

He Lived All Winter in a Tent

His uncanny knowledge of horses—Owen Sound horses in particular—resulted in one of Moose Jaw's better known citizens making this city his home when he was on his way to Lethbridge in May, 1910.

It was those horses that brought Frank McRitchie from the train on which he was travelling westwards. It was the horses that decided the youth of 23 years to stop off here for a few days; days which stretched into years and on to most of his lifetime. He worked here in a variety of jobs before settling down as a partner in the Ottawa Real Estate and Brokerage Co., a business in which he is still engaged.

Born at Bothwell, Ontario, Frank McRitchie attended public and high schools there before entering the service of the Merchants' Bank at Thamesville, Ontario, in 1907.

He also served with the bank at Hanover and Owen Sound, Ontario, until, with a group of four other boys, he decided to go on a home-seeker's excursion to Lethbridge, Alberta, there to join with another former Merchants' Bank employee who had written to them "to come to the land of opportunity."

Those were the boom days and this former bank employee wrote to his pals that he had made a profit of \$50 inside of two weeks, on a real estate deal.

Frank and his friends decided that the Lethbridge youth was dreaming a bit but decided to go out and see for themselves.

C'mon, Fellas!

As Frank McRitchie tells the story of 33 years ago, he was tired of riding on a train by the time Moose Jaw was reached. As all trains used to stop here for half an hour, he went through the old station and looked up the street. It was a wide street "and seemed to beckon me to stop," he says, so he went back to the railway car and asked the others to get off with him for a couple of days.

They would have none of it and insisted that they all stay together and go on to Lethbridge, their originally selected destination.

"I sat down for perhaps five minutes," says Frank McRitchie speaking of that trip to the land of promise, "then went out for another look and saw dashing through the gumbo, pitch holes and mud of Main Street, the Moose Jaw fire department with two Owen Sound horses doing their best."

He rushed back and told the other boys what he had seen and they got a great laugh at the idea of Owen Sound horses away out here.

Frank had always been very fond of horses and had trained and cared for blood horses when he was at home, where they had trained high-stepping hackneys, matched drivers, etc. He used to think that he could tell what a horse was thinking about. He knew them so well and he knew that he had seen before those horses which were now drawing the fire department equipment in Moose Jaw.

So he got off the train here alone



Times-Herald Staff Photo

FRANK McRITCHIE

... horses from home.

and went to the fire department headquarters, where he discovered that Mr. Frost had brought a carload of horses from Owen Sound, and that he was right.

"I was very lonely but decided to try and stay here," says Frank.

By the second day he had a position as accountant for Grayson and Armstrong, lawyers, who had an office next to McIntyre and Fells (now McIntyre's cafe).

His next experience was not so good.

Gambler

"I looked up an address book that I had taken along to see if I could find the name of anyone here whose address had been given to me in the east in case I happened to stop here," says this well-known real estate man.

"I had addresses of people all across the prairies and I was pleased when I found a minister in Ontario had given me the address of a nephew of his who was supposed to have a Sunday School class of boys. I hunted him up and in a few minutes he asked me how much money I had. I told him \$325. He said: 'Let me have the \$300 and I'll double it for you inside of a month.' He got my \$300, I am ashamed to say. However, I got my eyeteeth cut with that experience."

Being broke before the first month's pay came along, Frank worked in a shoe store just north of the Bank of Nova Scotia after hours from the law office, and he also fed two horses for a piano company and another for a private owner.

"Between the two jobs and what I got for attending to the horses, I was doing fine. Then, too, I always had a horse to drive on Sundays."

This accountant, store clerk and horse tender met a fellow named Jack Kelsie and between them they decided to buy a tent and "batch."

They used four soap boxes for a bedstead and Frank's trunks for a table.

When winter came along they dared each other to stick it out another week, and they finally stayed all winter in the tent.

They put newspapers over their heads, fastening the paper on with wool caps, and had blankets and cow hide to cover them and "got along fine."

They're There Yet

In the summer of 1910 a new sidewalk was built on Main Street between Fairford and Ominica St. on the east side and Frank McRitchie stuck a heel plate and a button hook in the fresh cement—deep in.

This was in front of the shoe store, north of the new Willson Stationery store. The hook and steel plate are still there in the sidewalk, says Frank McRitchie.

While he was working for Grayson and Armstrong, they drew the partnership papers for the Ottawa Real Estate and Brokerage Co. and with about \$75 saved, Frank decided to invest.

He went to the Ottawa Real Estate Company and offered them \$50 for a 30 days' option to buy a little cottage and promised that in the meantime he would paint the house himself in his spare time. Before he got the house all painted he sold it for \$250 profit, took up his option and got ready for another deal. After winning seven or eight times in this way, the company offered him a job, promising to pay him as much as he was making at all the other jobs, plus a commission, so he took it on.

Absence Makes . . .

In a month he left them and was in business for one day when the firm offered to take him in as a partner and in 1911 Frank McRitchie was back as a partner.

The firm members were all much older men than he was, and now Mr. McRitchie is the only original Ottawa Real Estate Company partner.

In 1913 he went back to Thamesville, Ontario, where he married Miss Alice Fern Harmer, his former opposition in business. She was the cashier in her father's private bank, Mayhew and Harmer, while he was with the Merchants Bank there.

They have three sons, Frank Harmer McRitchie, who graduated in engineering at Saskatchewan University and who now is working on engineering research at Columbia University, U.S.A.; Hubert Harmer McRitchie, a partner with his father in the Ottawa Real Estate Company at the same High St. W. address where the company started business in 1910, and the youngest son, Robert Harmer McRitchie, attending the Central Collegiate.

His interest in animals was shown when he planned an orphanage for young wild animals rescued from forest fires and in 1928 he promoted the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park, raised and paid off more than \$10,000 of debts, made improvements and managed it until 1940, when he left it free of debt, with feed on hand and money in the bank.