

Wolfe5

Elk Point
Vermilion, Alta.
1.1.11

Dear Mother:

The mail service out here doesn't seem to be very good, as this week I didn't get a letter from any of you, but I got the Christmas Strand and the Cornet Cards and the note paper as you see, not to mention the "Use of Life".

I won't have to go to Vermilion so soon after all, as I bought a heating stove from Lars Johnson on Friday for \$15. It sounds a lot of money, but it is a decent looking stove and I was in an awful way without it.

I have been living in the house now since Dec. 12th and it was comfortable enough till this day week when I had to return Landers' stove. Ever since then it had been cooling down in spite of the cooking stove. You see, the heat escapes a good deal through the side of the roof that isn't shingled.

For the last few days I could never get it hotter than freezing point and at night it was much colder.

Friday night was the worst night of all. As it was late when I got back I couldn't fire the stove and of course as I had been out all day, the house was colder than ever. When I got back I sat up till about 12 so as to warm it a bit, but I had to pull the bed clothes over my head to sleep at all and in the morning as soon as I had the fire lit, I looked at the thermometer and it was only 3 degrees above zero downstairs, and I don't know how cold in the bedroom. I hated to get up but I knew it would be worse if I stayed in bed any longer.

However, all that is over now and I can enjoy life again, thanks to the stove. The house is quite comfortable again, and last night was alright in here, although it was the coldest night we had since I came to Canada, 35 below zero.

Today is a lovely day - clear, cold and sunshiny. The snow has ceased for the present. I guess you can hardly have any idea of how happy I feel now that I don't have to keep as close as possible to the range. I quite enjoyed being out today as the sun was shining, and when you know you can go in to warm up whenever you like, you don't feel cold outside. I am glad not to have to go into town too, as if it snowed heavily on the road I would be in a bad fix. I won't go now till I like the look of the weather.

You were asking if there was anything I wanted you to bring out. I think you

might bring two of those little tubes for getting the milk out of a cow with a sore tit. You see lots of cows here that have lost the milk in one pump, and I think it might have been possible to save them if they had been treated rightly. Anyway, the tubes don't cost much and are small and won't be much load. Bring two in case we lose one. I can't think of anything else that I didn't mention before. Don't forget the salt cellars and spoons, also egg spoons. Canadians eat eggs like pigs I think. I have 6 egg cups and half a dozen cups and saucers and plates, knives and forks and teaspoons, all good of their kind. I have a kettle, a tea pot, a sugar bowl and butter dish, two enamel basins, one for washing up, the other I mix cakes in, a porridge pot and one other pot.

By the way, you might bring the jam saucers as I have not seen such things here. When they have jam here, they serve out a certain amount to each person on a saucer like pudding.

Over at Arnott's they have had trouble with the fowl as I knew they would. I went over for a few minutes at 8 last night, and they had brought the whole dozen into the house then. Mrs. Arnott told me that one poor hen had her feet frozen and that she had just thawed them out in cold water. She was afraid the hen's feet would drop off, but they won't this time unless she gets them frozen again.

Really Mr. Drew is very cruel to those fowl. It makes me mad; as I said to Arnott if he froze them all up and let them die in one night it would be bad enough, but to keep them all the time half frozen is infinitely worse. The government experts in Edmonton told him that the fowl needed plenty fresh air, and I suppose air is good for them, but a temperature of 15 or so below zero is not good for them I'm sure, as they aren't polar bears. The sooner they die, the better I think.

Be sure to tell me as early as you can both the date you will sail and the expected date of arrival, and the port. I expect it will be St. Johns, so that I can meet you in Vermilion. You see, I want to make sure you are dressed wisely for the drive out here.

Very many thanks to Fan for the Strand.

Elk Point
Vermilion, Alta.
5.1.11

Dear Kitty:

Many thanks for sending me the cornet cards, Use of Life, etc. I am at last able to enclose you a few photos. They are not very well toned as it is difficult to get good material here. By here, I mean in Vermilion, as it is of course impossible to get any photographic stuff nearer than that.

I think some of the views are rather pretty, don't you. I have some ones of the house taken later, but I could not find the film the evening I developed these.

My house is lovely and comfortable now, downstairs at least. The upstairs is still very cold, as I didn't get the shingles yet for part of the roof. So I moved my bed downstairs and laid paper all over the upper floor to keep the warm air down.

