

John Graham Mills, pioneer of North Dakota, was born in the Province of Quebec, Canada, on May 23, 1854, about midway between Montreal and Quebec. He was the eldest of twelve children, of whom four were boys; John Robert, David, and Earnest, and eight were girls; Mae, Emma, Melissa, Jennie, Rachel, Geogina, Maude and Jessie. At present all are living except three sisters, Emma, Rachel and Maude.

John Mills stayed on the farm until he was twenty-one years of age, where he had to help support the large family. In 1875, he took Horace Greeley's advice, "Go West, young man," and left for Ontario. At the time he left home he was twenty-five dollars in debt.

He landed in the county of Perty, state of Ontario, among a group of good, substantial farmers, who were of English, German and Scotch descent. Mr. Mills states that these people were the best farmers he has ever had the pleasure of meeting. They were well posted in good stock raising as well as good agricultural men. It was while working here that he received his training in how to raise good stock.

He was here for about six or seven years and then started farther west.

Mr. Mills's father, William Mills, was born in the state of Ireland and came to America when eight years of age. His mother, Mabel Graham was of Scotch parentage.

His grandfather, Robert Mills, was an old British officer. He received a government grant of land for his services in the British war. Both grandfathers were pioneers in a wooded country.

In 1906, Mr. and Mrs. William Mills celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. All the children were home for the occasion and once more the family was gathered around the happy family circle, each one telling of his or her adventures in life while away from home; but nine months later, this family circle was broken when the mother passed away. Just thirteen years later, in 1919, the father passed away. Both were on the

old homestead at the time.

Thinking life would be easier on the prairie, he started for Dakota in 1830. But did not arrive here until March 26, 1831, as he spent the winter in Michigan. When Mr. Mills landed in Sanborn, N. Dak., the first person he met was Mr. Rollin C. Cooper, another of our old Pioneers, who has, in the years since then, proved to be a true friend indeed. Many are the kind deeds that have been rendered by Mr. Cooper. I am sure none will forget them.

Mr. Cooper spent all of his best days on the prairie lands of North Dakota and even now, when the birds return here in the spring, Mr. Cooper also returns to spend his summer vacation in Cooperstown, the town which was named after him. His winter months, are, however, spent in the sunny south in the state of Florida.

John Mills, before returning to Canada, drew up a contract, bought the lumber and paid the carpenters for having a house built that fall so that when he returned with his bride in the following year, a new house would be awaiting them. But when he landed here in the spring of 1832, no house was to be seen. The carpenters thought that as long as he was not returning for a year they would have plenty of time, but they had taken too much for granted.

The first thing Mr. Mills did was call in the neighbors to help him build his house, at which they agreed to do if Mr. Mills would board the men until the house was built. Of course that would be cheap carpenters, so within a week the new house was completed.

John Mills was married March 15, 1832, to Mary C. Fletcher. Miss Fletcher lived in St. Mary's, Ontario, Canada, and was one of three children. She had one brother, William older, and one brother, George, younger.

At the age of thirteen her mother died and the responsibility of taking care of her younger brother, fell on her.

She was of English parentage and her parents were pioneers of the Province of Ontario.

Many a time the deer and the antelope would come up to the wooden fence and stand and watch the children at play in the yard.

In the spring of 1882, Mr. Mills, and Duncan Sinclair, with their farm equipment started for the prairie lands of N. Dak. Three weeks later, Mrs. Mills and Mrs. Duncan Sinclair came. Mr. Mills and Mr. Sinclair came with an excursion of about thirty immigrants. They traveled on the Grand Trunk, Michigan Center, Chicago Northwester and Northern Pacific railroads. They were five and a half days on the road. Everything went fine until the Northern Pacific train, pulled in too somewhere near the Southern part of Minnesota. But nevertheless, the excursion reached Sanborn in good condition.

When Mr. Mills and Mr. Sinclair came through, from Sanborn to Hannaford, they had to break the ice before they could cross the Bald Hill creek and get up to their farms.

When Mrs. Sinclair and Mrs. Mills reached Sanborn, they had to stop at the W. T. McCulloch home in Sanborn, as they had no home to go to as yet. Mr. Mills telegraphed the two women and told them not to come yet at neither home was finished, but as the depot agent forgot to take the address of Mrs. Mills, he did not know where to send it to and so he never sent the telegram at all. So the women came. Only one week was spent in Sanborn and then they came North to Hannaford, to occupy their own new home.

