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BINSCARTH

About a year before his death, my father, Matthew S. Scarth, gave me a brief story of the establishment of the name of "Binscarth" in Manitoba.

In 1882 two representatives of the Scottish Ontario Land Co.-- Messrs. Allie Bain and W.B. Scarth, were commissioned to investigate the possibility of securing a tract of land suitable for farm settlement in the vicinity of Fort Ellice. They proceeded to Fort Ellice by steam-boat, and during the ensuing trip over the country around Beulah and Birtle, had the good fortune to meet Major C.A. Boulton. Major Boulton spoke in most glowing terms of the "Shell River Country" to the north and west. It should be understood that the term "Shell River" covered a much greater area than the community of that name today. The district was duly investigated, and negotiations made for the purchase of three townships for the Scottish Ontario Land Co. This would include a portion of the present Binscarth-Russell communities. The agreement with the Dominion Government was mainly concerned with the location of settlers on all even-numbered sections in any townships so set aside. The plan to establish some type of colonization project now took shape in the organization of the "Colony Farm", in what is now known as the Woodstock district, with Mr. G.L. Smellie as Manager. It was necessary to set up a Post Office at the farm, and the first idea to use the name "Colony" was not acceptable at Ottawa, as there appeared to be a number of points with similar names. W.B. Scarth had been active in the settlement plans and in getting the Colony Farm started, and the Government adopted Mr. Smellie's suggestion that the new Post Office be named "Binscarth* Farm" ^(See footnote #1) ~~after the~~ after the family home of the Scarths in the Orkney Islands.

The Manitoba & Northwestern Railway reached the site of the present town in the summer of 1886. Father arrived early in the spring

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of that year. It was decided to name the new town site and Post Office "Binscarth", while the Colony Farm P.O. retained the name "Binscarth Farm" until its disposal in the 1890s.

The foregoing may assist to clear up some of the confusion with regard to the naming of the district where all our family grew up, and the community which carries the happiest of memories for all of us.

~~Binscarth- The "Bin" or "Ben" of the original "Binscarth" in the Orkney Islands (refers to an elevation or hill) at the back of the home in Orkney. My great grandfather installed a sort of reservoir on this rise to provide water pressure in the house (a startling innovation in Orkney at that time!). My cousin, Robert Scarth, still operates the farm in Orkney.~~

*deleted with
Bill's permission*

The Binscarth Colony Farm was under the management of Mr. G.L. Smellie, a brother of the late Parker Smellie of Russell. Sons and grandsons of Parker Smellie are, of course, still at Russell, and I have often wondered whether they have not a lot of valuable historical material on the Colony Farm. I expect you may have seen an old photo of Colony Stock Barn, hanging in the Office of the "Binscarth Express & News". It was there when I called on Mr. Cockburn in 1956. I do hope this will be preserved, as it is possibly the only photo of the "Barn" in existence.

Father spoke of the Colony Barn as being a wierd and wonderful structure. One of its main advantages appeared to be its proximity to the steep creek bank at the back. This made cleaning the big barn comparatively simple, as the manure, etc., could just be pushed over the bank and out of the way - a labor saving device which appealed to all. This location, however, proved to have serious disadvantages to the foundations(?) of the building. I

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understand that it settled back to such an extent that it finally collapsed into the creek.

Others of the Binscarth district associated with the Colony Farm in various capacities were-

Jimmy Thompson
Thos. Thompson
Hugh Skeogh
A.W. Jollye
Jack Matheson
Jack Anderson
Joe Smithson
Frank McPherson
Tom Almack
Jack Drought

Most of these were employed as winter help, caring for livestock, etc. The Colony Farm provided them with some experience, some much needed revenue, and a blessed change from their own cooking.

It is more than likely that the families of some of them will have some early records and possibly photos of early buildings at the Colony Farm or in Binscarth

Father helped to exhibit some of the Colony Farm Purebred Shorthorn Cattle at the Winnipeg Exhibition - this must have been in the late 80's. Others in the group were Joe Smithson, Tom Almack, and I believe - Jimmy Thompson. They had some new experiences - travelling and showing stock in those days was somewhat of an adventure. I thought that this might have been the first stock shown from the Binscarth district, but I discovered recently that there was an Agricultural Fair held at Birtle in 1881, and there could have been exhibits from the Binscarth ~~there~~ area there.

Robert Scarth - 1963

In thinking of the history of Binscarth, Manitoba, it is not surprising if we wonder how the town came to be called by this name. As one who carries part of the name, and from whose family it originated, and having had the privilege, in 1959, of visiting the original Binscarth, in Orkney, I take the opportunity of passing on what I know of the story.

The Orkney Islands lie to the north of Scotland - latitude about the same as forty miles north of Churchill, Manitoba, but the Gulf Stream influences the climate so that it is moderate in temperature, but subject to high winds in winter. It is a bit like the Canadian prairie, with hills and valleys and no trees, except where they are planted in a valley where they escape the force of the salt laden winds.

There is one large island called the Mainland, surrounded by several smaller islands. In one of the valleys on the Mainland between two high hills, lies the farm of "Binscarth".

Let us look back in history to find out who lived on these islands. There are records of Stone Age people, of Bronze Age people, then the Vikings, and it is during the Viking Age that we first hear the name Binscarth, about the year 1500. "Bin" is the Norse word for "farm" and "Scarth" is Norse for "valley" or "Cleft in the Hill". So, Put together, we have "The Farm in the Cleft of the Hill", and gradually the people who lived on that farm came to be called after the particular location of the land. This is still customary in many instances in Scotland, even today.

Binscarth, Orkney, is today, a farm of about 1500 acres and a Scarth still lives on the farm. He is Robert, son of my father's brother and has been honored by being appointed the Queen's representative, Lord Lieutenant of the Islands.

I refer you to my brother's account of how the name Binscarth came to Manitoba.

My father, Matthew Scarth, came to Manitoba, in 1886, having spent his first year in Canada in Ottawa. He worked on the Binscarth Farm; for Mr Storey, south of Russell; and was for a time, a member of a survey party working in the District of Whitewood, Saskatchewan, under the direction of Mr Bedford, the man who was later instrumental in establishing the Experimental Farm at Brandon.

In 1888 my father homesteaded the S.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of sec. 6:19:27. I know that a good bit of this land was broken with oxen, and the lumber for his house, which still stands, was hauled from Binscarth with oxen. Some years later the S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of sec. 6 was purchased from Mr Inman and another purchase was made after a few more years, adding the south half of sec. 1 to the farm.

In 1897 he married Wilhelmina Stewart, daughter of Sea Captain William Stewart, with the C.P.R. Steamship line. They had made their home in Liverpool. My parents lived on the farm spending a few winters in Binscarth town just prior to my mother's death in 1927. Father carried on a few more years, then in 1935 he had a sale and rented the farm to Mr Jack Hay.