Three European Emigrants' Experiences in Canada

From the Old Country to the New Home

Part I.

The Journey

Three European emigrants—let's call them "A," "B," and "C"—got to know each other on an ocean liner bound for Halifax.

The mouth of the St. Lawrence River is frozen from November to the end of April, during this time ocean-going ships dock in Halifax in eastern Canada. After the break-up of the ice, ocean liners go up to Quebec or even Montreal.

The more than eight-days-long voyage brings people close together, they exchange their thoughts and experiences. [Our three passengers] left their homeland because of the unbearable economic conditions after the war.

Each of them is married, each is a gown-up man. They could only manage to come up with the money necessary for their own journey and one of them even had to borrow money. They decided to leave their families behind for the time being. . . . They knew that there would be no easy money in Canada and realized that they were not going to be able to see their families for several years.

"B" received his immigration papers and money for the journey from relatives in Alberta. "A" and "C" obtained the necessary documents through the shipping companies. All they had was hand luggage that could be carried on the train without any difficulty. . . . It was March and springtime in Europe. They have heard of the severe Canadian winters, so they had their warm winter clothes with them. Indeed, they needed them even during the crossing of the Atlantic. . . .

During the journey in Europe, passenger "A" left the train at a small station to have a drink of alpine mineral water. He missed his train and was left without a hat and jacket in the cold night. Since he could not speak German it was very difficult to get information. Fortunately, his passport, train and ocean-liner tickets remained with him [and he rejoined the others a day later without serious difficulties]. "B" accidentally dropped his wallet, containing his passport, from the window of the train. He reported the loss of documents at the next station which were then located a short time later along the train tracks and mailed to the shipping agency.

They all had life insurance for the journey but, as the result of "C" 's reasoning, they realized that it was not a good idea to take these papers with them. "C" reclaimed the insurance papers from his agency and sent them

back to his wife. In case of an accident on the open sea such insurance papers would disappear forever. . . .

In Hamburg all third-class passengers were housed in the same hotel. They were kept under surveillance for four days for possible health problems. From this point on, their meals and lodging were taken care of by the shipping agency. The first and second-class passengers were allowed to find their own accommodation. They were not kept in one place for four days—unless they desired such an arrangement.

After their arrival all third class passengers were examined by doctors. At this health inspection the doctors checked whether the would-be-passengers did not have any physical shortcomings (such as hernias or missing fingers). Passengers with disabilities were sent back by Canadian immigration officers at the expense of the shipping company. After the health inspection, the passengers could leave the hotel but their luggage had to be left in a common room to which they had access once a day.

Those who were found to be sick were placed under quarantine in a local hospital until they could continue their journey.

All passengers went through one more health inspection on the day of departure. . . . Travel documents were [also] thoroughly examined and the customs officials once again checked the luggage. The passengers had full board during the crossing of the Atlantic. For alcoholic drinks each passenger had to pay separately. . . . Hand luggage was allowed into the cabins. Larger parcels were kept in a room designated for such a purpose; the passengers had access to them during the day.

Each traveler was allowed to take 150 pounds (67 1/2 kg.) of luggage without extra fee. This weight allowance was valid on the ocean liner as well as on the trains in Canada.

The three friends got to know every nook and cranny of their ocean liner during the long voyage. Most of [their fellow passengers] who became sea sick, stayed in their cabins. Some people, in order to avoid the same fate, did not eat for days, yet they became ill. Others, the more they ate, the better they felt themselves. As in most instances, the best is to take the middle of the road and not to overdo things. Those who had the foresight to take some cognac and red wine with them were fortunate as these drinks helped to alleviate their sickness.

Some play[ed] games on the deck and in the common rooms. The card and dice players tend to retreat to the less frequented places or to private cabins.

The importance of [inexperienced passengers] avoiding gambling cannot be stressed enough. Experienced gamblers recognize the "greens" who are easy prey; they organize card games and usually come out on top . . . By the end of the journey many [passengers] wonder how they will borrow cash when they reach post. Most of the experienced gamblers disappear

by this time and, in any case, they make a point of not lending money to anyone. . . .

Upon arrival, the Canadian authorities board the liner and examine the papers and the state of health of the passengers. After that, the disembarkation can start.

Halifax is a harbour town; the city has not of much interest to the passengers since they are to continue their journeys for many more days to different destinations in Canada.

The hand-bags are carried by the passengers. Everyone goes through one more health and luggage inspection on the shore. Those who have larger parcels will have to mail them in person to their final destination in Canada; the shipping is free of charge for up to 150 pounds.

The train tickets are obtained against vouchers issued by the shipping agencies. The officials of these agencies remind the passengers once more that their immigration visas were obtained under certain conditions: they have to settle in the Prairie provinces and undertake agricultural work. Those who are exempt from these conditions have special permits.

The three friends planned to travel together to Winnipeg, where they would part company. The journey from Halifax to Winnipeg takes about four days. The immigrants are put on a train called "Colonist" which is equipped with hanging beds and stoves. The latter can be used for cooking, as people have to fend for themselves as far as meals are concerned. Food for the long journey is usually bought in Halifax since the stations along the route rarely sell foodstuffs and when they do, everything is very expensive. . . .

The scenery passing before the passengers' eyes is unusually untamed for Europeans. The trip from Halifax to Winnipeg does not go through any large cities, except for Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa. Most of the time the landscape alternates between forests, lakes, and marshes. The forests are in a very poor condition, especially in Ontario. Next to the tracks, most of the forest is either burned down or the best quality timber removed; the rest is left behind to rot. The soil from the rocky terrain is washed away in such a way that no new forest and not even grass can grow again. This phenomenon can be observed only near to the tracks, further afield the primeval Canadian forest stretches into the northern wilderness. After entering Manitoba, the landscape gradually becomes more and more even, and about 40 kilometers before Winnipeg, begin the seemingly endless plain of the prairies.

Winnipeg is the capital of Manitoba and has a population of about 230,000 people. It is the intellectual and commercial centre of the Prairies . . . The Canadian Government has an "Immigration Office" here, whose director has the authority to make decisions on his own. This government bureau is next to the office building of the Canadian Pacific Railways.

Here, newly arrived immigrants can stay free of charge until they find employment; however, they have to obtain food on their own.

Winnipeg has a number of foreign diplomatic [*sic*, consular] offices. Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia maintain bureaus here to protect immigrants.

The three friends decided to find three different ways to establish themselves in Canada. "A" was going to apply for a Homestead. Since "B" was sponsored by relatives, he was to work for them for two or three years, then he planned to buy some land. "C" was going to rent a small farm. They agreed to meet in six years and discuss their experiences. As "B" was the only one who had a fixed address, the others agreed to contact him first.

"A" was going to head for a region of Saskatchewan where crown lands were being distributed for cultivation. "B" went to Alberta to stay with his relatives. "C," on the advice of a real estate agent, went to inspect a small farm in Manitoba which was up for rent.

Canadian railways have reduced fares for all westbound immigrants until they reach their destination . . . The discount is 2/3 of the regular passenger fare. Consequently, each immigrant pays little more than a penny for each mile traveled.

The three friends, after spending only a few hours in Winnipeg, parted in the knowledge that in their sixth year they would meet again. They exchanged only their addresses during the six years and decided to meet in the month of December of the sixth year. They met again at the residence of "A" who had settled in Saskatchewan.

The first to give an account of the story of the past six years was the host.