All the settlement is interested in my house. Some of them admire it and it amuses others. Mr. Hood the postmaster told me it was like an old Swiss chalet, and said he thought that all the houses round here were too much alike, and that it was a good thing to introduce a new style. Landers and Jackson call it Wolfe's Castle. They wanted me to take the Cornet and climb up to the ridge and play "The Cock of the North" the first evening we slept in it.

It looks a little like this sketch. The roof is 27 feet long and as the house is only 16 ft. long inside, it leaves a *Sketch of house here.* sort of verandah in front.

Later on we can board up the upper front of this if we like and so make another room.

I had all I could do to hoist the two half way up logs that run out to the front poles of the verandah and Landers helped me with the two top ones. Except these two top logs, I hoisted every log myself, and of course I cut down the trees, trimmed them, loaded them and unloaded them alone too, so you see I am as proud as Lucifer of the house. I got a letter from Foster in which he had the cheek to call it a hut.

Arnott and I went down to the store at the ferry on Monday. Of course there is no ferry there now, as the river is frozen this long time. In the morning it was very cold indeed, 30 below zero when we started. Arnott, against my advice, took a rubber hot water bottle which soon froze up solid. He can't walk yet since he put the axe in his big toe, so we went into Mr. Fisk's to get warm. This is only about 3 miles of the way. Arnott went in to

Stockwell's again, 8 miles of the way. They asked him to fetch them a lamp glass, so we did. When we got back to Stockwell's it was just 8 p.m., and although the evening had warmed up a lot, it was still very cold so we both went in. Mrs. Stockwell asked us if we had had any supper and then gave us a good feed. Coffee, hash and fried potatoes and bread and butter, and best of all some wild black currants which she and Jennie her daughter (Colin West's intended) had gathered last summer near here. They wanted us to stay all night. I would have liked to, but Arnott was afraid his people would think he was dead. We got to Elk Point post office about 10 p.m. The Hoods were in bed, but as we had some sugar and flour for them, Hood had to get up. We went in there for a bit and Hood stoked up his stove a bit so we got warm again. Finally we got to Arnott's at midnight exactly. It was only 6 below zero then; a good job too, as we were cold enough even then. I knew my house would be cold and that it would take a couple of hours to warm it, so as I had two rugs with me, I rolled up in them and lay down near the stove at Arnott's.

A year ago I would never have dreamed of calling in at a house on the side of a road and staying to tea or dinner, but out here it seems natural enough. Any place you go, if it happens to be anywhere near a meal time, they ask you to stay. It's really very nice of them, isn't it. Especially in cold weather as it's awfully nice to get a warm up.

The cold spell didn't last long. It snowed a good bit yesterday (Wednesday) and today was calm and sunny and the temperature about 26 most of the day, so that I went about with bare ears and hands all day.

Mrs. Arnott is having her first bit of dissipation today. She and Arnott and Gordon went down to Fisk's for dinner and have gone to Tom Arbow's for supper. They left the baby with Mr. and Mrs. Drew. I bet she'll catch it when she gets back; still I am very glad she went, as she has had rather a time since she came here, and she is really awfully nice. Gordon and the baby are lovely little monkeys too.

Elk Point
Vermilion
7.1.11

Dear Mother:

It will be a week tomorrow since I wrote to you last, yet I expect you will get the two letters together. Arnott is going over to Caskeyville tomorrow,

Sunday, and will post this there if he doesn't forget it.

I got your letter and Kitty's on Friday saying you had booked your passages by the SS Empress of Ireland to sail February 24th. You will probably land on March 3rd and get into Winnipeg on Monday morning March 6th, probably very early in the morning. If I were you I would go to a hotel and stay one or two nights, as you will be awfully tired. I was nearly beat out myself when I got there. The Alexandra is the C.P.R. hotel and has an entrance on the station platform. It is very dear, but is very handy if you get to Winnipeg in the middle of the night.

I suppose you will come the rest of the way to Vermilion on the Canadian Northern. It is the only railway to Vermilion, but of course you could if you liked go to Edmonton by the C.P.R., and back to Vermilion from there. One good job is that you will have no bother with your luggage in Canada. After you get it passed by the Customs, you can get it checked through to Vermilion by the railway agent who will come on board the boat. All you have to do then is to stick to your half of the check till you get your luggage in Vermilion. It is about a 29 hour train journey from Winnipeg to Vermilion, so you will need a rest in Winnipeg.

