

Living off the Land

My neighbours arrived from the east, Ontario mostly, to settle around Minto. Me? I went to BC first. Thought I'd try out the coast and mountains. When I arrive here, with all my fingers and toes I might add, it was from the west. I'm James (Jimmy) Jock. I'm, famously, the first resident of Minto cemetery,



The BC gold rush was over when I got there. I was more interested in living off the land anyway. But the weather got to me. So, when I met some friendly travelers heading to Manitoba, I told them I'd catch up and began sorting my affairs.

The sky was clear on the trail, but something felt amiss. No one I met, had seen my group of travelers. Oh well. I had my gun, my horse and I knew the way. What I didn't calculate was how quietly my horse could be untied and stolen while I slept. I awoke, completely alone. What now? I still had my gun, and my determination. So I walked, mostly by night, shooting game, crossing Kicking Horse pass and down the Bow River. I was clearly the intruder here, and a vulnerable one at that.

What was the most beautiful sight along the way? The flat, open prairie! Odd, perhaps, being from Scotland. But, I had no time to linger. I still had several weeks of walking and surviving to do, until finally arriving on the Souris river. It was 1886. All the good farm land was taken. No matter. I secured a quarter section on the north side of the valley. Built a modest home on the side of a broad ravine. Settled in to live my life.

Not every citizen is driven to succeed in the same way. I could chop wood, hunt and gather food, and trap for cash. If I needed company, or anything extra, I worked for neighbours, the Lisk Campbells. Lisk was a hunter too, and a businessman. He ran the ferry. When Riverside Bridge was built, he didn't pout for a second. He built a store, dance hall and baseball diamond. Intriguing for sure, but for me, I didn't need that much. Every day was a success! Especially when I survived with all my digits! Okay, okay. I'll tell you the story. The one that really made me famous around here.



Riverside Bridge

It was a cold winter. Brilliant sun dogs. Very deep snow. Hunting was tough, so I went farther and sat longer. I returned one day with a pheasant, and, a few frozen toes. I had violated the first rule of being alone. Don't hurt yourself! I warmed, massaged and restored feeling in all digits, except one big toe. And gangrene began setting in. Sheesh! No doctor nearby. So, I sharpened the axe, placed my foot securely on the chopping block and took a quick, well-aimed swing.

Yup. Don't think too long on it. You'll survive, a little bit smarter. I sure did.

See ya' later!

David Neufeld adapted "Jimmy Jock" from a story written for Vantage Points 5