A's Story

As you already know, I live in Saskatchewan. That crown land was obtainable in this district, I found out from the Winnipeg Immigration Commissioner's Office, where I also found out that it can be claimed at the Crown Land Agency in a town 30 miles from here. I managed to extend my discount ticket for that distance and, after a day's travel, I reached my destination.

It being a Sunday, I left my luggage at the train station at what was the end of the line. Among the people that were just coming out of church, I found one settler who had immigrated here long ago from Galicia. With my little knowledge of Slovak I managed to make myself understood to him as much as it was necessary.

There were already new immigrants in the town who had not yet decided what to do. They had all come to homestead, but they were frightening each other away from making a start of it because of the hardships involved.

The [local] farmers, on the other hand, seeing the arrival of ever more immigrants who were willing to hire themselves out, offered very low wages, which for the spring months did not exceed $22.00 a month in addition to board.

My Galician friend spoke favorably about the quality of the surrounding land. The climatic conditions were no worse than in Canada generally. Wheat, rye, barley, oats, flax, and potatoes grow here. The produce was bought by the elevator companies, and the livestock was purchased by the occasional traveling merchant.

The crown lands started about 25 miles from the town and the railway station. North of here there were large regions available which were partly covered by forests and shrubby pasturelands.

Those wanting a homestead felt that the lands were too far from the railroad. As it often is in these cases, everyone had some objection. As a rule, those who saw the lands the least, complained the most. To join those who were deliberating, wasting time with idle chatter, . . . I did not think was practical.

My acquaintance, being an experienced settler, was touched favorably by my determination. He showed good will toward me, invited me to his home to enjoy his hospitality, and offered me much valuable advice throughout the day.

I decided that the next morning I would set out and, according to his directions, would inspect the crown lands available for homesteading. My friend familiarized me in simple steps with the concept of surveying and marking land. He referred me to a Galician friend of his who lived amongst the homestead lands and who was an earlier settler. The next day before dawn I set out on foot for the designated area with the intention that I would return in a few days and only then present myself to the Crown Land Agent.

The roads around the town had been well-trodden; in this district among the cultivated lands it was rare to see virgin soil. As I found out later, these were lands that had been sold through companies. Before long the farmsteads receded in the distance and the road became worse. Still later the individual sled tracks indicated that very rarely did people pass this way.

It must have been around noon when I arrived at a poor farmstead; the owner spoke only English which was alien to me. I bought milk and bread from him; I was able to understand as much from his explanations that he had claimed his homestead 5 years ago. Judging from his dwelling he was still struggling with the hardships of the beginning. He knew the farmer

whom I was looking for, and he showed me the shortest route to get to him. The sun was setting when I found the farmstead that I had been looking for.

The owner greeted me rather indifferently. To my questions I got short but precise answers. When he found out what I was doing there, he became more talkative. He did not say much good about the settlers in the area and he stressed repeatedly that conditions for immigrants 20 years ago, when he came out with his wife, had been much harsher.

The next day we awoke to a cold and windy April morning. At my request, my host agreed to inspect the district with me since he was hoping to find his cattle, which grazed on open pasture, in the same region. We walked through the region all day until we found that best quarter section on which I did settle. We ascertained the number of the section and the location of the quarter . . . I carefully noted the details of this for myself from the iron bar [located] in the section's north-east corner.

Having returned to the city I made certain with the land agent that the area that I had chosen was not already claimed and, for the down payment of ten dollars, . . . it was allocated to me. . . .

On the advice of my acquaintance in the city [before setting out for this newly-purchased land], I bought a spade, an axe, a saw, and a few pounds of nails. For this I paid $3.80. My food supply at the time consisted of a piece of smoked bacon and a few bone-dry *pogácsa*s [small unsweetened round cakes] . . . I did not want to spend money on food [in the city] hoping that I could get the essentials cheaper on a farm in the countryside.

Not paying attention to the horror stories of the other new immigrants, I set out towards my "new domain." On the way there a carriage that was going my way took me a good ways for a small price. One more time I made use of the generosity of my farmer host and spent the night in his house, which lies approximately 3 miles from my land. The next day I walked around and more thoroughly examined my "domain."

The soil of the partly flat, partly rolling land consisted of approximately two spans of medium quality humus, then under the yellow clay a layer of pebbly sand, which I was able to determine despite the frost on the basis of the fox holes and skunk diggings.

More than half of the 160 acres was covered by a 30 to 40-year-old poplar forest; the rest was covered mainly with hard-wood bush, the strongest branches of which were not more than an arm's width. Because of the snowcover, I did not realize that the soil was rocky. In one corner of the land there was a 2–3 acre lake and from its low-lying, frozen waters it could be assumed that it would not dry up in the summer. The area was mostly flat, uninhabited, and unfenced land, from which I concluded that for now I'll be able to rent cheap pastures and meadows on them.

After some consideration I judged my situation in the following way:

If I were to begin house-building now, and if I could log the necessary wood from my own land, I would have to use sod as material for roofing for now, since the carving out of the laths and the shingles would take a long time. So the building of my abode would not cause too much difficulty.

From my 20 dollars of cash I would not have been able to acquire any draught animals, ploughs, or harrows. This appeared to me to be of secondary importance especially because I was aware that in the first year I cannot count on anything other than the small potato yield from the freshly ploughed land.

I was aware of the fact that after I took ownership of the land I must plough at least 10 acres of it in the first year, that I must reside on it continuously for 6 months, and that I must build up a portion of the fencing in order to fulfill my prescribed legal obligations. On top of this, I had to feed myself which seemed a very difficult proposition.

It did not seem likely to get work for a whole month—with good pay—given the small number and poverty of the region's residents. I could not leave my farmstead [to work] a long distance away because then I could not have contemplated the clearing and ploughing of the land at all. Therefore, I had to find a mean between the two.

My neighbour, whose hospitality I had enjoyed on several occasions, had 320 acres of land, 10 draught-horses, 2 cows, pigs and a large poultry-run. According to his own admission, he used to hire outside laborers from time to time . . . I staked my whole plan of action on this.

I decided that I would ask him for lodging for the whole year and in exchange for this I would work a certain number of days each month. If in addition he would be willing to let me have one his teams of horses and ploughs during a less busy work period, I would in exchange cut an appropriate amount of firewood for him during the winter—from his own forest. In that case I felt that it was possible that in May, June, and July during my free days I could clear and plough my land, in July I could also cut hay, and in August and September I intended to make money by harvesting and threshing. I planned to begin house-building when the autumn frost made it impossible to continue work in the fields. During the summer I planned to spend nights on my land in a kind of herdsman's hut, which I could put together quickly from tree branches and sedge.

My host received my plans with understanding and we agreed that for one year of lodging I would work for him 8 days each month. For every day's use of the team of 4 harnessed plough horses I committed myself to cut down and to deliver to his farmstead a wagonload of logs during the winter. With this agreement the most difficult of the problems of the beginning was solved, and its implementation allowed me to plan . . . for the second year. . . .

I used the free days of April and May to clear bush on my own land

and prepare about 15 acres of the cleanest flat land of my homestead for ploughing. We finished tilling my employer's land by June 10th and, with the team of five horses that was available for my use, I was able to plough 15 acres of my own land in 30 days. I planted 2 acres of potatoes; the sowing seed which was needed for planting I got on loan from a farmer who lived at some distance. I built the makeshift herdsman's hut on my farmstead on a hillside; it protected me against cold nights and the adversities of the weather.

