

On the shores of Moose Lake

By Dorothy M. Bogle

It seems as if it were kismet that my parents' paths should cross when they immigrated to Canada from England in the early 1890s.

My father was a teacher and found employment at a school in Pelly, in southern Saskatchewan and later taught at a one-room school for Metis and Indian children at a settlement called The Pas in what was then the Northwest Territories.

My mother came to Canada with her two sisters, who went on to California. She became 'mother's help' for the Rev. Pritchard and his wife at Grand Rapids, a Metis and Cree settlement on the North Saskatchewan River.

When tall, dark-headed, 26-year old Thomas Henry Peacock Lamb, made a voyage to Grand Rapids he visited the Pritchards and met the petite, auburn-headed 18-year-old Caroline Alice Marks. I imagine it was love at first sight for a few months later, on June 17, 1896, Rev. Pritchard married them in a small log church at Grand Rapids.

They lived in The Pas for a few years. Then my father, an adventurous Yorkshireman, decided to open a fur-trading post at Moose Lake, which was 50 miles from The Pas by dogteam, or about 75 miles by canoe.

He travelled with two Cree men to Prince Albert, which took about 10 days by canoe against the strong current. When he arrived he bought lumber and built a scow. Then he purchased barrels of flour, tubs of lard, a ring of cheese wrapped in cheese-cloth, a large chest of loose tea, bolts of print, needles, spools of thread, skeins of floss in a variety of colors, rubbers, steel traps, and other items for bartering. When the scow was loaded, my father and the Cree men rowed it down

the river to The Pas, which took about four days travelling downstream.

When my parents settled at Rat Creek, a mile or so from the Cree reservation at Moose Lake, in 1901, it was a year of high water. A hayfield between the Saskatchewan River and Rat Creek was flooded and the water was deep enough to allow the passage of the large, flat-bottom scow with square ends. It was beached at Rat Creek and a tent was pitched in a clearing above the creek.

My parents lived in the tent while the scow was dismantled and a house built with the lumber from it. Cree men from the reservation helped to build the house and then a store. I remember my mother telling about unpacking a trunk on their arrival and putting the contents on the grass to air. Chief Beaver, a tall Cree Indian, saw her large hat with flowers and ribbon trim, on the grass and put it on his head. My mother was afraid of offending him if she asked him to take it off; he wore it until he left to return to the reserve.

Moosoom (meaning grandfather in Cree) came to the fur trading post with a few muskrat pelts to barter, but more often to visit the white family. He was a short, small man, with a wrinkled face and shaggy hair streaked with grey. His bandy legs gave him an odd appearance. He wore moose-hide moccasins and knee length stockings, the cuffs of his pants tucked into them. He was a widower and had no children, so he adopted the white children at the fur-trading post (eventually 11 children) as his family.

After a while, Moosoom came to do chores for my parents which was a help for Mother when my father was away from home. In winter, he filled the barrel in the kitchen with snow which was used for drinking and washing clothes. He chopped wood for the two stoves in the house and the one that heated the store. My father paid him with pipe tobacco and a few groceries, while Mother gave him something to eat at mid-day and before he left for the reserve about dark.

When the boys were old enough to use a gun, Moosoom taught them to shoot by aiming their guns not directly at a duck or goose, but slightly ahead of the bird. Moosoom taught them to trap and took them with him to his rabbit snares in the forest and showed them how to set a snare with twine or wire.

There were times when darkness fell that my parents would have liked to have seen the lighted window of a neighbor, especially Mother, when my father was away and she was alone with the children. My father sold his furs to the Hudson's Bay Company at Cedar Lake, 40 miles distant (later to the Hudson's Bay Company in The Pas). When he was gone moth-



The Lamb family in 1914 with Clifford Mitchell, back row far right, and left, the Lamb governess, Miss Cooks.

er had to look after the children and barter with the Cree. Even in cold weather, Moosoom would turn up to help.

When my father made a business trip to Prince Albert, and later to Winnipeg, he brought books for Mother. One summer he brought an organ by scow from Prince Albert, also a canary.

The main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway from Montreal to Vancouver, was begun in 1881 and was completed in 1885. Later, a train ran from Winnipeg to Mafeking. My father and Jules Provo, a Belgian who worked for him, travelled with a team of horses and a sleigh over frozen swamps and lakes to Mafeking.

My father would then board the train to Winnipeg to buy stock for the fur-trading post and Jules took care of the horses. These trips were a great hardship for the men and the horses. When it was too cold to ride on the sleigh, the men walked with horse blankets over their heads and shoulders to keep them warm. Clifford Tennant Mitchell (my father called him C.T.), an adventurous, well-travelled, educated American from Philadelphia, came to Moose Lake to teach at a small log school on the reserve where years before a Metis with a bit of education had taught. He stayed with my parents and the boys began their first steps towards an education.

When my parents moved to Moose Lake and built a house and store on the lake shore, Mitchell built a cottage for himself close by. By this time he was employed by the Manitoba government as game warden and later became a fire ranger. He was at Moose Lake for 20 years when the government transferred him to Lac du Bonnet, a town about 60 miles from Winnipeg.

We had a governess who taught us for a few years in the new house at Moose Lake, then she taught at the one-room school the government built to take the place of the old log school on the reserve. Miss Cooks was an English lady in her mid-thirties, about five feet tall. Moosoom was always respectful, and I think he liked her well enough, but he did not like her always wanting to go canoeing when he took the children with him.

One day Miss Cooks canoed with us to a reef in the west end of the lake, which we called Gull Reef because there were a lot of gull eggs there. Instead of helping, Miss Cooks walked about in the sunshine and tramped on the eggs. Moosoom was angry. He



The Moose Lake post as it looked in 1912, from left to right, the barn, the store, and the Lamb home. On the far right is the cottage built by Mr. Mitchell.

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glanced at her with blinking eyes, but the old man did not ask us to tell her not to step on the gull eggs.

Many changes have taken place at Moose Lake since my parents lived there. A house with two bathrooms, six bedrooms, and electricity, is on the site where their home was; the school where Miss Cooks taught has long gone, and there's a large school which the Indian and Metis children attend.

In my parent's time, there were about 300 Cree on the Moose Lake reserve, now there are more than 1000.

The Indians no longer carry water from the lake for drinking and washing clothes. They go to a pump installed on the reserve and live in comfortable, though small, frame houses built by the government. The ancient log huts the Cree once lived in have vanished.

When my parents retired and left Moose Lake, my second eldest brother took over the fur-trading post. His daughter and her husband, Jock McAree now own it.

They are semi-retired and live in The Pas, and their eldest son, Greg, looks after 'Lamb's Store'. He lives in the house which is on the site where his great-grandparents had their home.

In June, 1987, some members of the family built a cement cairn on the site where our parents settled in 1901. The plaque is inscribed:

In July, 1901, Thomas Henry Peacock Lamb and Caroline Alice Lamb, an English couple, settled on this site and started a fur-trading post. In 1912 they moved two miles to the shores of Moose Lake. They instilled high principles in their 11 children and were friendly and hospitable to all. Mr. Lamb died at Tisdale in 1943 followed by Caroline Alice in 1955. ■