MILLER

When my father, Michael John Quinn, first set eyes on the particular area of land which was to become his homestead, he felt that he had indeed reached the "Promised Land." In 1899, he arrived in Red Deer by train, hired a saddle horse and rode out in search of a homestead. The spot he claimed was twenty miles southwest of Red Deer and about halfway between Markerville and Sylvan Lake. The clear, fast flowing creek attracted him and by this stream he camped overnight. In later years, he was to say, "I found good land in Alberta, land with water on it."

Michael John Quinn was the fourth of six sons of Martin James Quinn and his wife, Sara Jane, who migrated to Nova Scotia in the mid 1800s from County Galway, Ireland. The six boys and one daughter were born in Halifax. The boys attended the Christian Brothers School and then became seafaring men, all except Martin James Quinn, the oldest son and his father's namesake. He went inland and joined the Northwest Mounted Police and later the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Force. He was stationed at Fort Macleod.

Michael John after a few years at sea decided in favor of the land and toured the United States. In Iowa, he met and married Lucinda McAnely in the year 1890. She had descend-

ed from Irish forebears who came to the United States in 1790 from Antrim County, North Ireland. She was born in Iowa on April 13, 1868.

This young couple homesteaded in Butte, Nebraska, where Martin Emmet, Eugene Floyd and Clyola Fay were born. During their years in Nebraska the family received letters from Martin James in Alberta. He wrote temptingly of rich soil on free land. So it was that Michael John came to Alberta to see for himself. More than pleased with what he found, he returned to Nebraska to sell out and bring his family to Alberta in the spring of 1900.

There were several Fitch families, related, and the Sigurdson families living in the vicinity and in those early days all helped each other in neighborhood fashion. In a building "bee", a log house went up by the stream on the Quinn place, later a barn and other buildings. Abundant wild hay was put up for stock, and wild berries, the blue berry, cranberry and the Saskatoon canned for winter. Wild game was plentiful; prairie chickens, ducks, geese, and there were deer and moose.

In November of that year, 1900, I, Alberta, was born in the log house on the homestead. A few years later, father built a frame house with a wide veranda and painted the house yellow. The house stood on a gentle slope facing the Rocky Mountains to the west. About this time, Charles Quinn, a brother of father's, left the seas and came to Alberta with his family. He homesteaded on land adjoining ours near the cranberry marsh. But this turned out to be but a temporary venture for Uncle Charles who soon returned to Halifax and the sea. A family by the name of Hoggeboom from Los Angeles then occupied this homestead for a time, then when they moved back to the

United States, the Arthur Moore family bought the place.

Since there was no school in our district, my brother Emmet for part of a year boarded with the Icelandic poet, Stephen G. Stephanson and his family and attended the Holsa School near Markerville.

It was not long until father, the men of the Fitch families and some of the other neighbors organized and built Centerville School which was located about three miles from our place toward Sylvan Lake. Emmet then attended this school, along with Eugene, the Fitch children and the Sigurdson children. Ethel Drennan was one of Centerville's first teachers and she was much beloved by pupils and parents.

This little grey frame school house with its wall-bracket kerosene lamps became a community meeting house where in church, Sunday school and socials were held. We loved the life in the country. There were picnics in summer at Yankee Flats and at Sylvan Lake. There were no buildings at the lake then except those on the Petro farm beyond the lakeside grove of trees. The woodland was fresh, green and unmarred.

The family trips into Red Deer were another joy. Along the dirt roads we drove, sometimes in a wagon, or democrat or buggy, and in winter we went by sleigh with sleigh bells jingling all the way. Father entertained us with stories of how he had forded the Red Deer river before the bridge was built. He told us that one spring the river was so high that horses and wagon were almost swept downstream but his strong greys breasted the current and swam to shore with wagon and all, though groceries were floating in the water in the wagon box.

This fording of the river was before my time. I remember the grove we would drive around,

and there would be the new bridge. To the naive eyes of us children it might have been London Bridge crossing the Thames. And the glimpse of Red Deer lying across the river was as wondrously fair as London Town. When we went into the dry goods store, Brumpton and Gaetz, we were dazzled by the merchandise and we recklessly spent our carefully hoarded five cent pieces. The family often stayed two nights at a hotel and returned to the farm the third day, as twenty miles by team was an all day journey.

Another source of pleasure in our childhood was listening to the adventure tales of Uncle Martin, the Mountie, after he and his wife, Adella, and their small son, Edward came to live with us while he was building a house on his homestead which was a mile down the road from our place toward Markerville. He had resigned from the police force which he had served from 1883 until he went to the Boer War in 1898. He had been with those who brought in the rebel, Louis Riel, Through the nineties, Uncle Martin had been champion snowshoer of the Yukon. Then he went to Africa with Lord Strathcona's Horse with a contingent of Canadian Mounted Police. At the war's conclusion, Uncle Martin was honored in England by Queen Victoria along with other Canadian men for their outstanding service in the war. Upon his return to Halifax he was married and lived there until he decided to come back to Alberta and take up a homestead. After Uncle Martin, Aunt Adella and Edward were living on their own place, a second son, Clarence, was born there.

