

*Birtle Manitoba*  
*Episode No. X1*  
*The Year 1903*

*On my arrival at Birtle on Apr. 13<sup>th</sup> 1903 I went at once to the Parsonage and Rev. A. B. Osterhout, as an old friend of ours who had been Father's colleague for a year on the Coboconk circuit. He welcomed me with open arms and after a talk together we went downtown and he introduced me to many of the businessmen of the town.*

*Birtle was and is a lovely little town in the valley of the Birdtail River about 200 miles West of Winnipeg. It is one of the oldest towns in Manitoba being incorporated in 1890 [1884] though even before that there was quite a settlement here. In the early days it was a regular stopping place on the old Historic Hudson Bay trail between Wpg. and Edmonton. When I arrived the old ruts made by the Red River carts which travelled this way were still plain to be seen There is a wonderful spring of clear cold water on the banks of the river below the town which no doubt helped to make it a popular stopping place.*

*The people when I arrived in 1903 were practically all English speaking either from Ont. or the Old Land.*

*After a general introduction by Mr. Osterhout, I succeeded in making contact with a Mr. Tom Patterson who had just completed the erection of a three-story cement block in the centre of the town. He proved a nice man to do business with and was very sympathetic to my project. He said he would put in a skylight for me in some rooms on the top story of the block if I would agree to rent them for at least two years. For this I was to have the use of three rooms, two of them made into one for a combined posing and workroom and the other a small room I could use as a dressing room and bedroom and all for \$6 per month. In view of what I had heard in other places this seemed very reasonable and, as I was now anxious to get started, I decided that I could not do better anywhere so accepted this offer and decided to remain in Birtle.*

*This is a decision I have never regretted though I must confess that seven years later when I saw towns West of here spring up over night I got pretty restless as the old saying, "distant fields look green" was beginning to apply. In fact, I felt so dissatisfied that, in 1910, I packed part of my belongings, picked up my grip and departed West to once more spy out the land.*

*On this trip I travelled between three and four thousand miles and visited at least twenty towns, new and old, but finally returned to Birtle more satisfied than ever to remain at the old stand.*

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*It was June 1<sup>st</sup> by the time my Studio was quite ready for business but before that date I had taken several outdoor groups, one being a group of the Methodist Preachers of the Birtle District. Business started right off with a bang. I had 16 sittings the first week and 46 for the month of June with a total value of \$111.50. This looked like a fortune to me as indeed it was compared to the amount I had previously been receiving. For many years Birtle had been having a big day of sports on July 1<sup>st</sup> but not knowing what to expect this first year I made no extra preparation for this event other than to announce in the Birtle Eye Witness that I was open and ready for business. But I soon discovered that on that day people came from all the country around for a radius of from 25 to 35 miles and having driven that far made the best of their opportunities and did all the business possible while in town. It was something quite new to them to have a good Photographer in Birtle so they proceeded to take advantage of it. The only mistake any of them made was to wait until the big sports were over to come to the Studio with the result that many of them were too late and had to be turned away. As it was I did \$54.00 worth of business that first Dominion Day though on several such days later I did nearly three times that amount.*

*When I came to Birtle in 1903 there were the following business places viz:*

<i>4 General Stores</i>	<i>2 Hardware Stores</i>
<i>2 Drug Stores</i>	<i>2 Harness Shops</i>
<i>1 Dry Goods Store</i>	<i>2 Butcher Shops</i>
<i>1 Furniture Store</i>	<i>1 Shoe Shop</i>
<i>1 Bakery</i>	<i>1 Chartered Bank</i>
<i>1 Laundry</i>	<i>1 Private Bank</i>
<i>1 Lumber Yard</i>	<i>2 Blacksmiths</i>
<i>1 Newspaper</i>	<i>3 Farm Machinery Dealers</i>
<i>1 Flour Mill</i>	<i>1 Law Office</i>
<i>3 Elevators</i>	<i>1 Land Office</i>
<i>1 Public School</i>	<i>2 Hotels - Without license</i>
<i>1 Indian Training School</i>	<i>1 Restaurant</i>
<i>4 Churches, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Baptist</i>	
<i>1 Barber Shop</i>	

