WILLIAM WOLFE

By Ila Borowsky

(As obtained through a personal interview and from letters)

Born in southern Ireland in 1884, William (Billy) Wolfe came to Canada in 1910, hoping to better conditions for himself, his mother, brother, Tom, and sisters, Kitty and Fanny. Sally, the oldest girl, was presently at the University of Glasgow in the Faculty of Medicine. Billy had graduated as an electrical engineer.

Billy spent from April until after harvest working for Mr. Sullivan, a farmer near Vermilion, thus gaining experience in and knowledge of farming in the new land. He worked fifteen hours a day. On one trip to Vermilion he tells of having a meal in a cafe consisting of kippered herring, roast pork, soup, tapioca pudding and tea, all for 25 cents.

During slack times in the summer he investigated areas where homesteads were available. On a trip to Wetaskiwin he found only improved land for sale, all homesteads already having been taken. Then he heard the C.P.R. had surrendered the odd numbered

sections of Township 56 R6 and these were now open for homesteading. Points he considered in favor of this area were many. The North Saskatchewan flowed through the middle of the township from west to east and the present government was surveying the river with a view to navigating it from Edmonton to North Battleford. A steamer had already carried 750 passengers and some goods down river. Billy reasoned this would be the summer highway for shipping wheat and, since the C.N.R. was about to start a survey north of the river, here was the promise of a railroad in the near future, maybe in three or four years. There were already several ferries along the river. He wrote to Edmonton for a plot of township 56-6 and found fifty-nine quarters open for homesteading. Since Mr. Sullivan knew the trails he consented to go with Billy to look over the land. They were lost many times while skirting muskegs and lakes and once ended up in a Cree Indian camp about twenty miles south of the river. At that time there was a large Indian settlement in this area. Since Billy spoke French he was able to explain their predicament and obtain directions from the Crees. Crossing the river at Hopkins ferry, they went on to Caskeyville where they spent the night at Joe Mabley's near by. Billy remarked Mr. Mabley had the best home he had seen in this country. Next morning they travelled east,

where they hired a settler by the name of Mr. Charles Markstad to ride on his horse and show them the land around. The charge was $2.50 from then until 9 p.m. In choosing land Billy looked for good soil, some water, wild hay, areas clear ot brush and flat so it could be broken easily and quickly. He was impressed with four quarters. The water near Mr. Sullivan's was salty and alkaline so Billy was glad to hear wells near here had good sweet water and were free from alkali. Other points in favor of this area were that the North Saskatchewan ran about one mile south, the land was on the Edmonton to North Battleford trail which was the best in the country, the government telegraph line ran near, and the nearest telegraph office was about six miles away at Mooswa. He thought if the railroad ran that way there would probably be a station at St. Paul, about twenty-seven miles away, and at Mooswa, about six miles away. Also near were the finest of building logs -- tamarack and spruce, a post office about five miles away with weekly mail deliveries, and he could buy milk from Mr. Tom Aarbo who was a close neighbor and had thirty cattle. As he could file on a homestead for his mother also, he sent her a proxy to sign.

Before filing on the land at Elk Point, Billy thought it wise to investigate other possibilities. While in Edmonton staying at the Cecil Hotel, he met a young couple who

were also looking for a homestead -- Mr. and Mrs. Eric Arnott. They became friends so Mr. Arnott decided to go with Billy west of Edmonton to look at land there. On Sept.12, 1910, they, with two more men, hired a Mr. Sutton who was a land guide, at $7 a day, and set out in a three-seated democrat for St. Albert and points west. Their trip was beset with many problems.

Billy tells of early happenings and experiences:

Oxen could be stubborn and contrary creatures and to handle them it was wise to learn their idiosyncrasies. The old trail from Vermilion to Elk Point in the early days followed Queenie Creek and, travelling north with a load, especially on a hot day, oxen were wont to head for the water, wade in, and drag along whatever was behind them. Billy always unhitched his oxen before reaching the creek, let them go into the water, drink their fill, after which he hitched them to the load again and proceeded with no trouble. One settler neglected to unhitch his oxen and they all ended up in the creek -- flour, bran, tailings, and supplies floating in the water. Billy helped him get his oxen out, took the wagon apart before it could be got out, and rescued what supplies they could.