Our wonderful life on the homestead was destined to come soon to an end. The family knew its first tragedy in the death of

Land' Appealed To Michael Quinn

Clyola Fay in December, 1901. Then our mother, Lucinda, died suddenly on July 9, 1904. At first the two graves were made on the homestead, then when the new cemetery opened in Red Deer, the bodies were interred there.

Father sold the farm and moved to Red Deer about 1905. Our homestead subsequently became the farm home of the George Moore family and, as it happened, our yellow, frame house burned to the ground before they had a chance to move into it.

In Red Deer, father acquired the Great West Hotel and two residences in the same block with the hotel. There was also a livery stable and some other property behind the hotel. The houses were rented and father ran the hotel and a livery stable. The hotel was a box-like building of two storeys, painted white and with a broad veranda across the front. The dining room windows looked out on a grove of poplar trees which shaded a swimming hole where the boys went swimming.

We had an excellent cook in the hotel. Our family had its meals at our own table in the dining room. What meals there were with no thought of mounting calories to inhibit us! For breakfast, there would always be oatmeal porridge, then ham, bacon, eggs, toast, hot cakes and stewed fruit. But we could never partake of any other food but porridge at breakfast be-

cause of father's insistence that we eat oatmeal first. After that there was neither hunger nor room for anything else. But we made up for this at other meals, as the menu offered steaks, roasts, fish, vegetables, and a great variety of pies all made of dried fruit, Emmet and I have never forgotten the lavish and delicious food in the Great West Hotel.

I began my school career in an old photograph studio across a grassy, vacant square from our hotel. The school room ceiling was a slanting, glass sky light and I can still remember how its glare pained our eyes when we tried to focus on our primers as we laboriously pounded out our abc's. A Miss Wallace was my first grade teacher.

Emmet and Eugene attended the old brick school which was both elementary and high school. When the new elementary school was finished, we all attended there and then the old brick school became solely the high school.

The first automobiles appeared in Red Deer, gleaming red and brassy. But they never got very far before their proud owners had to appeal for help from the Quinn livery stable and then the grandeur of the new motor cars was reduced to shame as horses supplied the locomotion that the cars suddenly lacked.

Well, do I remember the Purdey Furniture Store fire after a Christmas program one night at the Presbyterian church which

was just across the street from the store. Flames soared in the wind lighting the whole sky. There was the acrid smell of burning glue and varnish. There was shattered plate glass scattered on sidewalk and street for days afterwards.

Once at a church picnic held in a grove across the Red Deer River, out of the woods came a solitary Indian clad in buckskin. He glided to a picnic table, took up a loaf of bread and began eating it. Then he lifted a pitcher of cold tea and drank it all right from the lip of the pitcher. Without a word he disappeared into the forest leaving the picnickers completely silenced in astonishment.

Often on celebration days, our hotel lobby was filled with Indian women sitting cross-legged on the floor, paposes on their backs and bright beaded work spread out for sale at their feet. While living in the hotel, I was often derided by my school chums because the Great West Hotel had no saloon as did the other hotels in town. I recall tearfully begging father to add a saloon to our hotel, but to no avail. So our hotel never became socially elite to rank among the other hotels.

We children sometimes played in the brickyard. In winter we gloried in the colorful ice carnivals, and most evenings we clattered over board sidewalks, depot-bound, to see the grain roaring in from Calgary.

But as our life on the home-

stead had been brought to a close, so was our life in the hotel to come to an end. The panic of 1906-1908 was sweeping the North American continent. Our boarders left. The hotel was closed. We moved into the now vacant corner house. While living here, father was married to Rose Koshman who had come to Red Deer from the Edmonton locality. Father, trying to bring some greener; into our lives such as we had on the farm, transplanted young evergreens from the bank of the Red Deer River and bordered our yard with these small trees. But we were never to see these trees grow tall, because in the fall of 1908 we moved to British Columbia. The Red Deer property was disposed of and later the CPR laid tracks on the land where the livery barn had stood.

In 1913, we left British Columbia and moved to Spokane, Washington. To my father's second marriage were born a daughter, Elsie, and two sons, Ernest and Thomas. After a long life of 92 years, Michael John Quinn died in Spokane in 1958. Brother Eugene had long ago lost his life at the age of 23 in 1919 in an accident in the Pacific northwest coastal region. Emmet Quinn from the time he returned from service in the First World War was a wheat rancher in Montana and is now retired and lives near Havre.

Uncle Martin sold his homestead soon after we moved from

the farm in Alberta. He lived with his family in Calgary until he died in 1916. We last heard of his son, Edward, living in the Peace River country and of Clarence living in the Turner Valley area. A daughter whom we never knew was born to Uncle Martin and Aunt Adella in Calgary.

For years, my home has been in suburban Seattle and though the world has greatly changed since my childhood, I still hold close in treasured memory the newness, the freshness and the adventure of pioneer days in Alberta in the early 1900s.