*During this summer my cousin Art Parker wrote to me and wanted to know if there was any chance of him coming out and learning the business with me. As business still kept coming I could see that it was going to be very*

*difficult for me to carry on alone, so after considerable correspondence Art and I came to a mutual agreement and subsequently arrived from Ont. On Sat. Sept. 12, 1903 in the midst of a howling blizzard. What you say, a howling blizzard in Sept.? Exactly, but one that was very much out of season.*

*On Friday of that week I had been called to go about seven miles South West of town to photograph a beautiful field of wheat with two binders operating. It was a lovely afternoon and I got a splendid picture. Early the next morning, Sept. 12<sup>th</sup>, it began to rain, then became quite cold and the rain turned to snow and stuck and froze to everything, the trees became so loaded that one of them broke down and of course all the grain, of which only half was cut, was flattened to the ground. By the time the afternoon train came in it was snowing and blowing just like a blizzard in Jan. In fact on the branch line at Hamiota only about 30 miles from Birtle the R.R. had to get out their snow plough to open the road. The following Monday the sun was once more shining brightly as it does about 75% of the time in this country and in no time at all the snow was all gone and the fields once more dry. The grain which was all so badly flattened had to be cut by running the binders one way only but nearly all of it was salvaged and turned out an A.1 grade. We had a very busy fall in the Studio, between the time of the big snow storm and Dec. 31<sup>st</sup> we took 150 orders.*

## *The Year 1904*

### *Arthur and I Get Lost*

*Art and I had a funny experience. It was one of the few times we ever got lost on the prairie trails. We had an order from Sam Falloon to drive out to his place and take photos of his big stone house and barns and his large family. We were to go on the day of the Sports at Foxwarren, be at his house in time to get the photos before noon, have our dinner and then drive to Foxwarren Sports. Falloon lived about 15 miles North East of Birtle so we started early. It was a fine day though slightly cloudy and we were jogging along with "Old Frank" my favourite driver and taking in the scenery as we went. About four miles out we came to a small side ravine leading into Snake Creek Valley. We went down the ravine, crossed the creek and up the steep hill on the other side. The creek had about two feet of water in it and no bridge where we crossed it, but we just waded through. There was a house a short distance from the top of the hill so we went in there to ask for further directions. The farmer came out and when we told him where we were going he said we could go back to the trail we were on or just go on through the barn yard and follow the best trail around the straw stack until we met the other one. We did this but, as the trail seemed to get worse, we decided we hadn't gone far enough yet, so kept on going and presently came to the edge of another valley. I was very much in doubt about it so got out and walked down some distance. There was a faint trail and no sign of any water so we knew it couldn't be Snake Creek again, so we kept on and presently came to a good trail running up a side ravine to the top of the hill and decided we must be ok. We followed this up for a mile or so when suddenly I stopped the horse and exclaimed to Art, "Do you know we are headed back to Birtle?" Art said, "You're crazy, how could that be? We never crossed Snake Creek the second time, what makes you so sure about it?" and I replied, "Do you see that apple barrel hoop, well that was on the other side of the trail about an hour ago, stand up and look backward." He did so and said, "I believe you are right. But how did we cross that creek and what will we do now?" We decided we were too late to get back to Falloons before they went to the Sports so I said, "We better go home, Art, and you go up to Foxwarren on the afternoon train, see Falloons, make arrangements to go home with them after the Sports, take the photos tomorrow morning and come home on the morning train. Art did this and got some good photos and we got a good order. Two things had worked against us that morning. First, there was no sun and second, a short distance up the valley from where we crossed the creek the first time it ran under ground for a quarter of a mile or more so we had crossed it on dry land the second time, came back up the same trail we had gone down on, only in the opposite direction and were happy on our homeward way once more. It was a silly thing to do and something we never forgot.*