Around the end of July, on the clearings of the neighboring areas as well as on my own land, I cut the grass which the sweltering summer heat dried into hay in a few days. I gathered this onto my land, I put it in stacks weighted down with stones, and surrounded them by a picket fence to protect them from stray animals. In the last days of July and the early days of August I worked on public roads outside our district [for which I was paid 2 dollars a day].

Given the favourable crop yield of the area, there was a great demand for workers for harvesting and threshing. They promised a day-wage of 3 dollars for harvesting, and 4 dollars for threshing.

In August and September, . . . I worked only 25 days [for wages] because of unfavourable weather (rain, snow, transitory cold spells). The last 15 days of this I spent on a farm near a small town. When this work was completed I was supposed to get $53.00 from the farmer but, to my biggest surprise, he announced that he could not pay right now, and that he could pay my claim in a few months once the crops are delivered. This was in spite of the fact that at the time of hiring he promised, in front of two witnesses, immediate payment of the earned money.

Following the advice of experienced farmers I complained in person at the police station of the town, where they summoned the farmer immediately. In front of the Justice of the Peace he repeated that he is not willing to pay right now, upon which [the Justice of the Peace], on the basis of the sworn statements of the witnesses, seized the farmer's two horses for purpose of selling them. In the absence of other buyers I bought the two horses as an equivalent to my $53.00 claim . . . On top of this [the farmer was] obliged to pay $17.00 [in way of court costs].

I bought used harnesses for the two horses for $15.00 and so for the interim—with my host's wagon that I borrowed—I set up my first team. I harvested about 60 bushels of potatoes; from this I returned double the amount of the seed-potato I had borrowed and the rest I buried deep underground. I used every available day of the fall and the winter and made significant gains during this time.

During the rainy days of fall I dug a well close to the place where I was planning to build my house. The side of the well I surfaced with natural stone for now. In order that my horses do not wander away I fenced-in

about 5 acres of the area where my house would be. This fence I nailed together from freshly cut round poles fastened onto stakes driven into the ground.

Towards the end of September winter arrived, but the changing levels of snow did not prevent the work in the forest. In six months I built one room of my loghouse. I made its roof from the dried sedge leaves that grow on the lake. I stuffed the attic with hay. To fill the gaps in the walls I used muddied hay. On the inside wall of the room, I nailed large sheets of paper.

A [new] neighbour helped me in the construction work. He had set up a homestead next door after he and I had finished the fall work. I gave him shelter in my newly-built house until he built his own. I helped him with that task.

My horses, along with those of my old neighbour, stayed outside all winter and found some shelter from the often changing wind on the appropriate side of [a large] stack of straw. They were used to this. They came home daily for water and hay so, when necessary, it was possible to keep them at home. They were all hair, skin, and bones. . . .

During the course of the winter I cut 2000 pieces of fencing posts and 20 wagons of firewood from the nearby public forest, for which I acquired lumbering permits for 50 cents each. The hardwood bushes served as source of fencing posts while the dried out, healthier poplar trunks I cut into firewood. The fencing posts were bought by the town's lumberyard for 5 cents a piece, while the firewood I sold in the town for $3.00 a load. It must be made clear that a farmer cannot cut more wood on the homestead property than he needs [for himself], until the property is registered to him. . . .

My [new] neighbour had arrived in Canada in early spring [just like I]. He had worked [on and off] from April to December and had been able to save $150.00. He had brought warm winter clothes with him from home and, except for a pair of shoes and gloves, he did not have to purchase any clothing throughout the winter. [He] had been a chef in the army and he could do everything from baking bread to cooking. Foodstuffs could be acquired cheaply in the small town and from the farms along the way; game could also be trapped if necessary, so, feeding ourselves was inexpensive.

Occasionally, [my new neighbour] was also able to make some money by chopping wood [for others], so that he hardly spent any of the money he had saved during the summer. At the end of March we both had approximately $200.00 at our disposal. [Unfortunately] I sustained a substantial loss because in the great cold my potatoes, not buried deep enough, froze, and were no longer usable as human food.

We decided that in the spring we would purchase the most necessary farm animals and farm equipment jointly and use them together as long as

we did not have the ability to make ourselves independent. My neighbour bought two horses with worn-out harnesses for $80.00, and I paid $25.00 for a cow. I thanked my [other neighbour and] former host for his support, asking that we may remain good friends in the future also. . . . Then, starting in early April, I began a partnership with my new neighbour. . . .

Around this time one of the town agents was advertising a public auction for the middle of April, where the equipment of a liquidated farmstead was to be auctioned off. [At the auction] permanent residents of the area—with a suitable guarantee—could put down half of the purchase price in cash, and the rest they could pay within one year with 8% interest. [In this manner] we were able to buy a wagon, a plough, a clod-cutter, a harrow, a grass cutter, and a few smaller hand tools, in still usable condition, for $160.00. Half of this we paid in cash, while for the rest my old acquaintance from town undertook the guarantee for us, for which we left a few tree trunks in his yard as a gift.

Aided by an early thaw we diligently continued the task of bush clearing begun in the winter. We set fire to the branches of the tree trunks and the bigger shrubs that were cut down in winter . . . The heat loosened the shallow roots [and made it easier to remove them.] Removing the stones from the ground after the thaw was tough work for which we had to buy an iron rod with a pointed tip from town for $4.00.

We harnessed together the four horses and in the beginning of May the tough work of breaking up the soil began. The virgin soil, full of roots, put up strong resistance against the break-iron and it had to be hammered into shape and sharpened with a file anew every day. We were not able to raise the daily achievement above one-half acre. The hay we had, my frozen potatoes—still suitable for hog-feed—made it possible for us to obtain oats [through barter], and so it was possible to supply the hard-working horses with adequate food. I fed my co-worker's horses while he fed me, except for milk and milk by-products which I contributed. What needed to be bought beyond this, my partner purchased on his own.

We decided on the following plan for the current (second) agricultural year:

The 15 acres that were broken up in the first year I would sow with wheat in the second half of May, and the freshly-broken ground of this year, I would sow with oats by the middle of June the latest. This was not consistent with the usual agricultural practices [but it was imposed on us by our poverty and the shortness of time.] We obtained sowing seeds from the government land agent, which normally one is expected to pay back from the harvest. . . . For a few dollars we also rented, for purposes of growing hay, a neighbouring unoccupied section. . . . We considered in the plan that during the busier part of the year we would both get jobs and try to make money this way also, supplementing our income from the

land.

We pursued our plan with unflagging diligence and, by the end of May . . . we had prepared our lands. One of us worked with the plough, the other pursued the hard work of lifting rocks and clearing bushes. We paid little attention to our own welfare. Indeed, we ate a hot meal only once a day and which my co-worker made in the evening while I fed the animals.

Around the middle of May the 15 acres that had been ploughed the previous year I tilled thoroughly with a 3-pronged clod-cutter, and after harrowing, I sowed it with wheat by hand, since my [old] neighbour needed to use his sowing machine himself . . . While the soil that had been ploughed last year crumbled under the affects of the weather and the clod-cutter did easy work in it, this year's fresh ploughing was very difficult to prepare for sowing. After the first run-through with the clod-cutter, the roots newly upturned by the plough completely covered the surface of the land and it became necessary to pull these away with the harrow. . . . The fresh ploughing still had to be clod-cut twice, in different directions, and then, once harrowed, it was possible to sow the seed with the now-freed-up, borrowed sowing-machine.

With the most diligent work, by mid-June we had been able to sow approximately 20 acres of freshly ploughed land with oats on the two farms, . . .

