

The Harvest Excursion—Definitely Not a Vacation

Special trains brought men to help with the prairie harvest.
Quite a few of them stayed and put down roots.

A look through the family stories in "Deloraine Scans a Century" will uncover a number of stories that go something like this:

"Robert Payne came to Boissevain with his elder brother James, with a harvest excursion in the fall of 1897. In the spring of 1900 they began to farm in partnership, and after two years Robert bought his own farm and married Lulu May Oke of Deloraine in Waskada."

After the initial rush of homesteaders had cooled off, and most of the free homesteads were taken, there was another way to get established on the prairies. The Harvest Excursions introduced many young men to prairie life, and many of them found a way to stay and settle down.

Harvesting is a time-sensitive operation, and labor intensive as well. When the time came to get that good crop off the field there were simply not enough men around to do the job. The railway companies met that need with Harvest Excursions.

In about 1900, Verner Shaw came west at the age of seventeen on an excursion train. He worked as a "hired man" on farms until he could save enough to buy an outfit of horses and machinery to "start up on his own" on rented land.

The system worked

well - especially in good years, like 1913, when crops averaged from 15 to 30 bushels an acre and \$2.50 was the going rate per day for harvesters.

But there were a few bad years to contend with. In the fall of 1908 a local paper reported that: "Harvest excursion trains ... have flooded the town with workers, and no work, and dead broke. The Town Council Chamber and Flynn's Hall gave many of them shelter, and we have at least 150 hungry men with no work."

"Harvest excursion trains have flooded the town with workers..."

In 1898 weather caused a problem, and the paper reported that "Hardly more than fifty percent of the crop has been threshed by October 20th, and further delays with heavy snow has held up the harvest again. Many of the eastern harvesters have left, and several threshing machines have stopped altogether." So like everything related to agriculture, weather played its hand.

Sometimes the connection was international: Maurice Vanhant-saeme came to Winnipeg from Bel-

HARVEST

EXCURSIONS

From all Stations in Ontario, Return Rates to

| | | |
|---------------|---|---------|
| Estevan | } | \$28.00 |
| Deloraine | | |
| Moosomin | | |
| Binscarth | | |
| Reston | | |
| Regina | } | \$30.00 |
| Moosejaw | | |
| Yorkton | | |
| Calgary | | |
| Prince Albert | } | \$35.00 |
| Edmonton | | |
| | | \$40.00 |

LEAVE ALL POINTS IN THE
VINCE OF ONTARIO, ON

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------|
| AUG. 15, return until | OCT. 18 | OCT. 22 |
| AUG. 22, " " " | SEPT. 5, " " " | NOV. 6 |

Parties ticketing from other points should arrange to arrive at Toronto in time to connect with the 10:15 p.m. train on above dates.

▲ Railway companies advertised rates for Harvest Excursions in ads like this one.

gium in 1927. He came to Deloraine for harvest. The next year he worked for several farmers before his wife, Julia, and three children came to Canada and joined him as farm labor at the Teetaert farm for the summer months. In the fall of 1929 they started farming on their own.

Peter Jackson, was born near London, England, in 1892, and came to Ontario in 1911. After working for the CNR, he came to Manitoba on a harvest excursion in 1924. He did farm work until 1947 when he moved to Deloraine.

Thus, in a variety of ways, the Harvest Excursions played a role in shaping our communities.

Sources:

- Boissevain History Book Committee. *Beckoning Hills Revisited. "Ours is a Goodly Heritage"* Morton - Boissevain 1881 - 1981. Altona. Friesen Printing, 1981.
- Deloraine History Book Committee. *Deloraine Scans a Century 1880 - 1980*: Altona. Friesen Printers, 1980.
- Hartney and District Historical Committee. *A Century of Living - Hartney & District 1882 - 1982*. Steinbach. Derksen Printers, 1982.



► Mr and Mrs Verner Shaw.