

The Martin Hansen Story

by

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Martin Hansen was born into a large farming family in Denmark on February 13, 1888, which he always jokingly referred to as "Valentine Monday." He was a big strong boy and later a big strong man who never tired, he tells us, until he was wounded.

By the age of 16 he was ready to become foreman of a neighbor's farm. At 17 years of age he joined the Danish Royal Guards, for 18 month military duty, guarding the Danish Royal Family at Amalienborg Palace and their summer quarters.

In 1911, at the age of 23, he left Denmark for the United States. He landed at New York, bought a six-shooter in Chicago (he felt everyone had to have a six-shooter) and took the train for Hope, North Dakota. There he worked on several farms until he heard of a place called Athabaska, Alberta, where you could homestead land for next to nothing. He crossed the border into Canada on July 1, 1913, and arrived in Athabasca July 3, after an eventful trip on the newly completed railway. At one point, he tells us, "A train was lying flat on its side in the muskeg and the passengers had to walk from one train to another around this wreck!"

He hadn't been in Athabasca long when the livery stable, located south of the railway station, burned, taking with it his trunk and his overcoat.

He filed on NW 8 68 21 W4, north and east of what is now Danny Jewell's place, on July 14, 1913, and set to work to prove up on it. He rafted his stove and lumber down the river to a spot close to his new homestead and, in the words of Lucien Sale, "He strapped the stove on his back and climbed the river bank." Subsequently he carried up all the lumber in and on the raft and finished his first shack.

One of his neighbors was Patrick O'Connor who had homesteaded on the NE quarter of 32 68 21 W4 on the 21st of August, 1912. They became fast friends and visited back and forth until Pat's death.

Martin Hansen joined the 65th Battalion in Saskatoon in March, 1915. Later he transferred to the 10th Battalion. He was wounded at Silobek Lake in France on June 14, 1915, taking shrapnel through the right lung. Discharged from the army on May 1, 1917, Corporal Martin Hansen received fifty dollars.

He took a job as telephone operator in Athabasca on April 1, 1917. He married Stephanie Sale on July third that year, and together they raised a family of three girls: Marie, who later married John Desnoyers; Marguerite, who later married Jim Wood; and Agnes who later married Gilles Brunet. Today he has seven living grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Having lost his first homestead during the war, he

filed on a second homestead NE 8 68 21 W4 on July 15, 1918, and they went farming again. The winter of 1919-20 was one to remember. Rayner Whiteley recalls that, "A heavy snowfall of eight or nine inches came on Thanksgiving night and there was good sledding until late in April of 1920." Martin Hansen made hay on the Gordon place and drove his herd of cattle to it four miles north and east of Athabasca. However, the Soldier Settlement Board was a hard task-master and Martin worked too hard. He fell ill and was taken to hospital. By 1920 he had lost his second homestead.

Bert Perry, Chairman of the School Board, offered him the job of janitor of the Red Brick School. He was hired by the Board and worked there until 1924, when he and his wife just had to go farming again. They bought a quarter section from Eugene Sale, just north-east of Parkhurst School, and farmed it until 1948 when they sold to Joseph Schulte and retired to Vancouver Island. In 1953 they returned to West Jasper Place in Edmonton where Mrs. Hansen died in 1974. Today, June 23, 1982, Martin Hansen is alive and remarkably alert at age 94 in the Veteran's Home, Edmonton. He recalls the day when he crawled onto a stretcher in France and the doctor asked him, "I suppose you think you're going to die?" He answered, "No, I'm going to come back and give them Hell for this," and the doctor answered without much conviction, "I'll bet you will!"