

We live 'back o' beyond', on the wide-open prairie. It's 1905. We managed to build a school for our kids. But we had no bell! Someone on the school board said, "Well, we can order everything else, why not a school bell?" Lo and behold, we found one in the Eaton's catalog.



Butterfield School

I'm Evelyn Edwards, first teacher at Butterfield school, a few miles south of Pierson. Our School District was created last year and, here we are, on a cool day in October, listening to the ring of our new bell! It had to come from Toronto. But apparently a new Eaton's just opened in Winnipeg - so we won't wait so long for orders in the future!

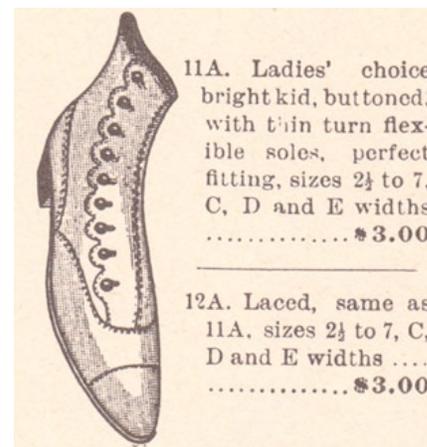
We've been able to order everything from fashion to furnishings through the Eaton's Catalogue – ever since it first came out in 1884, just when this part of the province was filling up with settlers. In those early years the catalogue offered mostly clothing, but eventually we could order everything from books to parlor sofas to farm tools. Why, my collection of Dickens and Kipling came from that catalogue. You can even order a ready-to-assemble house!

My favorite section of the catalogue is where jams, dried fruits and biscuits are featured. Makes my mouth water! Oh, and French cashmere dress material, silk blouses with leg o' mutton sleeves, and straw hats trimmed with ostrich plumes are simply breath-taking! A man's blue serge suit is \$3.00, but a pair of

lady's leather lace up ankle boots costs a whole \$4.00! I'll have to save up for those!

The local merchants, though, aren't too happy about the Mail Order Catalogue – too much competition they say. Bleeds money out of the community! In the early days, Eaton's offered things local merchants couldn't bring in. Eventually, Eaton's opened catalogue order offices right inside local businesses, so that we had to walk in and see what storekeepers had. But still ... local merchants couldn't compete for variety, or price.

Way out in the country, Eaton's allows us to do our research at home! And, why shouldn't we enjoy the fruits of our labour? We came from Ontario, prepared to endure hard work and face lean years, but the goal was a better life. Being able to purchase fashionable things symbolizes that better life. Who knows what tomorrow will bring. We know it's better for us to have thriving business close by. So, I get the basics nearby and the fancy things from Eaton's.



From the 1901 catalogue.

Well, recess is over! It's time to bring in the children. Ringing this bell is so much fun!

Betty Sawatzky and David Neufeld adapted 'Even the Bell' from a story written for Vantage Points 4.