

Matthew Stevenson Scarth-1865-1958

Born at "Binscarth House", near Finstown, Orkney. His junior schooling was in Finstown and in his early teens he attended the Old High School in Edinburgh.

He sailed for Canada from Greenock (Clyde) -July 2, 1884 on the S.S. "~~Maximilian~~ Waldensian". They reached Quebec on July 11th. His Diary of the trip recounts the very careful navigation necessary through the Strait of Belle Isle to miss the fields of ice and numerous large bergs. He was met by his Uncle, James Stevenson, at Quebec and after a few days visit proceeded to Ottawa and "Langside", a farm and large market garden on the outskirts of the city. This would be his home for two years.

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Unfortunately, he was likely too busy with all the new Canadian experiences to record events after 1886, so any accounts of his activities are based on his own recollection of them as related to family members from time to time.

Matthew came west by C.P.R. in 1886 and his Winnipeg stay was of short duration. Teams and wagons were getting stuck in the notorious Red River mud on Main Street, and the buildings appeared to be of flimsy construction. The general atmosphere of the town seemed to indicate that it was either just recovering from a ^{collapsed} land boom or going into another one. He eventually arrived at Birtle by rail which was as far as the Manitoba & North Western R.R. had reached before it went bankrupt. The C.P.R. took over and steel was laid to the town site of Binscarth in the autumn of 1886.

For a few months Matthew's headquarters would be the Binscarth Colony Farm, located in what is generally the "Woodstock" district in later years. It was a project undertaken by the Scottish, Ontario & Manitoba Land Company with the object of encouraging new settlers to locate in the area and to give them some practical experience and

advice as they faced this new world of north-western Manitoba.

It is not possible now to do more than speculate ^{why} ~~that~~ the name "Binscarth" was given to the Colony Farm venture because there appears to be sound indications that Matthew's father, Robert, who established the Orkney "Binscarth" had made some financial investment in the Land Company. By this time the Colony Farm had brought in some very good livestock, cattle in particular, from Ontario. During his second summer there Matthew had an opportunity to go along as a helper with some selected show animals to the Winnipeg Exhibition. I believe he had Farm Foreman Jack Anderson and Tom Almack with him on the trip.

Part of one summer provided new and interesting experiences when he was a member of a "location" party under the direction of S.A. Bedford (later Dr. Bedford, Director of the Brandon Experimental Farm). The project's main effort was to establish immigrant Hungarian settlers on their new colony at Esterhazy. The "locators" preferred their tent to the risk ~~of~~ and discomfort of the insect-infested accomodation of "The Ritz" at Whitewood. It was necessary to keep a sharp eye on the lumber being stock-piled by the C.P.R. for the settlers' homes.

Matthew supplemented his experience at the Colony Farm by seasonal work with two local farmers--W.P. Storey in the Millwood area and Tom Fraser near Woodstock. It was during his stay at Frasers that he was able to observe at first hand one of the community's early developments. Major C.A. Boulton had worked very assiduously to get the main C.P.R. route directed through what was then known as the "Shell River Country" north-west of what later became Russell, but the powers of the day had kept south, crossing the Assiniboine at Millwood. An opportunity arose with the arrival of a Provincial Election, and the Major, never one to pass up a good political move,

entered the fray as a candidate. A rail connection was promised to the now growing village of Russell by extending a branch from Binscarth. In an era of ~~rather~~ deliberate and measured political strategy ~~now~~, a rather precipitate date had been set by the Boulton forces for the completion of this project, and a reasonable supply of materials had been secured to show that they meant business. The general route of the right-of-way ran through, or near, Tom Fraser's homestead and Matthew was to get a first-hand view as rails and ties were dumped helter-skelter by the harried teamsters before any grade was ~~marked~~ even surveyed. Those familiar with the area may be able to imagine this spectacle as it dodged around the sloughs and rough terrain existing at that time.

Homestead land was being taken up steadily and Matthew was aware that it would soon be a scarce item. He filed on the SW Quarter of Sect. 6-Twp. 19-Rge, 27-west of the 1st Mer. in April, 1888. The original Receipt for the Filing Fee of \$10.00 issued by the Sub-Land Office in Birtle is dated April 23~~rd~~, 1888. His closest neighbors would be ~~the~~ Oswald Inman and James Turnbull.