If I was you I would not bring too much cabin luggage, as the cabins are rather small. You will have to take a goodish bit as you can't get at your big luggage for about a fortnight; a week on the water and a week on land. I would bring smelling salts and a little brandy in case you get sea sick and some cascara sayrada(?) as you will very likely want them on the train, a good comfortable pair of slippers and a pair of comfortable boots; you need not be too particular of appearances. Still, a boot brush and polish is handy.

I agree with you that the Skeeses(?) were as cool as anything about Willie coming here with you. I don't want him anyway and besides if he did anything nasty on the boat it would not be pleasant for you.

If you don't like the Colonist on the train, don't hesitate to change. Make Tom get the tickets changed on the train for you. In any case, just after the train starts, you can walk right through it and see how the first class people are fixed up.

I think it would be a good idea if you brought out some garden seeds with you. Nothing heavy, just some radishes, carrots, parsnips, etc. Can you get celery seed and rhubarb seed.

You might ask Tom to get half a dozen snap fasteners from Mr. James Wolfe like the one I had for fastening onto the pony's halter in the stable at the mill. It looks like this when half open. The sketch is a bad one, *Sketch of fastener here*

but I guess Tom will remember the kind I mean. The black thing is supposed to be a lever for tightening the link that goes over the nose of the big hook. They use all sorts of snaps here except that particular one, which is the best of all I think.

I don't quite grasp Grandma's idea in thinking it selfish of you to come out here. It seems to me to be rather the reverse as this place isn't exactly a heaven below yet. However, things aren't so awfully bad either. I expect we must be half way through the winter now. At any rate, the sun is already noticeably higher in the sky, and the weather hasn't been so very hard. We have had some very hard spells, but they never lasted more than three days at a time. All the neighbours say it is the windiest winter they ever saw, but it has been calm compared to the weather we get at home.

I got Eda's letter alright and replied to it too. I am afraid she is a bit of a hypocrite though, as there was more skating than current news in it.

Tell Kitty most of the ladies I have seen in the winter wear very thick woolen stocking caps. They pull them down over their ears and the backs of their necks and down to the eyebrows. Then they wear very high fur collars to their cloaks, so that when they are driving, you only see their noses and eyes. It's very hard to tell who's who.

Things aren't going any too smoothly at Arnott's. Mr. and Mrs. Drew are a great nuisance to both him and his wife. Mr. Drew keeps telling them all the drawbacks of the country, and he is as pleased as punch when he can find some fresh fault with it. As Arnott says, it takes all the strength out of a fellow to have him all the time at it. Of course lots of what he says is true, and lots isn't, but anyway he might very well try and encourage them a bit, or at any rate not discourage. Arnott built a pretty big house especially to please the old people, and besides that he goes out of his way to be nice to them, and he will certainly never get any thanks. The big house is rather a drawback too, as it takes a lot more firewood to keep it hot.

The fowl too are a joke to the whole settlement. I think I told you about one hen getting her feet frozen. After they had her near the fire for 3 or 4 days they put her out again, and she got her feet frozen again in about 10 minutes. Now the cock has got the top half of his comb frozen and it is falling off.

Of course none of them has laid as yet, nor will they either till the weather gets warm or they are put in a warm house. The best of it is that the Fisk's fowl are laying and so are the Austen's and they aren't treated scientifically at all, but are fed and kept warm. When anyone meets Arnott the first thing they say is "how are the chickens doing". It is really hardly fair as it wasn't his idea to get them so soon.

I got the little pendant Kitty sent safely. It is a little beauty I think. I showed it to Arnott and he is as green as the Convenenra(?) Marble with envy.

I may as well tell you another of Mr. Drew's crimes as I have not much news this time. I think I told Kitty that Arnott and I had to go the store last Monday and didn't get back till midnight although we had started early in the morning. When we got back, we found Mr. Drew had been telling the ladies that we had very likely upset the sleigh when on the hill near the Dog Creek. It is a bad hill, but even if we had both been hurt, which wasn't likely, he might have had tact enough to suggest that we had stayed all night at the store, or something of that sort. Altogether he is about as big a genius as Mr. Lloyd George.