Despite the rain every 3–4 days, cool weather lasting into the second half of June adversely affected the germination and development of the crops, while the heat of July bone-dried the freshly cultivated, dust-like loess, . . . While last summer's torrid heat had wiped out the roots of the harmful plants turned up in the old ploughing, the oats planted in this year's ploughing were full of the most diverse kinds of wild plants, [with stifling effects on the crop]. . . .

In the meantime we used our free time for ploughing new areas, but work was hindered by the [lush vegetation] . . . as well as the abnormal heat of the summer. Despite our greatest efforts we were not able to break up more than 10 acres, which we divided up equally between the two farms.

In the second half of July, [partly] with a grass-cutter and partly with a scythe, we cut the grass that grew on our rented property, and we split the hay collected from this. During the last few days of this month we hired ourselves out for two weeks of road-building work. One of us got $5.00 with the four-horse cart, the other got $3.00, . . .

As a result of the onset of a dry-spell, the harvest of the whole region was a sad sight. The light soil, dry as a bone, was not able to offer any moisture to the plants, and the 50-degree heat that set in in mid-August dried the crops into white straw. The undeveloped wheat grain shrivelled up, while the oats didn't develop even far enough for it to seem worth threshing. This was a great blow for the whole area, but it affected us

especially severely, . . . My own secret plan of paying back some of my loans from home, was dashed.

As a result of this, my co-worker took on construction work at the railway that was being built, and I took on the work of bringing in the harvest. My old host's harvesting machine didn't have a lot to do, so it was able to do the harvesting of our crops also. The harvesting of the 35 acres only took 3 days, for which I promised to work for him for 6 days.

The oats could only be used for fodder. The wheat sheaves I stacked up near my house, counting on the fact that I would thresh them out with horses when the busier time of work had passed. The expected income from the wheat harvest was not enough to pay for threshing.

With the help of one of the small town's employment agents, a large farm hired me—along with our 4 horses—for harvesting and threshing for a daily $5.00. The rest of my animals I left in the safe-keeping of my neighbour, who went home weekly. The distance of one hundred miles (160 kilometers) to my place of work took me 2 days and two nights to cover with my team of four horses.

This year didn't want to bring any significant achievements. A 3-week snowy and rainy period during the second half of September and the first week of October stood in the way of successful work for both of us. The sheaves placed criss-cross were not allowed to dry out because of the wet weather; the threshing could not be started for now. Later, [it seemed that] . . . the constant cover of snow would delay the threshing until spring.

After the first week of seemingly permanent rainfall, with hardly three days wages in my pocket, I returned home and began the ploughing of the harvested area; but because of the unfavorable weather conditions I remained at the beginning of this task. The light soil was soaked through so much that a person or an animal could sink into it. On rainy days I plastered up the walls of my house with clay; while later I fenced in that part of my domain which I wanted to sow next year. I still used round timber-trees for this which I obtained during the clearing of the areas that were ploughed and which I had put aside for this purpose.

My partner also came home because of the cessation of the railroad work as a result of the rains; and . . . in rain and in snow, he kept on ploughing his fields. He caught such a cold that his rheumatic pains didn't allow him to leave the house for weeks, . . .

During the dry, cold days [of winter] I started the threshing of my wheat, which finally amounted to 8 bushels per acre, altogether therefore 120 bushels. I kept almost 30 bushels for my own use and the rest I transported to town in a farm-wagon that I borrowed from my [other] neighbour. Because of the bad roads, I was able to transport only 45 bushels at one time. Each journey took two days. . . . My wheat was judged no. 3 grade, [and] I received 95 cents a bushel, . . . As everyone in the area was supplied

with hay—I was not able to sell any of my hay supply.

My yearly taxes were calculated to be $18.00. When this was assessed it was taken into consideration how much of my land I had turned productive so far, as well as that the closest school and telephone wire were a great distance from my farm.

Considering the unfavorable harvest the paying back of seeds was permitted [to take place] in the following year. We paid our debts from the purchase of the farm equipment, of which $40.00 was my share. Despite all my efforts, I was not able to send any money home to help my family.

In the given conditions nothing else remained but to make some money by chopping wood and transporting fence posts. After procuring the necessary permits, I started on this. With steady work I was able to save almost $150.00 by springtime. In town, the price of firewood became lower because of the slump in the economy. [Fortunately] the lumber yard was able to get a large order to cover the post needs of areas poor in wood so, throughout the winter, I got 6 cents a piece for fence posts.

This time I cut so much construction wood that I could build a stable for my horses and cow. For roofing material I used thatch made of the wheat; in fact, I put some of this away for the time that I intended to expand my house.

For the third year my partner and I agreed that while we would continue our [mutually] advantageous arrangement of a joint household, after the completion of our stock of horses and farm equipment, we would prepare for separate farming operations so that we could develop our homesteads at a faster pace. [Accordingly], we divided the old equipment . . . by drawing lots: I got the wagon and the grass cutter.

The town's farm equipment sales agency, after inspecting my farm, seemed willing to sell me farm machinery for one quarter of the price down and final installment due at harvest time. In this way I bought a riding plough equipped with an attachable break-iron and plough-iron, a clod-cutter, and a harrow that was made of three pieces, altogether for $130.00, one quarter of which I paid in cash. [Furthermore], I bought two horses for $60.00, and a pair of cheap, factory-made harnesses for $40.00. With the thus completed equipment, I began the spring work of the third year.

At first I concentrated my efforts on cultivating last year's stubble-field and ploughings. My riding plough with the plough-iron proved to be excellent; with it—with a plough-iron–I was able to plough more than [three and a half acres] a day. . . . I fed my horses with unthreshed oats, . . . they also got hay twice every day.

The ploughed land had only to be harrowed and then it stood ready for sowing, while last year's ploughing I prepared for sowing with the already outlined method and I finished it by the end of May. I sowed 30 *hold*s

with wheat [42 acres], the seeds for which I got from the government land agent.

The winter clearing on my land produced almost 10 acres, 5 acres of which I was able to plough and sow with oats by mid-June. [By this time] my 35 acres of sowed land had been fenced in completely, so stray animals could do no harm to the nicely growing crops. In the meantime my cow presented me with a calf, which I sold in town for $10.00 when it was 6 weeks old. [Next] I bought a sow [for $20.00]. . . .

Before and after hay cutting, for a few weeks I–along with my four horses—worked on the building of the railway bed [some 10 miles from my farm], for which they paid $5.00 [for an 11 hour work-day]. [Later] I worked with the horses on road construction—for the same amount—until the approach of the harvest called me home. This time the harvest looked promising and a labour shortage . . . was expected in the area.

I and my partner agreed with our kind old neighbour that, after the harvesting of his own crops, he would let us use his mechanical harvester and for every day we used the machine, we would give him a day of labour in exchange. [We also rented a threshing-machine from someone; it cost us 12 cents per bushel of wheat, and 8 cents per bushel of oat threshed . . .].

Despite a few cold nights, the favorable September weather allowed the harvest to be completed and threshing to be started unusually early. My yields were 15 bushels of wheat and 30 bushels of oats per acre. With a team of two horses. . . , I also helped other people with threshing, for which I got $5.00 a day. From my earnings and from a part of the harvest, I was able to repay many of my obligations. . . .

This time my wheat was judged no. 2 grade, the price of which—discounting transportation costs—was $1.06 a bushel, and for the oats they offered 35 cents.

