

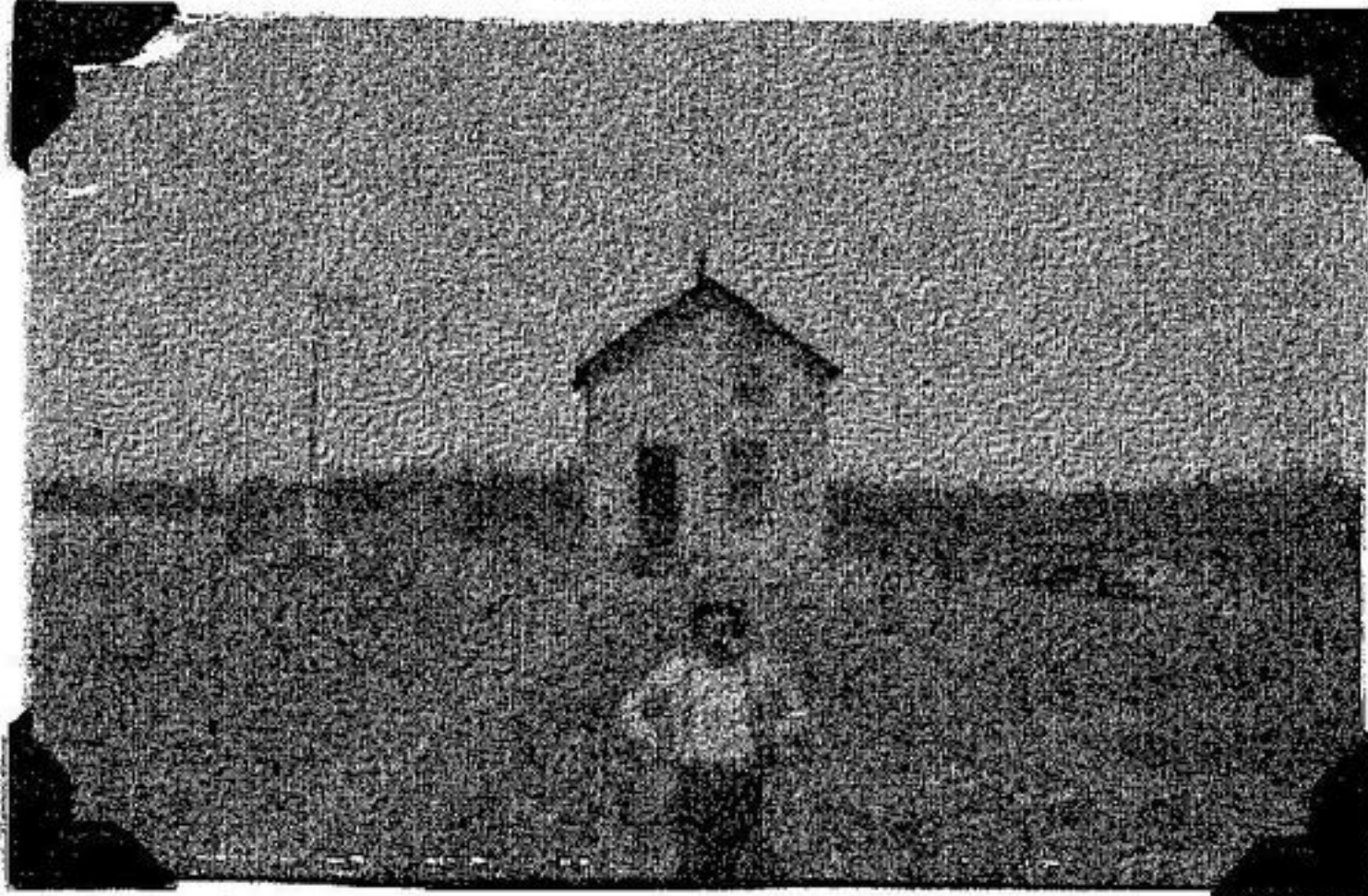
EARLY DAYS WITH THE WEBSTER FAMILY

Written in 1943 by Mrs. M. Steen

Much of the history of this great northland will remain unwritten, a secret jealously guarded in its own grand immensity. This is but a few bare facts, loosely connected, of the Webster family's experience in this land of beautiful summers quick of growth, abundant of production, prodigal of moisture and blessed with its northern lights

Like great sapphires in the sky
Monstrous diamonds there on high.

It is thirty-one years since we left England's shores and arrived at Cochrane, with the idea of settling on my brother, Sam Webster's farm at Clute. At first we stayed at the Cochrane Farms, as they were called, at that time belonging to Sutcliffe and Neelands, surveyors, about two and a half miles from Cochrane, shown below with Robert Armstrong in front, in 1912