Only the outside of the flour was damaged as the water could not soak in far; but the bran, tailings and supplies were ruined. That was an expensive lesson. As soon as it got hot in the field and the flies were bad, the oxen invariably ran for water or the bush and refused to work until conditions improved.

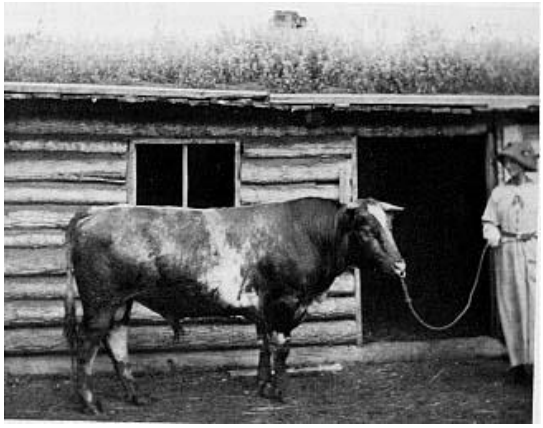
In 1908 liquor could not be bought without a prescription from the doctor, so stills where homebrew was made were hidden in the woods. Thirsty souls could procure a jug of the potent stuff for a nominal fee. Shortly after the Hopkins ferry was in operation, several of these souls were gathered there, tipping jugs while passing the time of day. One fellow suggested they have a hanging for excitement -- but who was their prisoner? He was given swigs from the crocks and asked if he would take part in a Kangaroo Court. Wits somewhat addled by the brew, happy with everybody and suspicious of nobody, he consented. So a judge was named, a jury chosen and the prisoner -- him -- on trial. The judge tried him, the jury found him guilty, and the judge sentenced him to hang. A rope was slung over a sturdy branch of the nearest tree and the prisoner swung up in the air. By this time the court needed a bit more lubrication and by the time they remembered their prisoner he had turned a ghastly purple. Suddenly all were very sober. They cut down the

man, dead seemingly, dragged him to the river, dumped him into a row boat (no oars) and pushed the boat into the water, where the current picked it up. A few hours later the prisoner regained consciousness, found himself several miles down river in an old boat with no oars. He managed to pry off one of the floor boards and paddle to shore.

Mrs. Wolfe, Tom and Kitty arrived in February, 1911. Billy met them in Vermilion with sleigh and oxen. While in Vermilion they bought necessities like pots and pans and groceries. The piano was sent from Ireland, with other furniture.

Billy's first crops were wheat and oats. He now had horses, a plough,disc and harrows. A neighbor, Mr. Markstad, drilled in his grain once and also did his binding once.

During the 1914-18 war the government asked farmers to grow wheat. In 1915 the crop was good; in 1916 an early frost took crops; in 1919 drought struck. In 1915 Billy hauled wheat to Vermilion to be ground into flour at Wiebe's Flour Mill, which had been built in 1911. Sometimes a trip was made to Hopkins to buy a sack of flour, only to find the shipment had not arrived, so this meant another long, hard trip. Building materials took precedence in freighting. This was before 1914, when there was a store at Elk Point.