In the absence of a granary, during threshing I piled my produce in my living-room. In the fall of that year, a grain elevator started operations on the new railway line, at the same time as the [new] railway station, and I was able to deliver my produce there with the help of a grain wagon that I purchased for $35.00. [The station building was soon followed by a] grocery store, . . . a barbershop combined with a billiard hall, the post-office, and the school . . . With this the foundations were laid again for a "town," the kind of which there are many in Canada in areas where the railway system is more developed.

[This fall] I sent $50.00 home for my family. . . .

By the spring the second room of my house was finished; as well, a separate horse stable and pig shed . . . [It was only now that I] boarded the floor of the first room in my house and acquired the most basic furnishings. Still in October my sow had a litter of eight young pigs; and in the spring my cow gave me a calf again. During the winter, because of all the building

activity, [I made less money from the sale of wood . . .] [For this third year I paid taxes in the amount of $36.00 . . .]

The fourth and fifth year left a lot to be desired. In the former, the last July frost ruined the whole of my crops; in the latter, an ice storm caused significant damage, a portion of which was reimbursed through insurance.

My joy was great when after 5 years I was able to see my family. My wife found it difficult to get used to the barrenness [of the prairies]. . . , but with doubled diligence we started the task of fixing up our very poor home, and the work did not leave much time for meditation.

[Since my arrival here] the inspector of homesteads had visited me twice. First he came in the fourth year when he ascertained that I was fulfilling my obligations. The neighbours had to swear that every year I spent at least 6 months on my farm. He measured the cultivated lands and he expressed his satisfaction with what he saw. He provided me with good advice concerning methods of growing and of animal husbandry. He advised me that in my fifth year I should apply for my Canadian citizenship, and [arrange for] my farm to be placed into my possession by the land registry also. . . . In my sixth year [of my stay] I received my citizenship and even today I hold in my hand the notice of the registration of my property.

A great blow struck my former housemate and neighbour this year. His house caught fire because of a chimney fire and within a very short time it burned to the ground. I gave shelter to his family, which had also arrived in the meantime, until he built up his poor hovel. His house and his furnishings were not insured, so it is very difficult for him to recover [from his misfortune].

As you can see, I have already fenced in half of my farm; true, for the time being only with round poles because wire fencing is expensive, but there will come a time for that as well.

I have ploughed altogether 50 acres up to this point and cleared another ten. I plan to leave about 20 acres of my property as forest and another 20 acres as pasture. I am leaving 20 acres of cropland fallow this year to allow to rest. On the rest, after three years of wheat production, in the fourth and fifth year I will plant barley and oats. I have not yet experimented with flax; I will try that later. I keep 4 horses, 2 cows, one brood sow, and a poultry yard; my wife and the children work the half-acre-large vegetable garden.

We have not experimented yet with sheep breeding; likewise the ambitions directed at fruit-growing remain for later, but for this, according to the experiences of the neighbours, neither the soil nor the weather is favourable.

If only life here were not so joyless; if only our dear homeland were not so unreachably distant!

B's Story

After "A," "B" told his story of the past years.

Soon after my arrival, I noticed that my relatives valued me not so much as a kinsman but as an employee. The agreement which we struck reinforced this impression. The contract, which became effective on my day of arrival and remained in effect for a year, set my annual wage at $300, from which $170 was to be deducted for the railway and boat tickets. The money was to be paid on the last day of the year. Should I quit during the first six months of the year, I was to repay the price of the boat ticket. If I left in the second half of the year, I would not be eligible for any wages.

We put these conditions in writing. Later I found out that my annual wage was set at least $50 lower than what was customary in the area at that time.

My relative had immigrated to Canada twenty years before and was farming one section, about 640 acres, when I arrived. Of this land, about 400 acres were cultivated, the rest was used as woodlot and pasture for the time being. The farm lay about six miles from the nearest town and railway line. The first block-house which had been the initial home of the proprietor was still standing – it was used as a repair shop and tool-shack. I was often reminded how much more difficult the lot of old immigrants had been than that of the newcomers.

The new farm dwelling was a two-storey house of six rooms, with double plank walls and a hot-air furnace in the basement. For fuel, wood was used. Among the farm buildings there was the stable for horses and cattle which were separated by a wood plank partition. The loft was used to store hay. In the back of the stable, in what served as a machine room, a diesel engine was installed. It was used for grinding and for drawing water. The granary, pigsty and poultry-house all stood apart. Farm machinery was scattered about in the open, as was usual in Canada, exposed to the elements. There was everything here, from plough to thresher. It was only later that I learned from the neighbours how deeply in debt the farm was. They gave the following explanation.

My relative and his hard-working family toiled with extreme dedication for eighteen years, until they possessed 1 1/2 sections of a well-equipped farm. The economic boom of the war years had helped them greatly. An auspicious moment brought the opportunity to sell the farm to two buyers, which my relative did. One buyer bought the half section, without the farm buildings but with part of the equipment, for $30 per acre, in cash. The whole section with all the buildings and the rest of the equipment was sold for $55, of which only one-third was paid in cash on the signing of the agreement. The rest was to be paid in the following four years in

equal installments. The sale price of the farm was over $46,000, of which $23,000 was paid.

It was at this time that my relative decided to move to the United States with his family and buy a farm there, which he did, purchasing a farm for $30,000. He paid half of the price at the time of purchase and was expected to pay the rest in two annual installments which he planned to cover from the sale of his Canadian farm. The Canadian purchaser had taken out a $10,000 mortgage against the whole section in order to repay the debt that he had incurred to cover the first payment.

The new owner's plans were dashed by the sudden onslaught of the [postwar? – ed.] recession. He fled the farm after selling most of the livestock at a loss. Thus, my relative was unable to meet his financial obligations and lost his U.S. farm along with the $15,000 he had invested in it. Moving back to Canada and other expenses depleted his ready funds to the extent that he returned to his own farm without a penny in his pocket. While he managed to re-mortgage the farm with the help of guarantors, he had to take out still another loan in order to supplement the livestock. The value of the farm at that time barely surpassed the amount of debt burdening it. This was the situation when I arrived.

I shared a room on the second floor with the eldest son of the family. The meals were sufficient and good. Instead of water, we drank tea without rum. Generally, alcohol was not part of the board. The water from the well was unsuitable for drinking because of the minerals it contained. . . .

The livestock consisted of 18 draught horses, 5 unbroken colts, 6 cows, 4 sows and poultry. I was told at the beginning that there would be no restrictions on working hours for farmhands hired for the whole year.

It was early April, the fields were still covered with snow, and it was very cold. The animals spent the night in the stable. They were let out after morning watering, the cows after milking. With my roommate, I fed and watered the animals every morning, then milked the cows, which is an activity the men do in Canada. The four milk cows gave about 25–30 litres of milk every day, which I had to skim with a separator. . . .

Next, we cleaned the stable. The dunghill must have been quite old, I thought, since the land here is not treated with manure. Twice a week we spread fresh husks on the stalls—we had to bring in the husks from the haystack left on the threshing site.

The rest of the day was spent in clearing that part of the farmland which had been used as pasture and was designated for ploughing that year. At sunset we took care of the returning animals. Because of the coming ploughing season, the horses got oats as well as hay to eat. The cows were fed barley meal; the pigs, cooked potatoes and skim milk. Milking and making sour cream were the closing activities of the day.

A warm southern wind quickly melted the snow in a couple of days.