By the way, I see Walsh only got in by the skin of his teeth. I didn't think the clergy would have had so much influence. I wonder at Barry having the courage to try at all after the way he behaved before. I haven't much doubt but that Uncle Harry voted for Walsh; at any rate, that was the side he used to favour.

If I was Tom I would not buy a second .22 rifle, as for deer or moose you need at least a 30.30 or 30.40. A .22 doesn't hit nearly hard enough for big game. Besides, you can't get very near them. Of course a .22 is very handy for grouse, partridge, gophers, etc. and is cheaper to use than a shot gun. Still one can't have everything. Guns, rifles, etc. are only very little dearer here than at home.

Will Tom come out here for a bit first or will he look for a job for himself. I imagine it ought to be rather hard to get work on a farm till the snow goes.

Talking of the snow reminds me of one very important thing I had forgotten to tell you. You will each want a pair of very dark spectacles, otherwise you will get snow blind on the drive out. Snow blindness is no joke at all. In bad cases one is quite blind for 3 or 4 days. At this time of the year when the light isn't very strong it doesn't hurt, but in March things will be different as the days will be longer and the sun higher in the sky.

Elk Point
Vermilion
18.1.11

Dear Kitty:

Thanks for the note book which I got safely by the last post.

I am afraid you will have to wait a good bit before you get any chance to ride here too, as I haven't been able to even get the logs out yet for the stable, and of course I haven't any fields penned either, so that we must wait a bit before getting a horse. The house isn't done yet either; the floors take a lot of doing.

Luckily the weather has got nice again. Since Sunday it has been lovely, especially Tuesday and today. I hope to be able to post this in Vermilion, as I intend to start about midday tomorrow so as to get there on Saturday night.

The trails are pretty good now as it hasn't snowed since last Sunday week, and they may not be so good again. Besides, I must get those shingles on before you get here, as the upstairs will never be warmer till I do.

The snow is nearly up to my knees in most places now, so that when you get off the trail it is quite hard to walk.

Yesterday the oxen ran away on me. I had gone down nearly to the far side of 26 for a load of fire wood, and when turning round in the wood they got tangled in a bush. I got off the sleigh to let them back it easily and the beggars made off at once. They had been nearly idle for about a week. I was afraid to get in front of them for fear they would smash the sleigh against the trees, so I just managed to get on to the runner of the back sleigh. I tried to walk the pole to the front sleigh but the jolting upset me and I fell off. I had to fall pretty well out so as to clear the back runners and of course I was buried in snow. When I got up they were going harder than ever and though I ran as far as I could, which in snow isn't far, I couldn't catch them. They went all the way to my house and stood there till I came up. I would have liked to lick them but it wouldn't have done any good, so I didn't. It took just an hour from the time they ran away to get them back to the same place again. I was afraid they would go home and as Mr. Drew, the old ass, always insists on leaving the stable door open, they would have tried to go in and smashed something. It really is a wonder they didn't. They never even

touched a tree when getting out of the wood. The beggars are too airy altogether lately. When spring comes and they plough a bit, it will soon tame them.

I made quite a fine chair the other night. It baffles description so I guess I will wait and let you see it for yourself. You won't swing on it much anyway.

I took these two photos last Thursday. They are very dark as they were taken inside in the house. I have rather a funny expression owing to watching the camera to see that it didn't upset when I pulled the string. It was the first time I had a linen collar on since September last so that I felt quite a swell. See the bag of Glenora flour and the flour sifter on the right. I had your Harp pendant on too. The third one was taken outside as you will see; it was a very cold day and I very nearly paid for my foolishness by getting my ears frostbitten. That was what made me try the others inside.

What do you think of the house. The boards sticking out over the end are only temporarily on to keep the paper in place.

Ask Mummy to get a couple of flat files for sharpening a mowing machine knife from (Mr. Cormier(?)) J. W. Wolfe. The files here are too soft and wear out at once, so most people use grindstones. And tell Tom he might as well pack in the big condensing lens that I bought for the home made magic lantern. I don't suppose we will want it much, but it wouldn't fetch much if sold and it cost a good bit.