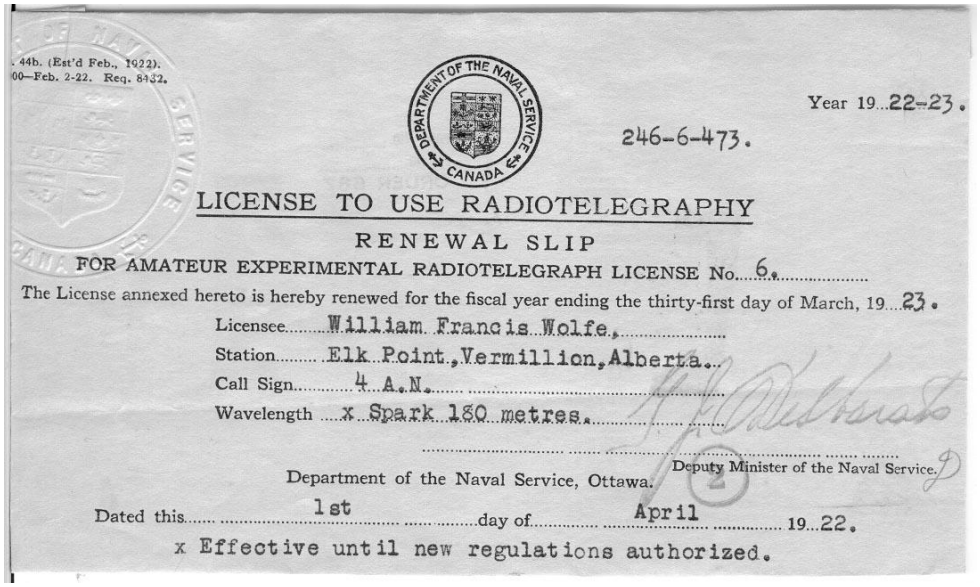


Cattle buyers travelled throughout the area and took delivery of cattle bought at Hopkins Ferry. Billy sold a two-year-old calf for $40. He took pigs to Vermilion, receiving nine and ten cents a pound.

He remembers the 1918 flu epidemic, when people were terrified and there were so many deaths. There were many heroic acts. Jack Compton visited neighbors, helping wherever he could. He found the Jacksons half frozen, each in their bed in the corner, very ill with flu. Jim died but his wife recovered, thanks to Jack Compton arriving before it was too late.

Since there was no doctor in Elk Point, one came from St. Paul and vaccinated many people. Whenever anybody left home, they wore a cheesecloth mask, covering nose and mouth, which they thought protected them from breathing in the flu germs. No

one was allowed in stores or public buildings without a mask.



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Year 19..22-23.

246-6-473.

LICENSE TO USE RADIOTELEGRAPHY

RENEWAL SLIP

FOR AMATEUR EXPERIMENTAL RADIOTELEGRAPH LICENSE No. 6.

The License annexed hereto is hereby renewed for the fiscal year ending the thirty-first day of March, 19..23.

Licensee..William Francis Wolfe,

Station..Elk Point, Vermillion, Alberta.

Call Sign..4 A.N.

Wavelength ..x Spark 180 metres.

Deputy Minister of the Naval Service.

Department of the Naval Service, Ottawa.

Dated this..1st..day of..April..19..22.

x Effective until new regulations authorized.

In 1921 Billy obtained a license for an Experimental Rad. io Telegraphy station. His license covered all waves-radio, T.V. waves and police. A wave was 200 metres long, or about one quarter mile from crest to crest. His call letters were 4AN -- the "4" referring to the four western provinces; the "A" to his first license; and the "N" to the fourteenth lic. ense being issued in the west. He had the station until World War II was over. During the war he was limited to receiving only. The long wave brought in stations from all over the world -. Wales, Norway, Hawaii. He heard direct from Bor. deaux, France, where messages to Washington were sent in Morse code, which Billy could read. When the telegraph strike was on, Billy heard the news radioed from Calgary to Edmonton and so could keep his neighbors well-informed, when otherwise no news could get through until the next day.

His first radio program lasted an hour and a quarter. Complimentary letters were received from as far away as Wainwright. The program consisted of Billy as announcer, Violet Ramsbottom on the piano, Mr. Richardson - violin, Charlie Keller singing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart", Del Beebe singing and yodelling, cornet solo by Billy, and much

more.

He was able to call St. Paul, have his message relayed to Elk Point and Dr. Miller. When Mrs. Wolfe was ill, he was in constant touch with St. Paul, getting advice. Since he was proficient in the Morse code, he was often called upon to test the Boy Scouts in their Morse code. In 1919 he had a new house built, in which he had a 32 - volt electrical plant.

Billy was Justice of the Peace from 1919 to 1929. He was appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. In 1915, 1916 and 1917 he audited the accounts for the Municipal District of Lincoln. In 1929 he became bookkeeper for C.J. Markstad's business. His ledgers were a work of art, his handwriting small and precise, and his figures correct to the last decimal point. He was a favorite with the school children, who visited the store at noon hour when he was behind the counter.

In 1924 a 32-volt power plant was installed to provide Elk Point with electricity. In a short time the demand for electricity exceeded the capacity of the plant and in early 1926 Dr. Miller installed a 110-volt power plant, principally to operate his X-ray machine. Later this plant burned down and a new one was installed about a quarter mile

farther west. This plant operated until Canadian Utilities took over.