Around April 20 we began working in the fields. The rains that followed the previous year's harvest made the completion of fall ploughing impossible. For ploughing we used two double-share ploughs, both drawn by six horses. In the meantime, the farmer started to harrow the land that had been tilled in the fall. . . .

We worked for 11–12 hours, with the horses being fed three times a day. Changes in the weather did not affect our schedule. While we ploughed non-stop, the never abating wind kept changing from rain to snow, to slush, to sunny weather. Spring and fall last only a few days in Canada, so each waking minute had to be fully exploited.

We ploughed about 6 acres daily with the double shares, while the master harrowed some [21 acres] behind us. We did the sowing in the second half of May. We sowed wheat in two-thirds of the cultivated land, and barley, oats and flax in the rest, . . . We finished the sowing by June 10. Of the wheat grains, we sowed 1 1/2 bushels per acre. During this period, we replaced the weaker horses with an unbroken, more or less wild horse in each team. In this manner, we managed to tame three of these animals for the harness.

Potato was planted only in the vegetable garden where women and children of the family worked exclusively.

After sowing the horses got a few days of rest while we dug up and collected rocks in the fields that were being prepared for cultivation. Making this land arable was done by ploughs equipped with a breaking iron and a seat. They were drawn by five horses. With the horses rotated every 4 to 5 hours, about an acre of land was broken every day. Meanwhile the master ploughed the land that was to be left fallow that year. We did not use the clod-crusher on the newly broken earth until the following spring and sowed wheat in it after harrowing. In the second half of July we did the breaking of virgin ground only with one team, while the other two were used to mow and gather in hay. Dry weather was favourable for this activity but not for sowing which promised a meager crop.

The farm had two reapers and one thresher of medium capacity. As reaping time approached, we prepared the machines. Repairs were made by the farmer himself, since he had the most experience in such work. One of the main objectives in the designing of Canadian agricultural machinery is to make sure that even farmers could replace broken parts. . . .

We started harvest during the first days of September. Three people were assigned to the two reapers. . . . Since female members of the family were preoccupied with household work, two day labourers were hired for two months during reaping and threshing, each earning $45 a month. The daily work capacity for a reaper is about 15 acres of wheat.

Except for three days of rain, which caused an eight-day disruption in work, the weather was not bad. We finished reaping around September 25.

The dry though cold and windy autumn allowed us to start the threshing right away. The 20-horsepower steam boiler was heated with hay and was operated by the farmer with his son's assistance. In addition, a water-cart, six twosome box-carts to carry sheaves and three twosome box-carts to carry the threshed-out grain were required. Two people fed the machine. Altogether 15 people and 10 twosome carts were needed for the job. To cover this, another four seasonal workers were hired at $4 a day, while neighbouring farmers provided the rest of the workforce and the carts. In return, the master agreed to thresh their crop after his.

Threshing yielded 14 bushels of wheat, 20 bushels of barley, 30 bushels of oats and 60 bushels of flax-seed per acre. The machine threshed out some 1,000 bushels of wheat a day. Interrupted for six days by one rainy day, we finished threshing in two weeks. One of the machine's elevators blew out the crushed hay, while the other one poured the not exactly clean grain into the box-carts that took part of the harvest to the railway station and the rest to the farm's granary.

Having finished this work, the farmer and his son went to the neighbours to do their threshing . . . The two seasonal workers and I started ploughing the stubble with three double-share ploughs, each equipped with a seat and drawn by six horses. After short periods of frost and snow, the deep winter frost which came in mid-October prevented us from finishing the job.

My winter schedule was varied enough to keep me busy from early morning until late in the evening. I took over milking and skimming from the younger children who had been doing this work during the summer. This meant that, along with taking care of the animals, I had no free time either before breakfast or after dinner. For the rest of the day, I either hauled crops to the railway station or carried the manure, accumulated over the past years, from around the stable to the unploughed fields—this was the first time the farmer decided to have this done. When the snow didn't prevent me, I cut and carried firewood from the forest to the farm. In the summer it was cut up with a disk saw and stored for the following winter.

We celebrated only the first day of Christmas. New Year's Day is not a holiday in Canada. After Christmas I told the owners I intended to look for another occupation when my contract expired. During the year I had to request an advance of $20 to buy some clothes and had other minor expenses. Thus I had a $110 credit by the end of March. . . .

The second phase of my Canadian experience began on April 1.

I decided to try a variety of employment for a year, to gain experience. I wanted to bring my family over the following year and settle down somewhere. I informed my wife of my plans. She and the kids were living with her parents in the meantime.

A few days later I paid $10 to travel by train to a small town in the

south. After idling there for 4–5 days, I was hired through a labour agency for one month of ploughing, for which I was to receive $25 plus board. Because of the mild spring, we could start work in mid-April. A few days later, however, severe winter weather returned, with drifting snow, and we had to abandon the ploughing for two weeks. . . .

My employer was an eccentric bachelor who did the cooking himself. He roasted a lamb or pork leg and served it to us cold daily for as long as it lasted. The tea can was never empty, and this was our only warm "meal" three times a day, served with sugar but nothing else. Judging from the kitchen equipment, this seemed to be the year-round diet on the farm. By the middle of the month, I wanted to leave my cook-employer, but in that case I would have lost part of my wages. So, I waited till the end of the month before I quit and asked the boss to pay my wages on time. In spite of this, I got my $25 only after a long hassle and several days' delay.

It was already late May, so I went to work for the railway, changing ties, which is usually paid by the piece. I had to travel three hours to get to the work site, but only paid the employee's fare of 90 cents for the ticket. The length of railway lines in Canada is enormous and requires its own technology for the maintenance of both groundwork and rails. . . .

Along with other foreign workers, at first I could do only simple jobs which did not require much explanation. I was paid 30 cents per hour and thus earned $2.40 for an eight-hour workday which did not include the time spent getting to work. Room and board was costing me $1.00. Two weeks later they started me on changing ties which I had learned in the interim. After a few days I began earning $3 a day, but then a long period of rain interrupted the work. [In the end] my employment on the railway ended when the contractor hired a native-born person to replace me.

Early in June I found employment doing road repairs, earning $1.50 a day after board. I had to remove dirt with a hoe-like tool from road sections which were to be repaired. To do this work, I had to buy a pair of rubber boots for $6. We finished this repair work in three weeks and I had to look for a new job.

Early in July I hired myself out for two months of farm work, earning $35 a month after board. I spent most of the time cutting hay. My master cultivated three sections and paid my wage fairly when my time was up. I was happy to continue working for him, doing reaping for $3 and threshing for $4 a day.

The weather was quite good in September and I worked about 20 days, receiving my share of $70 for it. My master was satisfied with me and promised to pay $25 for October and $10 for the winter months. At the railway station, however, workers in transit were talking about a distant place [southern Alberta – ed.] where one could earn good money harvesting sugar-beets. I decided to go there, paying about $25 for my ticket.

Sugar-beet is grown on irrigated lands, according to standard practices. It is planted by machine in such a way that hoeing can be done between the rows by a horse-drawn beet-hoe. Thinning had to be done manually with a hoe. In harvesting, the horse-drawn beet-plough extracted the whole row. Cleaning the beet and loading it onto vehicles had to be done manually. Harvesting sugar-beet is paid either by the acre or by the day. When paid by quantity, usually workers of different nationalities form teams. From my experience, however, the work they undertake is profitable only if they draw up an agreement in writing and sign it in the presence of witnesses for all parties. In some towns, employment agents promise more than what farmers are willing to pay once the workers have arrived. Besides, on occasion, there are vast differences between the wages promised and those paid, always at the expense of the worker.