## *The Year 1906*

*The first of July was on Sunday this year so was celebrated on Monday the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Harry Copeland was chief constable and a good friend of mine and we often used to make pictures together at his home across the river. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> a few of the boys and I bought some little fancy canes, these canes had an iron cap on the bottom with a small slot where one could insert a small dynamite cap. We could walk along unconcerned and nothing would happen but tap the cane a bit hard on the cement walk and, bang, it would go like a pistol shot. We were having lots of fun walking up behind folks and shooting them off and even if they turned around they were not sure what did it as they could see nothing that caused it. Outside of a little scare it was doing absolutely no harm to anyone or anything. After a short time, Copeland came along and told us to stop that, that we were scaring the horses. As a matter of fact we never shot them off near any horses, we couldn't see why we should stop so when we thought Copeland wasn't around we would let them go bang, of course he heard them and I guess got a little nettled that we didn't listen to his authority. On the morning of July 5<sup>th</sup> we were all served with the following notice on printed forms of course -*

*“To A.J. Lawrence - Whereas you have this day been charged before the undersigned one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace or Police Magistrate in the Prov. Of Manitoba that you on the Second day of July A.D. 1906 at Birtle, did cause a disturbance on the Main St. by discharging fireworks after being warned by a Constable to desist, these are therefore to command you in his Majesty's name to be and appear before me on Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> day of July A.D. 1906 at 1:30 O'clock in the afternoon in the Town Hall to answer to the said charge and be further dealt with according to law. Herein fail not.*

*Given under my hand and seal this 5<sup>th</sup> day of July 1906.*

*H.A. Manwaring*

*Note: When I appeared before Manwaring he said if I would plead guilty and promise not to do it again he would let me off easy, which I did and paid \$3.00. But what I have been mad about ever since was that, like a little kid, I promised not to do it again. In light of what I know now I don't believe they could have stuck that charge on me as they would have had a hard time trying to prove a few things but Manwaring sure worked it beautifully and all paid up.*

*Copeland and I have had many a good laugh about it since. This was the first and only time I was ever summoned to court.*

## *The Year 1912*

*In May we started on our new Studio in Birtle. It was provoking that I had to go up the line every month (to his studios in other towns) as it resulted in me having one raw deal and almost two pulled on me while away. I hired Russ. Eason to built the Studio and he got Tom Laidman to help him. These men were not masons so I hired Sam Templar who is now our town Constable to put in the foundation and plaster inside walls. He had a young English boy who was as green as grass to help him. Eason was a really good carpenter but when they had the walls up and the roof on they ran out of material for the ceiling, this was to be a special material about ¼ inches thick tongued and grooved, the walls of heavier material but not nearly so nice a finish. When I arrived home they had just stacked all of the material inside the studio but it was all of the kind for the walls. I asked Eason about it and he said that was all they had on hand, the ceiling material was somewhere on the road. I told them they were not to put that on the ceiling and the next day the other arrived so they had to change it but had it been a day later arriving most of it would have been on.*

*I decided to put hardwall plaster on the inside of the main wall as it was supposed to be the best and would not chip when nailed. Sam had lathed the walls and plastered them just the day before and they looked dry but when I scratched my thumb nail across it the plaster fell right off. Was I mad about it and asked Eason what the matter was. He said that the plaster should not have been put on until the door and windows had in as the hot winds blowing through had dried the plaster before it set. These men were supposed to know their business and Eason had let them go and pull that stunt. I was afraid it was all going to have to come off and I didn't know who was going to pay for it. I called Sam in and asked him what he was going to do about it and he said he thought if I throw a lot of water on it, it would still set, I tried what he said and it looked as if it would work but I said I'm not throwing water on it you can come and do it yourself. The next morning he sent up his green hand but he didn't know enough to put the water on properly so I had to turn in and help him but I kept him carrying water all day.*