Billy was instrumental in organizing the Elk Point Hospital District. He was Returning Officer for the plebiscite on the decision as to where the hospital should be built. Dr. Miller was secretary-treasurer for the first two years. In 1932 Billy was appointed to take his place. He took his duties very seriously and became much more than a secretary treasurer; he acted as manager, electrician, handy-man, and advisor.

In 1931 he married Willemine Verwoerd, a nurse from Holland. Three girls were born of this union -- Nora, Linda and Mona.

In 1944 the family moved to Victoria.

THOMAS P. WOLFF

By Mrs. Thos. P. Wolfe

I was born in Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland, where my father owned a bake shop. Although the country was very beautiful and the

climate pleasant, troubles were threatening Ireland, and opportunities for young people were not good. The Wolfe family, who were farming near Skibbereen, emigrated to start a new life in a new country. The eldest son, Billy, came to Alberta in 1910 to locate a spot suitable for his mother and youngest sister (who later became Mrs. Tom Johnson of Lindbergh). He settled on a homestead south east of Elk Point. The following year his brother, Tom, brought his mother and sister to the settlement, and he himself homesteaded land south of his brother, on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River. Here he pioneered, clearing and breaking land with oxen, building a one-room log shack and three log stables -- one for the cows, one for the oxen (later for the horse), and one for the pigs. These buildings were well built, carefully mudded to fill the cracks, and roofed with rough lumber and rubberoid.

In 1914 Tom went back home to the war, where he was a machine-gunner until 1918. He and I were married in August of the following year, and we sailed for Canada later that fall. We were on the boat about two weeks. We landed in Montreal, then took a train across Canada to Vermilion. I will never forget the trip from there to our new home! We were driven by team and wagon as far as the river. Then the ice was just forming so was very treacherous. We walked very gingerly across

the river with one small suit case. Our trunks were to come along later. My instructions were "Watch where you step. Do not look back." We landed safely!

Billy and his mother met us with team and wagon at the other side, driving us nearly six miles to our home. The log shack had a large flat stone for a doorstep, one small window and a door. Beside the door was a substantial woodpile, and off to one side was the water pump. A coal oil lamp was our only source of light. I later discovered that, hidden in the trees a short distance away, was a neat little

outhouse! Tom had started to build a two-storey frame house before going to the war, but it was barely put to the weather. It took a lot of work to finish the inside so we could move into it the following year. It was great to see the progress. Tom bought adjoining land and worked very hard getting it all in good shape. Every step was rewarding.

The mail was brought from Vermilion by Mr. Monkman either by car or horses, depending on the roads. It came once or twice a week (as I remember) and we regularly got letters from "home". These were greatly looked forward to and Tom and I would switch our minds back to Ireland, catching up on the news of everything and everybody we had left behind.

Tom's older sister, Dr. Sally Wolfe, who was trained for a doctor and later spent forty years in China as a medical missionary, visited us and delivered many babies including our first child, Marjorie, born at home in the fall of 1921. Dr. Miller came to Elk Point shortly before this and his house was used as a hospital, where our second and third children, John and Gwen, were born. Dr. Ross came as a young doctor to practice with Dr. Miller at that time. Our fourth child, Dorothy, was born in the new hospital in 1929-- conditions were improving!

The usual epidemics of measles, chicken pox, whooping cough, etc., made the rounds -- no innoculations or modern medications were available

then. One of our children developed scarlet fever so Tom drove to Elk Point in the sleigh to get Dr. Miller, who came back in his sleigh and buffalo robes. He ordered six weeks quarantine for the whole family. As we had no telephone, we were really cut off from the rest of the world, but kind neighbors dropped off our mail and necessary groceries -- keeping their distance. This was followed by fumigation, which meant shutting all the doors and windows, and literally buming sulfur in the house for several hours. Everyone moved out for the day, and then almost choked over the smell when we came back in the evening. No wonder it was expected to kill the germs! Other home remedies for minor ailments were mustard plasters, lots of Friar's

Balsam and Eucalyptus to inhale, red liniment, hot lemonade, bread poultices, etc. The closest dentist was Vermilion (a fifty mile trip by team), or, later, St. Paul (twenty miles), so these visits were only if really urgent.