Six of us formed a work team. The agent in town promised us a long contract at 40 cents an hour each. We accepted these conditions and travelled to the site at our own expense. There, the farmer didn't want to hear about payment by the hour, but offered us $16 for harvesting and loading an acre of sugar-beet. He said that 16 rows of sugar-beet constituted an acre. Since the crop was not too thick, with hard work the six of us managed to clean and load the 16 rows of sugar-beet in half a day. In order to buy ourselves food, we asked the farmer for payment. He surprised us by stating that he had promised not $16 but $10 an acre, and that an acre consisted of 24 rows, not 16. He was willing to document this latter statement. Room and board cost $1.30 in this area, which means that we all spent more than we earned.

This and similar experiences made me decide to leave this region and find work elsewhere. On the way we met another team being sent to the same farmer by the same agent, with the same promise of 40 cents per hour. These workers didn't believe our warning of what to expect and continued on their way to the promising job opportunity.

Since most of the sugar-beet fields had been planted that spring for the first time, the whole area was unprepared to accommodate and feed large groups of seasonal workers. Smart entrepreneurs exploited these underdeveloped conditions to the utmost, asking more for a bed than city hotels did. Many beet workers spent very cold and snowy October nights in haystacks. . . .

The six of us decided to stay together and try our luck in the coal mines. When we arrived there, once again we experienced the general dislike, even hostility, that non-agricultural workers showed toward new immigrants.

We hired ourselves out to a coal mine as unskilled workers. The mine operated only three days a week. After a few weeks we still hadn't earned more than what we needed just to survive. Since conditions did not seem to improve, we quit. Then we went on to British Columbia to lumber.

After a long search we got jobs earning $2.50 a day, less $1.00 for board. We were satisfied with our situation, but then the enterprise was sold in a short three weeks and the new owners hired workers of other nationality.

In mid-December I returned to Winnipeg, hoping it would be easier to find employment there. I was bitterly disappointed. The boarding-houses were full of unemployed people, their number estimated at more than eight hundred. Most of them had no money left at all. Agents from travel companies were promising agricultural jobs in mid-April. Many people were on the streets all day, in –35 or –45 degrees Celsius, trying in vain to find work and shelter. Most of them probably regretted ever having come to this land!

And just where did these people go without a penny to their name? Immigration authorities were obliged to provide shelter for new immigrants only, until they got their first job—an opportunity which everybody who arrived from overseas had already exploited. There was no work in the city. It was also useless to walk the farmlands in search of work. After a month or two, many people quit the logging camps, it was hopeless. But the winter was very long and cold. Those who used to be particular in the old country about what kind of work they chose to do and for what wages, now moved from one boarding-house to another in rags and hungry, trying to survive for a week on credit which they promised to repay from their summer wages.

In the industrial areas of the eastern provinces, the situation was the same. "Man-smugglers" had open season on these desperate people, promising to help them get to the United States as long as they had relatives there who could fulfill certain demands. Next came the repeated, nerve-racking attempts to cross the border, arrests and deportations, moral and financial collapse. This is how the final chapter in a once promising emigration often ends. If anything follows, it is desperate toiling for many years to recover the costs of travel.

I spent four months idling in a boarding-house, paying $1.00 a day for humble, shared lodging. The unusual, haphazard way in which I lived made me tired and apathetic. Since leaving my relatives after my first year in Canada, I had spent most of my wages on travel and necessities. All the cash I had to my name was $180, which included my first year's wage. This would have been sufficient to cover the travel expenses for my wife and three-year-old son. Being homeless myself, however, meant that I could not expose them to similar insecurity.

After much brooding I decided to hire myself out to a farm in a good area for an entire year. I wanted to get acquainted with the conditions there, so that I could possibly buy a farm myself and settle down. I knew English well enough by that time to express myself on a basic level. With a heavy heart, once again I paid $25 for a train ticket.

When I arrived, after a few days of job-hunting I was hired by a farmer who had lost his wife just weeks before and was left with two infant orphans. The farmer gladly consented to bringing my family over and was willing to provide free board for us, as well as pay $350 to me and $200 to my wife annually if she accepted responsibility for the children and the household. I undertook written obligation to this effect. Thanks to the personal commitment of my employer, we soon received the immigration permit for my family. The farmer covered half of their travel costs with an advance payment. He also telegraphed the local agency for the shipping company in my homeland, so that they put my family on a boat without delay. They arrived at the end of March.

The farm, which was the size of one section, was a model farm which had been under cultivation for a long time. The owner usually hired a farmhand for a whole year and seasonal workers for the busier periods. He busied himself mostly with buying and selling animals, and the management of the farm gradually became my responsibility. Instead of the planned one year I spent two in the same job, incurring hardly any expenses during this time. In the second year my boss permitted me to buy a cow and a sow, and later, four sheep. I had $600 saved by the end of the second year.

During this period, I had enough opportunity to study the area and its economic conditions. One year the whole crop was ruined by frost and had to be reaped for fodder. This made me think twice about my own ambitions. While this farming region was really part of Canada's best agricultural land, there was no security against natural disasters. On top of that, memories from the old country preoccupied us so much that we could not commit ourselves to buying a farm and settling in this foreign land.

After much thinking, we signed a five-year contract with the master who guaranteed us a total wage of $600 a year and allowed us to keep a specified number of cattle, pigs and sheep for our own use on a rented pasture. After two years, we had $1,500 saved and hoped to save another $1,500 in the remaining period. The value of the animals will cover our travel expenses back to our homeland. The [Hungarian] plain is calling us, and so do the sad sighs of our elderly parents, the smell of the blooming acacia trees, all are throbbing in our restless hearts. We'll go home. $3,000 is not a large amount, but it is enough to start a new life in the old country.

Of the years I spent here, the second was the most hectic. In that year travelling expenses and unemployment consumed most of my earlier funds. In our last employment we worked very hard for our wages, but we had security. Our lodging and meals were good, and the harsh weather didn't bother us.

Once back in our homeland, we'll forget the dreariness of these [Canadian] years.

C's Story

First of all, I have to tell you a secret, said "C" as he began his story, a secret which I hid from you at the time of our emigration. Except for my widowed mother, nobody else, not even my wife, knew it. Besides the declared $45 I had another $300 in cash. My maternal uncle had been living in America for many years, and he sent various sums of money to my mother which she carefully saved. My uncle always described his situation faithfully in his letters, thus my mother was well informed about the difficulties [new immigrants have] at the start. Before my departure, she made me promise not to mention this amount even to my wife. She sewed the sum inside the lining of my overcoat and impressed upon me that I use this money only in case of emergency or to start an enterprise by which I could secure my future.

[After arrival] in Winnipeg, I walked into a real estate agency where I found a compatriot among the employees. After a few days acquaintance, he informed me about local conditions. He recommended I take a half section lease whose owner had died a short time earlier. The heirs lived abroad and commissioned my agent friend to lease out the farm. It came with a family house, farm buildings and functioning as well as broken-down equipment. Because it was in the north, one could suspect that climatic conditions were severe, but the rental terms looked advantageous.

The agent was willing to show me the site; he paid his train ticket and I paid mine. The farm was situated about ten miles from the railway, in a wooded area rich in lakes. Of the 320 acres, 60 were stubble and 20 newly broken soil. Most of the undulating unbroken land was covered with a poplar forest. The farmhouse and stable were built of round timber. Both the livestock and the primitive farming equipment, which were tended by a neighbour as a favour, gave the impression of a run-down, poor farm. Only the favourable terms made me seriously consider the matter of leasing.