P.S. I don't really (I think) look quite as big a fool as I do in the photos, so cheer up. The photos are all fixed, though they are toned brown instead of black.

Vermilion Hotel

22.1.11

Dear Mother:

As you see by the address, I got into town alive at any rate. I left at a quarter to twelve on Thursday, got to Paul Lloyd's that night late, got to bed at 2 a.m. and up again at 4:30, got to Edouard Labequins, a half breed's that night and here last night at about 5:30. Paul Lloyd came in too. I brought a

part of his load in. He brought about 25 cut of his wheat in and is taking it back again in the form of flour, bran and tailings.

We had a hard time on Friday as the cattle got played out and it got dark and we got off the trail. We let them rest a bit while we poked about in the snow till we found the trail again. Then I stood there to mark it while Paul drove one team onto it. Then I went and got the other. We were very glad to come to Ed's house.

Yesterday was the coldest day of the three and we were on the more open country too, so we got the good of the wind. I got the tips of three fingers on my left and two on the right hand frozen very slightly. I put them inside my coat and overcoat under the arms and warmed them. Needless to say, we walked nearly all the way so as to keep warm. You can't walk down hill, as if you do, the oxen are apt to upset the sleigh or run into one another. That is, the back team overtakes the first one, and bang into it.

Last night was very windy, so the trail will be all drifted in and be very heavy travelling. I guess we will hardly get started till early Tuesday as it will be late tomorrow before the flour is ready, and besides it will take me a while to get the mattress for you and the shingles, etc.

Long trips with oxen in the winters are very nasty. I think I needn't come in again till I come to meet you, when we will have longer days and warmer, I hope. I would bring a veil each if I was you, if you get a good dark one, it would do instead of the goggles for snow blindness as well as for warmth. You might as well bring the phonograph I think, and some of the best records. If convenient, bring a few flat files to sharpen a mowing machine knife, as they don't keep very hard ones here.

You will be likely to get this letter earlier than usual and likely enough you won't get any next week as the trail is reported to be drifted so I will hardly get home till Saturday, thus missing the post.

Vermilion
23.1.10

Dear Kitty:

This is to wish you many happy returns of your birthday. I don't expect to get home till after Friday so I would not be able to post you any more letters

till Feb. 3rd, and even if I direct these to the Empress of Ireland at Liverpool, it is very doubtful if you will get them.

I hope you will like the needlebook as much as I like the Harp that once you sent me.

I got my cheeks frozen again when coming in to town. I didn't know it till today. It's odd, isn't it that you don't know it when you freeze sometimes. It isn't too bad, just a bit sore. Oxen are too slow for long journeys. I hope to get back alright as I have got a face protector now.

Both Paul and I loaded up on sleighs today so that we can start at day break on Tuesday (tomorrow). I expect I will stay one day at Paul's place to rest the oxen as the trail is bad owing to the wind drifting in the snow.

I got a bedroom set today for you and Mummy's use. It isn't a beauty, but it is I think the nicest in town as I tried two places for it, and went back to the first one finally.

I had intended to go to see the Sullivans but I won't now as I will try to follow Louis Johnson out. He has a load and will improve the trail a bit. As you will have seen by the time you get this far, I can't think of any news.

I can't get your letters till I get home. I'll chance at least a letter to the boat so look out for one in the rack in the reading room when you are feeling at home on board.

Tuesday
24.1.11

Dear Fan:

We haven't started home yet, or rather we didn't get very far and came back again. We only went as far as the top of the hill at this side of Vermilion river, and as there was a hard east wind and it was 30 below zero and snowing pretty thickly, we came back.

The day was bad till about noon and then the snow stopped, and the temperature is dropping since and so is the wind. It is still cloudy. I hope the morning will be better anyway.

One good thing is that there is quite a collection of teams gathered now for the north trail. There will be at least five, but I expect when it comes to actually starting out, some will back out.

When you get to the station in Liverpool, no matter at what time of the day or night it is, if you wait about a bit you will see a representative of the C.P.R. in uniform on the platform. If you show him your luggage, he will give you a check for each piece, and then you needn't bother anymore about it. He will see that your wanted luggage is put in the right cabin, and the heavy trunks in the hold. So you can enjoy yourselves till time to go on board.

End of material I have...spelling of people's names is how he wrote them. LS