

Dorris Court, Britannia
Lloydminster
NWT Canada

Oct 21st

My dear Friends,

Whenever anything of importance happens I always feel it is about time to write a general letter. Yesterday was a day never to be forgotten by any of the inmates of Doris Court or inhabitants of Lloydminster. For days past we have been anxiously watching 7 huge prairie fires raging in the distance fearing that a wind might bring heavy disaster to our homestead and town.

The night of Oct 20th was an anxious one, the terrible circle of fire closing around us. The general opinion was that we were safe for the night but I could not sleep. The next morning our worst fears were realized and we knew that a few hours would decide our fate. The only safeguard against prairie fires is a broad belt of ploughing all round your homestead. This my husband has done with the exception of one side which alas was the very side towards which the fire was sweeping with awful rapidity. Needless to say the plough was soon at work and it was literally ploughing for dear life.

Every available tub was filled with water, every sack collected together to beat out the flames when the time should come. Mr. Rendell, Barnes, and another man who is working for us were all on the alert watching with intense eagerness all the different points. Meanwhile within the house I together with Mrs. Falhank

(the wife of the post master who is boarding with us this winter) and Mrs. Bunyan who nursed me when my little girl was born, stood gazing out of the window horror stricken at the awful sight that met our eyes, we, each of us, had 3 little children and each one in arms. We mustered 9 little ones all under 6. Our little flock fortunately were too young to realize the deadly peril we were in and we had to keep on "rounding them up" preparatory to a hasty flight.

I collected a few little valuables and looked around with a very heavy heart wondering what would become of us if in an hour or two we should be homeless. At last we could stand still no longer and we three women rushed out and filling buckets with the clay soil dug up from the foundation we scattered it all over the ground immediately around the house.

The wind was blowing a hurricane, bringing or rather driving the fire straight on us. The awful roar of the flames was enough to make the bravest shudder and the smoke and smell stifling. Willie continued plowing until absolutely compelled to stop owing to heat and smoke. Our two men meanwhile drenched our roof with water and were arming themselves with wet sacks hurried to the weakest points where there was the least probability of the flames "jumping" the fire guard which was only 150 yds off the house all round. We could do nothing more than wait with bated breath.

At last came the joyful sound of "safe" from the western side but the danger was not yet over for on the north west side we were again threatened, and after the horses had been placed in safety all hands had to fly around to meet the enemy at the fresh point of attack and after a hard fight, thanks to cool heads and

strong arms the dreaded fire was kept at bay and after a short time of awful suspense and anxiety my husband came back to us with the welcome assurance "all danger over, safe for another year".

We were all too overjoyed for words and after the dreadful strain of so many hours you may pretty well guess what the reaction was like. Mr. Rendall was literally fagged out, but after a little rest and refreshment we all felt better. We lost 4 ton of hay only but many have lost all their hayricks.

The fire started by the Vermilion River and was raging for days before it reached us and swept on down towards Battleford. There is no doubt whatever but that our fireguard in great measure saved the town life. Apart from the horror of it, it was a most wonderful sight. Of course on the prairie you can see an enormous distance, and for 20 or 30 miles there was nothing but flames. As it grows dusk the effect is most weird. How thankful we were that the fire reached us in daytime and not at night!

Thus ends my description of a prairie fire and I earnestly trust I may never witness such another. We have quite a houseful at present mustering 15 in all which is a big family to cater and cook for. My little ones are quite happy, the little Canadian girl being especially bonnie and thriving splendidly.

Our town site is all surveyed and the Government has decided to grant a plot of land to every colonist who cares to apply for it. Mr. Rendell and Barnes have each got one and we intend on erecting a little store on ours for the disposal of our dairy

produce. We are hoping to get 2 or 3 more cows this next week. Everyone likes our butter made in the old Devonshire fashion.

I have been for a drive to-day and the town is growing very, very fast, dozens of little "shacks" springing up all around. There are two large general stores, 2 restaurants, Post Office, Butchers Shop, Blacksmiths, Vicarage all within 20 minutes walk of Doris Court. I have had to write this at odd moments and in great haste and must reluctantly curtail this and write the rest of my news later on. I was overjoyed to receive today 6 home letters from my dear old friends in acknowledgment of the news of the birth of my little daughter.

Yours as ever, A.R.

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Canada