We butchered our own meat. Beef was canned in quart sealers and processed for hours in a boiler over the top of a hot wood stove. Pork was smoked and home-cured. Milk was set in two big round enamel pans, and skimmed for cream every morning and evening. Once or twice a week this cream was churned and made into butter. This was a family effort until one of the children would get too eager and cause the plug to come loose or the

lid to fly off -- what a mess! The butter was well salted and the surplus stored in crocks for the winter. The washing machine (although an improvement over the metal tub and scrub board) was a round wooden tub with a hand wringer. The clothes were also agitated by hand -- a wooden lever which was worked with one hand and one foot. A wire clothes line in the trees served as a drier. Sad irons were heated on top of the stove.

Every Saturday night was family bath night. Pails of water were hauled in, heated in the boiler on the stove, and poured into a round metal tub on the floor. Perfect privacy was ordered. One by one the four children took turns, then Mother and then Father. By the time all had coiled and uncoiled, the kitchen floor was half washed too! In the morning the water was hauled out by pail, and the tub stored away for another week.

There were many hazards both inside and out. Probably the greatest farm hazard was the possibility of the horses running away with or without a buggy, sleigh or implement. Sawing wood was also dangerous. There was great community spirit and each fall the neighbors formed a bee and went from place to place cutting a winter supply of firewood. Chimney fires were a constant threat in the winter time. Our furnace consumed long heavy logs which gave off excellent heat, but caused soot to build up in the chimney.

School was five and a half miles away so, when the children were small, there were many months of the winter they could not travel that distance. I taught many of the subjects of the first five grades at home, and also many Sunday School lessons. Church services were first held in the school house at Aarbo's corner. Later the United Church and manse were built in Elk Point and Mr. Smith was the first resident minister.

Annual fairs and school festivals were held and well attended. The best items were taken to St. Paul, where they were competitively judged. The school Christmas concerts were one of the happiest days of the year. The children and their parents travelled by sleigh or cutter so appreciated a clear moonlit evening. Layers

of coats, sweaters, long underwear, felt boots, and lots of hides or home-made quilts kept us warm. Foot warmers were necessary for cold days too --we often used a hot stone which had been in the oven for a couple of hours.

The Arnott hall was the community centre for not only concerts, but also picture shows and dances. Sports such as skiing and skating were enjoyed on the river hills and on the river itself. In winter the river served as the main highway. Tom hauled wheat by team and sleigh up the river to Myrnam to be ground into flour. He would bring back our year's supply of flour in one hundred pound cloth sacks. The problem then was to keep the mice out of it! These sacks proved very useful for dish towels, pillowcases and even underwear during the depression. In the summer Mr. Jacobson operated a ferry across the river, the speed of which varied as the flow of the river, since it was powered only by the push of the current. A beautiful bridge replaced the ferry in the early fifties.

The river hills were a delight with flowers and berries. The spring of the year was colorful with crocuses and buffalo beans. We had a very beautiful view of the river, and we loved those hills. In 1940 Tom built a large veranda across the front of our house so we could enjoy the view to the full. We stuccoed the house the following year, and developed a nice

lawn and garden surrounded by a pretty metal fence.

These were very happy days as our family grew up. Our eldest, Marjorie, trained for a nurse in Lamont. She nursed in Duncan, B.C., where she married Dick Christmas, and now has three daughters and two grandchildren. Our son, John, enrolled in medicine at U. of A., then served in the R.C.A.F. until October of 1944, when he was reported missing over Germany. That was a sad winter for us. Gwen trained for a teacher, taught high school in Cremona for two years before marrying a farmer in that area, Fulton Earle. They raised a son and a daughter, now have two grandsons. Dorothy trained in McTavish Business College, worked in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge. She married Gerald Brown of Coal-dale and has one daughter, now in Grade 11.

All our girls have very fond memories of Elk Point and say they would not want things to be different if they had a chance to live these growing-up years over again. We had many friends, and every winter families would get together for dinners or house parties, with lots of fun and excitement playing table-tennis, old fashioned games and sing songs.

We retired in 1959 and moved to the west coast to be near our daughter, Marjorie, where the climate was more favorable. It was hard to leave the homestead where we had spent forty years together building a farm, each step giving a satisfying feeling of accomplishment. Tom loved the land and had the true spirit of a dedicated pioneer. We sold the place to Harold and Isobel Pinder, who passed it down to their son George. Tom enjoyed gardening and a little fishing on Vancouver Island until he passed away in 1971.

I continued living in Duncan for four years and am now settled with my daughter, Gwen, and her husband on the farm at Cremona.