✓ By the 1890's Matthew, through purchase and pre-emption, acquired adjacent land to make up a section, and 640 acres must have seemed a very large area at that time. Some of it was open prairie, but, typical of the parkland zone, there was scattered willow brush and poplar bluffs. He inherited a love of trees from his parents and it was only many years later when more cultivated land became a vital necessity to meet rising costs that he made a reluctant decision to clear away the larger bluffs. A slow and back-breaking task-starting with oxen and later with horses for power. With the advent of the newer and more flexible gas tractors for farming, a Waterloo Boy was purchased in 1918 and the land-clearing process could be speeded up to some extent.

Nature has no way of knowing where farmers need trees, but the

experience of bitter winter winds must have fostered the idea of windbreak shelters for the farmstead. Matthew was among the earliest to take advantage of the splendid program initiated by the Dominion Forestry Farm at Indian Head, and all of our family would derive benefits from his foresight. All of the early plantings near our house originated from the pioneer Patmore Nurseries in Brandon. A goodly number of the trees and shrubbery survived long after he left active farming, monuments to his love for the natural gifts of the park country.

Always interested in cattle, Matthew was partial to the Shorthorn breed as they were more of the dual purpose type and fitted into the farm program. I can personally recall his one venture into Aberdeen-Angus, but no one should think that his decision not to change had anything to do with the breed itself. He had always recognized its good qualities. But in a moment of weakness he had placed a bid on a black cow (everything "black" was called Angus in those days) and there being no further bids he became its owner. It seemed somewhat restive but was duly placed in our pasture with the other cows. They had learned that a two-strand barbed wire fence was an adequate restraint from wandering. Not so the newcomer--whose name I cannot recall, which may be just as well. I know it came out of no recognized Herd Book. "Blackie" took one quick look around and headed for distant places at high speed, fence or no fence. This set a very bad example for our domesticated bovines and, as I recall, the dark lady became the guest of honor as a contribution to our local Beef Ring, that summer or the next.

There were considerable areas of trees and brush on the east half of the section and in between open spaces with good pasture, so that a system of fencing was eventually established that enabled the rotation of each field for pasture as its turn came for summerfallowing. This was a helpful factor in weed control as well.

Some of the family once attempted to estimate the milage of fencing on our farm, but I regret not being able to recall the total. It was an amazing figure.

The standard farm papers of the earlier days in Manitoba were the "Nor West Farmer" and the "Family Herald and Weekly Star". and Matthew took an active interest in the development of the early farm organizations. The family has a clear recollection of his purchase of some of the first shares and ^{his active} promotion of the Grain Growers Grain Co. (later the U.G.G.). Our neighbor to the east - I.B. Griffiths - had settled there in the early years of the century and his interest in the political emergence of the agrarian movement was often the basis for lively and searching discussions.

Matthew was one of the Directors of the Binscarth Agricultural Society from its start before the First War until his retirement from active farming. He would share a record of service with James Fletcher, Louis Johnson, James Thompson of Woodstock, P.J. McIntosh, James Murray and Freeman Rice.

While Matthew enjoyed the western rural scenes he would not be classified as the "happy traveller" if he had to be alone. He liked to have company on a trip and feel unburdened by the responsibility of travel details and arrangements. By some lucky circumstances the family was able to satisfy two of his fondest ambitions -- to see the Rockies and the Peace River Country. The summer of 1939 provided the opportunity and he enjoyed ~~it~~ in the lovely environment of the Banff National Park, and later three months in the Peace River area, touring over both the B.C. and Alberta sections. That experience would fulfil at least part of his dream to cross Canada from sea to sea.

By his son Com. S. Scarth

✓ Perhaps after paragraph 2 on page 2

Additional notes: *Per H. L. L.*

In 1891 my mother Cecilia Scarth came to Binscarth to keep house for her brothers, Mathew and William. The latter had left a seafaring life and had come from Orkney to his brother at Binscarth. Subsequently he homesteaded the N.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 6 Twp. 19 Rge 27 W. 1st Mer. The two brothers were batching together in Mathew's home. William's homestead was just a quarter of a mile north on the same section.

My Mother kept house for them for several years until Uncle Will married and moved to his own quarter. On my Mother's subsequent return from a trip back to Orkney she met Wilhelmina Stewart, daughter of Captain Stewart of the steamship the Empress of Britain, on which my Mother was returning to Canada. Miss Stewart was also coming to Canada to visit relatives in Montreal and Captain Stewart asked Mother if she would sort of keep his daughter under her wing. Mother and Miss Stewart became great friends and Mother invited her to come and visit her brother, Mathew and herself at Binscarth. Evidently Miss Stewart did and the visit ended in her becoming my Aunt Minnie. She and my Uncle Mathew were married July 31st 1897. Aunt Minnie predeceased my Uncle in 1925.

Norman Lurnbell