The home in which Mrs. Mills went to was considered an "up-to-date" home as it was the first two-story house in that community. If we should see such a house today we would hardly think it fit for a granary to say nothing of a house. The kitchen floor was one made by nature and most everywhere you looked, the sunlight would be shining through small cracks in the wall. In 1894, an addition of four rooms were built on and then it looked more like a house of a civilized ~~XXXX~~ man.

In June 26, 1883, a son, Milton Ethelbert, was born. His boyhood days were spent at home until the age of twenty-three, when he left home and started a farm of his own just one-half mile west of the old homestead. When he moved to New York state in 1919, the place was rented to Robert Pittenger, who now resides on the place.

On January 1, 1914, he was married to Maude Parrish of Illinois. No children have been born to them, but they have adopted two boys.

September 18, 1886, a daughter, Mabel Elizabeth was born to Mr. and Mrs. John Mills. Her younger life was spent at home. At the age of fifteen she left for Minneapolis, where she attended high school. After finishing her four years of high school she spent one year at the Music Conservatory at Fargo. She then taught Music and drawing for one year at Cavalier and the following year she taught high school at Hannaford, for a period of three months. The next year, 1912, she was married to Mr. Eli W. Parker, of Lake Mills, Iowa. One child, Jeane Winifred, was born to them.

April 22, 1888, a third child, George William was born to Mr. and Mrs. John Mills. All his life has been spent on the old homestead, now located three and one half miles north of Hannaford. On March 6, 1912, he was united in marriage to Veda B. Shepherd of Cooperstown, North Dakota. To them four children have been born: Lucille Mae, Florence Eleanor, Jeannete Evelyn and John Rodney.

March 30, 1912, Mr. and Mrs. John Mills moved to town and have since made their home there.

When John Mills came to occupy his grant of land, it was not surveyed, so he had to "squat" on it. All he had received was a "Squatters Right." He had to do his own surveying as it was only surveyed in townships and not in sections.

When the land was surveyed for sections, the section line was put through the house. It went through a window and then out through a door, but when the surveyors noticed this they went back and surveyed the line over again and this time the line was put about two rods from the back door

step.

After July 12, 1882, the homestead was located in Griggs County, Bald Hill, Township 145, Section 22 and 28, range 59.

The farmers who wanted to file on land in North Dakota had to go to Fargo to receive their rights. In order to be the first one to get his papers, John Mills slept in the window of the land office building in Fargo all night. He wanted to be the first one in Bald Hill to receive his claim.

The following years, he put out two tree claims, each consisting of ten acres, but both years it was a complete failure.

In the year of 1885 there were no crops, as a settler on the other side of the James River wanted to see what a prairie fire was like, so he started a stubble burning just at the other side of the river bank, but as everything was "bone dry" that year, and the river was very low, the sparks soon leaped over the small stream. As a result, the fire kept spreading and finally resulted in a real prairie fire, which took all crops and everything in its path.

In 1886, Mr. Mills's crop consisted of eight shocks of wheat, a wheelbarrow of potatoes and a few oats, which were threshed by Soren Beyg. He threshed all forenoon of one day and did not get enough oats to feed the mules which were hauling all the water for the machine. The next year the same land produced wheat which averaged twenty-four bushels to the acre.

The crop of 1888 was froze out, but as there was plenty of feed so that nothing suffered from it.

During the years which followed, some were very prosperous years and some were very hard years, but still the family was happy as there was no sickness or hungry people.

From the year John Mills landed in North Dakota, he practised diversidied farming. This was one of the hobbies of the early farmers, but few were very successful. Mr. Mills bought the first spreader that

was shipped into Griggs County. The first cornbinder was brought home but no one knew how to put it together. Finally Ram Hazzar, who had only driven a cornbinder for half a day, started putting it together. Gradually they found a place for every piece and the cornbinder was ready for use.

The first binder he bought was a Plano, which cost originally three-hundred dollars, but after making a few offers, the price was cut to two-hundred and sixty dollars. This proved to be a good binder though, as it was used for fourteen years. He also bought a mowing machine and a rake, which amounted to one-hundred dollars.

John Mills helped haul the lumber which was used to build the first house of Cooperstown. At present the house is located near the courthouse. The lumber had to be hauled from Sanborn, which was a distance of twenty-eight miles from the homestead, and about thirty-eight from the present site of Cooperstown.

Anyone coming to North Dakota had a hard time at first as the methods and customs of farming were entirely different from those of the other countries. As Mr. Mills states, "Good common sense went a longer ways than some of the proved theories."