*This building cost \$775.25 and the land \$150.00 making a total of \$925.25 with probably a few extras.*

*I drew the plans for the whole building myself and there has only been one small change I had to make. The building was finished late in June and when we were ready to move I carried everything out of the other studio into the back yard and went over them with a fine toothcomb as they say. I even*

*burned the mattress off my bed in an effort to hunt out all the bed bugs. There had been plenty of these in some parts of the block (Patterson) but all I ever found were a few skeletons behind some of the picture frames. Some folks claim that cold won't kill bed bugs but I fully believe that the cold killed these but of course they might have partly starved out. But I never found one in my new Studio.*

*When everything was fixed up the place looked fine and it was a great relief not to have any steps to climb. I put in a water system whereby I could catch five barrels of beautiful clean rainwater off my metal roof and any overflow kept going on through and out again so in case of a long rain it kept on running through and clearing out all the stale water. This was one of the biggest work savers I ever had.*

### *Fun on the Train*

*To end up the day (after umping five girls' baseball games at the Grain Growers Picnic in Shoal Lake) when I got to the train station I was passing between the excursion train and a freight when two fellows I knew quite well from Birtle happened to see me. They had been drinking too much and one of them said, "Here's little Lawrence, let's put him in through the open window into the laps of those women." So they grabbed me and heaved me up. I knew there was no use resisting so to save getting hurt in the process I helped myself up all I could and landed right into the ladies' laps. Of course they all knew me, everyone did around here those days so they just had a good laugh. A little later as the train began to fill up I lost both my seat and my cap. I think one of the girls had swiped it on me. I was hot and sweaty, my hair down over my face and some of the boys had broken my fancy little cane, so I joined with the gang that was parading up and down the train waving my broken cane and hollering and singing, even some of the people from Birtle thought maybe I was drunk as one lady said to another, "Is Lawrence really drunk?" so I got lot a fun out of it and it was all the fun I had that day.*

*We used to have great sport out of those excursions heaps more than going by car. The C.P.R. asked a certain amount to run the train and half of any extra we collected over that amount," we put our own price on the tickets and took our chance on the weather but we never went in the hole and sometimes cleared fifty or one hundred dollars.*

*Given a fine day and good roads a Sports Committee could count on taking in ten or fifteen hundred dollars at the gate. Those were the good old days.*

## *The Year 1913*

*The new Studio in Rosburn gave us all plenty to do and it kept me especially busy going from one town to another. In fact I got pretty tired of it after a while as I never seem to have any home town. Two towns had church service at 7 P.M. and two at 7:30 P.M. and I never could remember which was which.*

*On July 9<sup>th</sup> I went down to the G.G. Picnic at Shoal Lake but no more umping for me. The previous year had been too much for me, I couldn't sleep all that night thinking it over and over all night and got up next morning feeling very tough. I wouldn't have done it again for ten times the money.*

*In Oct. this year the Manitoba Gov't put on a photo contest to get some pictures for advertising purposes. Meeres and I took part in it and won prizes worth \$21.00 which we considered pretty fair. Jessop of Gladstone was in it and he got first prize and won a bit more than we did all told.*

## *The Year 1914 War is Declared*

*This was the year that war was declared on Aug. 4<sup>th</sup>. Immediately after the boys around town and district began to enlist and they started their training in Birtle. They had a large tent along the side of the Birtle Hotel, the boys slept there and boarded at the Hotel. They had some sort of training for a while but nothing like they gave them during the Second War and there were thousands of them waiting for their uniforms.*

*I took a photo of the 100<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers from Birtle and later took photos of two other contingents. During the first war they would go away in large groups and more than half the town, accompanied by the Band, would go with them to the station. These were sad and exciting times.*