The farm was offered for a three-year lease on condition that half the annual profits were to be paid to the owners as rental fee—half of the crop in kind, half of the other incomes in cash. Also the first year's seed-grain was supposed to be repaid in kind. Fifteen new acres had to be put under cultivation each year, and the livestock, farm buildings and equipment were to be returned in good condition. A $200 bank deposit was expected as security. The agent represented the owners for the term of the lease. Taxes were a shared liability.

Having considered the situation, I decided to lease the farm and went ahead with the formalities. At the same time, I commissioned the agent to get an immigration permit for my mother and wife. I asked my uncle in the U.S. to lend me the price of steamship tickets to bring my relatives over. He was willing to do this and sent me the money.

In the beginning I concentrated all my efforts on improving the livestock and fixing up the farm machinery for the spring work. The dwelling was neglected but not in too bad shape. For the time being all I needed to feed myself was bread—the cows and poultry provided the rest. It was cold and there was still deep snow in April, so I could not start working the land. I hired myself out to a sawmill nearby, earning $2.50 a day until the snow melted and I could begin ploughing early in May. For this, I used an old iron plough with a seat and six old horses. I did not think it was a suitable team for such uneven terrain and clay soil, so I bought two more horses for $60. For lack of a clod-crusher the harrow had to be used; without a sowing machine, the work had to be done by hand. Under such conditions, I was barely able to plant barley and oats in the already arable fields by the middle of June, in spite of help from my mother and wife who, in the meantime, had arrived.

In the first year, a late August frost destroyed our crops so severely that they had to be cut for fodder. In the second year the 90 acres of oats spent the winter under snow which arrived early. Only after the spring thaw could I thresh the little that the rodents had left. The third year yielded mediocre-good crops which I harvested without satisfaction.

Because of the farm's northern location, our harvest was always meager, even under optimum conditions, and did not compensate for the difficult work of clearing the forests and cultivating the poor soil and rugged terrain. The wooded area gave little opportunity for stock-raising. Besides, animal products could not be successfully marketed in a region of sparse population. Work opportunities materialized in this part of the country only in the busiest seasons. I could hardly wait for the end of the three-year term of my lease and get back my $200 deposit. Three years of our hard work barely yielded $800 in savings—most of it I earned by lumbering and doing day jobs for fishermen. The savings went to pay the loan which I had taken to bring my family over.

In the spring of the fourth year, my uncle—who had since been widowed—got fed up with mining in the United States and moved up to join us. We bought a one-section, completely equipped farm on the railway line for $50 an acre . . . (paid with half of the sale price of the crop at 7% interest.) The whole farm was under cultivation, and we managed to make about 100 acres irrigable by regulating a small river that crossed the property. This area proved to be suitable for the growing of fodder, and we have had two years of success with alfalfa. We experimented with bee-keeping as well, and it looked quite promising. We rented a neighbouring pasture to breed sheep, trying to produce ewe-cheese and curd.

Last year the harvest was mediocre. This year most of it was ruined by some sort of locust and blight. No matter how good the farm is, agriculture in Canada is always a risky business.

We have been speculating a lot about whether it was worth tying ourselves down to the Canadian soil with our labour, let alone investment. The farm is relatively good. It is close to the railway and has all the advantages of fully cultivated soil. But we must realize that we will be unable to sell it for cash once it is paid off, after 25 or 30 years of hard work. We will be yearning in vain to return to our homeland: after 25–30 years who will know us there? Our siblings and relatives will be dead, and we'll be strangers to the younger generation.

And what do we have in this country beside toiling? A sparsely populated, endless, strange land all around us. Seven months of awful cold and snowdrifts in the winter, followed by unbearable summer heat full of inhuman work with dubious results. School makes strangers of our own children. For whom do we live, and why?

The Joint Opinion of the Three Emigrants

Following the stories, a lively debate developed among the three friends which gave rise to a whole series of questions and answers. Eventually they agreed that the agriculturalist who immigrated to Canada should not consider settling down permanently or buying any land until he familiarized himself with local conditions, which would take at least three or four years. The only way to do this is for the immigrant to work as a farmhand for a year after his arrival; and it is advisable that he work for a non-Hungarian, English-speaking, old-time settler with a good reputation.

The rights and duties of both parties should be put down in a contract—two copies—signed by four witnesses. One copy should be kept by the employer, the other by the worker. To avoid language problems, the services of an interpreter should be requested from the local sheriff. The interpreter's name should also be recorded in the contract.

In Canada, farmers use every minute of the workday during the summer, from early morning till late evening. Everybody has to be prepared for this. The winter season is slower, but when working outside one always has to be wary of frostbite. It is advisable to learn from the old settlers different ways of protecting the hands, feet and ears against the cold.

Each immigrant should make learning English his primary goal. Younger immigrants can achieve this in 1–1 1/2 years if they live among [native English speakers]. It is especially true if they use their spare time for language learning. With a good working knowledge of English, the immigrant can get along much easier than the one who, lacking this skill, depends solely on his relatives [who can take advantage of the situation].

If permanent settlement is the immigrant's ultimate objective, his own personal experiences in the first year and reliable information about past

circumstances usually give him an adequate picture of the area's economic conditions. If these conditions are sufficiently tolerable, the immigrant enters into contract with one or more farmers for the second, third and four year. If the conditions are unfavourable, he ought to move on and relocate at least a couple of hundred miles away. There is no limit on distances in Canada.

He can repay his passage money out of his first year's salary. The following year he can bring his wife over, if conditions will allow. The couple's hard work in the third and fourth year may yield enough income so that they can begin to farm on their own without taking an unreasonably burdensome debt. Even so, the beginning is very hard, and 15–20 years will pass, full of hardship and inhuman toil, before the settlers can call their sufficiently equipped homestead their own property.

This is not to say that such a goal must be, or can be, attained by everyone. Nor is it denied that fortunate cases do and can exist—cases in which bigger or faster results are achieved. As elsewhere, this is simply a matter of luck.

Even in the most optimal case one should ask, however, whether the result was worth the sacrifice. You have to leave the familiar culture of the old country. The distant foreign land you travel to will remain foreign to you forever. Still, decades of hard labour will tie you inescapably to the strange soil. Since you cannot sell your property, you are condemned to stay for a lifetime. You exchange your usual way of life and your children's, your ancestral language and customs, for a cycle of never-ending work. . . .

Most unfortunate is the situation of those immigrants in Canada who have been duped into investing some money in advance of their arrival in an unknown place, among unfamiliar conditions. By doing so they deprive themselves of the freedom of movement [and expose themselves to exploitation]. One can never warn immigrants enough against the dangers of such practice.

Those immigrants who possess considerable capital and come to Canada to increase it, must keep in mind that in this country everybody is an entrepreneur and businessman who possesses not only the language but also the knowledge of local conditions–indispensable for capitalizing on business opportunities.

It is easy to become an entrepreneur, but goals must be carefully tailored to the possibilities . . .

[Editor's note: The book concludes by giving advice to tourists who might wish to visit Canada.]

"For amateur hunters and naturalists, the rich wildlife of central Canada and the as yet unexplored regions of the North provide excellent grounds for activity. For such enterprise only money, a well-functioning supply system based on careful planning, good health, and steadfastness are required."