In 1880, was the last buffalo hunt. When the pioneers of '81 came here, there were no buffalos, just a lot of bones. However, there were plenty of deer and antelope roaming through the country. There were also plenty of geese, One day the geese were so thick that they could hardly plow through them. Another day Mr. Mills shot and wounded five with the one shot.

The first post-office of that neighborhood was located at Duncan Sinclairs. Four miles north and one mile west of Hannaford. At present Anton Painter lives on the place. This post-office was called Mount Claire. A few years later it was moved to the Northern Pacific section house.

The first election was held in 1882. The principal question was;

Should they move the County Seat to Cooperstown or leave it at Hope. There was a big pull between the two places but Cooperstown finally won out and the County Seat was moved to Cooperstown. It was not moved until 1884, tho, as the Courthouse was not finished until then.

The first officers of this election were: Sam Sansborn, John Houghton and John Mills. These three men worked till five O'clock in the morning making out the returns for the election.

The first records of 1883 for Griggs County were kept in one of R. C. Cooper's grainarys. They were kept here for only one year though as the courthouse was built the following year.

During this one year the records were discovered to be missing twice. The first time they were found at Cooperstown. The officers here had stolen them from Hope, as they wanted to look over the records. Later they were again misses from the grainary and it was found that the people of Hope had stolen them from the granary for the same reason. However, when the officials of Hope returned them to the granary, they were in perfect condition.

Mrs. Mills tells of one incident where a man came riding past her house shouting that the Indians were coming. Not knowing what to do or where to hide, she decided that the best thing to do would be to just stand in the door-way and watch for them. If she hid they would find her anyway. Late that afternoon, she saw a group of horsemen coming over the hill at the North. Yes, that must be them, but as they drew closer, she found it to be Mr. Cooper and his men. They were moving from Sanborn to Mr. Cooper's ranch up by Cooperstown.

In 1903, John Mills decided that he would like to raise cattle. He started with four head of pureBread Herefords. From the small beginning, the heard increased to a good size.

In 1910, he exhibited at the fair in Fargo. In 1912, he again exhibited all around the circuit and was then made one of the charter members of the State Fair Board, and was president of the Griggs

County Fair Association for nineteen years, missing only one Fair meeting in that time.

When Mr. Mills left the farm in 1912, his youngest son bought all of the stock. Since then he has taken charge of the stock raising. At present he owns about sixty head of Herefords.

When George Mills took over the stock, for a few years he exhibited at the fair, but as time went on, there was more work to do on the farm, and so the idea of going on with the exhibiting, was given up, and since then no exhibiting has been done.

At the Fourth Annual Portrait Gallery held in Fargo in 1925, Mr. Mills was one of the two men of North Dakota to have his picture hung in the Saddle and Siroloin Club Hall of fame. W. L. Richards of Dickinson, North Dakota, was the other person to be so honored.

Mr. Mills was elected to the Hall of Fame for his outstanding work in trying to better the agriculture in North Dakota.

During the year 1925, there were eight men who had^{had} their portraits placed in the Hall of Fame; namely, James H. Bosard, Grand Forks; John Christiansen, New Salem; James B. Power, Leonard; Oscar H. Will, Bismarck; Frank Sanford, Valley City; David Clark, Botteneau; and E. C. Butler of Cooperstown.

If both Mr. And Mrs. John Mills keep their health and remain well, they expect to celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary next June. The Date falls on *March 15*, 1932, but as they expect all the children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters and all relation to attend, they have set the date for sometime in June, so that all can be present.

EARLY DAYS IN GRIGGS COUNTY

by John Mills

In the early days, the land was not surveyed in Griggs County so the settlers "squatted" on the land and received a "Squatters" Right". The settlers had to do their own surveying as the townships and sections were not platted as yet. The settlers who wanted to file on land in N. Dakota had to go to Fargo to receive their right.

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In 1886, there were no crops. In that year the crop of John Mills living in Bald Hill Tp. consisted of eight shocks of wheat, a wheelbarrow of potatoes and a few oats.

The crops of 1888 froze out in Griggs County but as there was plenty of feed, nothing suffered.

In 1880 was the last buffalo hunt. When the pioneers of 1881 came to what is now Griggs County, there were no buffaloes, just a lot of buffalo bones. However, there were plenty of deer and antelope. There were also plenty of geese. One day the geese were so thick, that the settlers could hardly plow through them.

Bibliography:

Griggs County Sentinel-Courier
Jan. 21 and Jan. 28, 1888
From the life of John Mills, written by his granddaughter.