

The Lewis Wood Story

by

James H. Wood

Lewis Hay Irving Wood was born at Arnott Hill, his mother's parent's home in Falkirk, Scotland, on January twenty-third, eighteen hundred and eighty. His father, Colonel Julius John Wood, was a surgeon in the British Army in India at the time and Lewis spent his childhood in India. Later he was sent to a boy's school in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he learned to speak fluent French. He finished his formal education in Edinburgh, Scotland, at a technical college where he took pattern-making, a wood-working apprenticeship designed to fit him for making wooden patterns for the huge iron works of Scotland.

In 1904 he threw it all up and came to Canada. His first two years in Canada are somewhat obscure but we do know that he worked on a farm in southern Alberta where the housewife had to teach him to swing an axe. She must have done a good job because he became an excellent woodsman. His axe and saws were never dull. He also learned to drive horses while working on the Grand Trunk Railway west of Edmonton, near Edson.

Lewis Wood met Herbert Hayes in Edmonton in the fall of 1905 and Bert invited him to spend the winter with him on his new homestead--in a tent! Dad accepted and walked one hundred miles up the old trail. He climbed a tree and spotted Bert's tent.

Lewis Wood filed on SW 6 66 22 W4 on the fourth of April, 1906. He built a house and took up residence there by October, 1907.

He returned to Scotland for a short visit between 1909 and 1910. On the ocean liner returning to Canada he met a Miss Letitia Rice of Belfast, Ireland. She had lost her mother when her younger sister was born. Her father, Captain of a sea-going ship, was lost at sea when she was fourteen. Now at the age of twenty-five, she was on her way to take a position as governess in the city of Quebec.

On September 6, 1912, Lewis Wood married Letitia Rice in Westminster Church manse in Edmonton. Their honeymoon was spent travelling by democrat over the old Athabasca Trail. Mother stayed with Mrs. Jim Minns while Dad made his shack larger and tidied it up for her. One day she walked over to see how he was coming along and found him asleep on the job!

By 1913 Dad was building a second barn of tamarac logs which he hauled out of the muskeg with a team of oxen. George Hall had filed on the quarter to the west, SE 1 66 23 W4, on the thirty-first of May, 1909. He sold it to Letitia Wood and Lewis had more land to clear.

Meanwhile, he had to make a living. He freighted to Wabasca, Lesser Slave Lake and Pelican in the wintertime and raised sheep, cattle and hogs. We always had a large potato patch and a large garden. Wild fruit was plentiful, and, if you didn't mind working you could find plenty to eat. In those

early days people ate rabbits until the rabbits started dying of tularemia. Then they turned to ruffed grouse and pintailed grouse or prairie chicken as we called them. After the railroad came in 1913 we shipped grain.

Julius was their oldest child born on July 24, 1913. Isabel was next on December 4, 1914. Jim followed on April 30, 1916. We three were born in the little log house and were delivered by mid-wife. I know that Mrs. George Lewis put on my first diaper! Bill was born on October 23, 1919 in the new hospital in Athabasca.

In 1927 Lewis Wood bought a lumber mill and hauled it home one cold winter's night when you could hear the sleigh runners squealing for over a mile. He and Julius and Tex Palmer set it up on George Hall's old place in the valley of the Muskeg Creek towards Bill Minn^o's place. They sawed out the lumber there. Bryce and Billy Minns put their John Deere on the belt for a while because our Fordson was a bit light for the job. It seemed the Minns people were always around. They threshed for us, sawed firewood for us and even chopped grain for us at times. Dad had known them since the homestead days along with Bert Wagenitz, Jim Minns, St. Marie, Fred Pollitt, Uncle Scott Willey, Scottie and Auld Willey and, of course, Bert Hayes.

When Dad died in 1967 in his eighty-eighth year, all that could be cleared on his half-section had been cleared. Of course Julius and Mom helped him and Bill cleared the last

ten or fifteen acres.

Mom died in her eighty-eight year in 1973. They are buried beside the other South Athabasca pioneers in St. Alban's graveyard, South Athabasca.