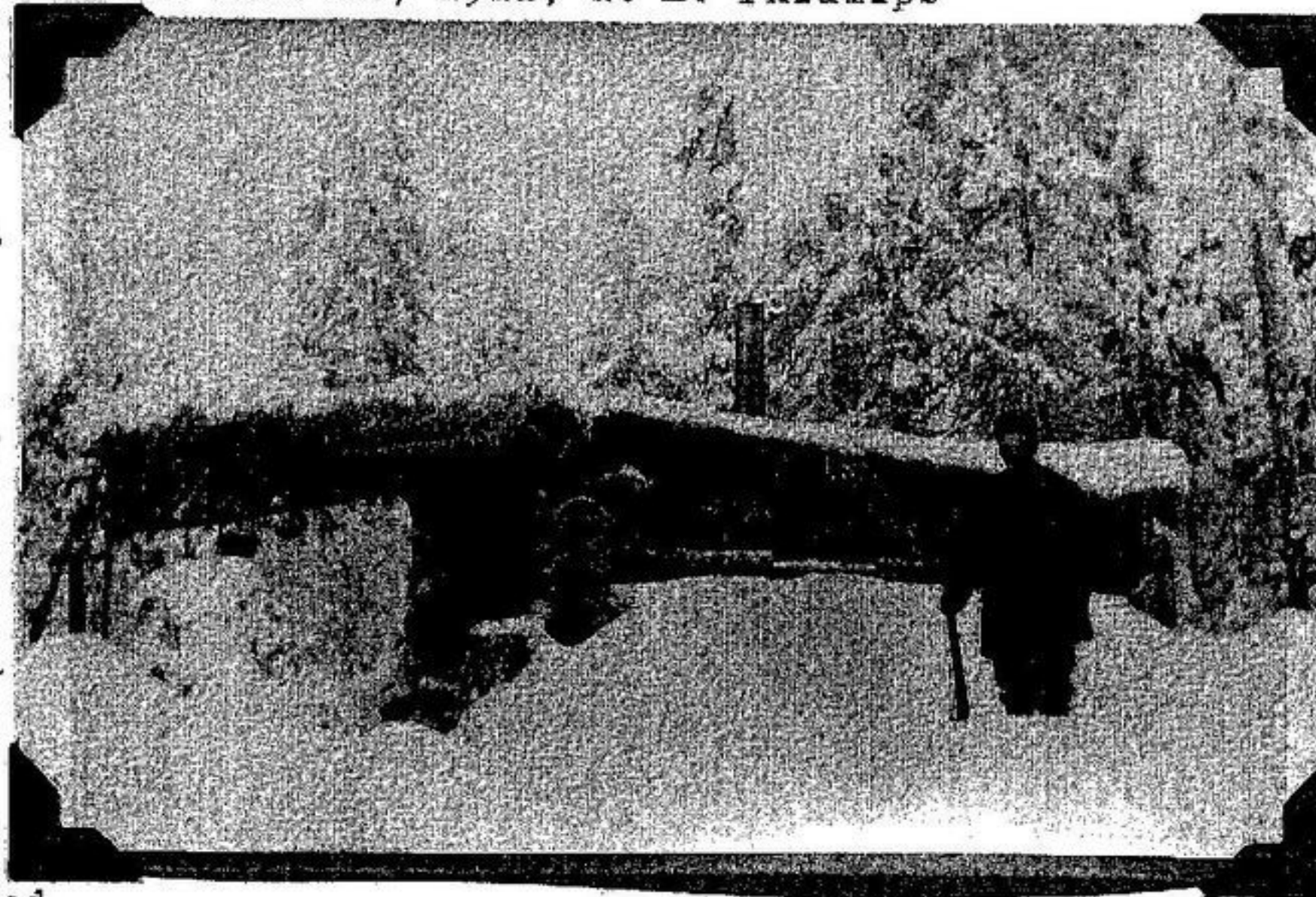
acres at this place, no roads, a trail from Cochrane of corduroy, clay and mud, and around, nothing but green bush.

My brother, Sam Webster, and E. Phillips were two of the first to take up lots in Clute. They had many adventures together. They carried their food in packs from Cochrane to Clute at that time. He told us how a wild cat (lynx) followed them one time from Cochrane by jumping from tree to tree. But they kept right on, fearing to stumble lest it jump on them, and were very thankful when they came to the little log cabin in the woods, breathing with relief when they were safely inside.

Sam Webster, 1912, at E. Phillips

Once a large bear came out of the bush at the right of the picture of the Cochrane Farm and walked straight towards me. A road gang were making a road at the time and went after it with their axes. It strolled off in a leisurely fashion and was lost to view again in the bush.

We had been there only two weeks, when the little hut in which we were staying (we had moved to the lot next to the Cochrane Farm) was burned down. We lost everything we owned except an old sea chest my father, a sailor, had been used to taking on his sea voyages. That was left at Carrere's Farm on the corner, as the mud road was so bad. We had



One frightening experience we had was of walking out from the town the night we arrived, over muskeg and around stumps, as there were stumps of trees all around town then. By the time we reached our destination we were wet to our knees. We had certainly never expected anything like that, being accustomed to the sidewalks of London, England, where we had lived all our lives. There was a clearing of around ten

to wait for dry weather before we could get it.

After we had lost all we owned by fire, we lived in two tents, while two Indians and Sam built a nice four-roomed bungalow of logs, back of Armstrong's house. We were very excited when it was nearly finished and happy when we were able to move into a house we could call "home" again.

One day my brothers Sam and Albert and I walked from the Cochrane Farm to see Mr. and Mrs. G. Cowan. I will never forget that walk. The big hill was not cut down at that time. I was very tired when we reached their hut, but they had caught some fresh fish and we had lunch with them, delicious and refreshing. After we had rested we walked back, arriving home around eight o'clock at night, a trip of around twenty miles, but it seemed even further to me.

Four months after we had arrived here my brother Sam took typhoid fever and died in the hospital at New Liskeard, there being no hospital in town at that time. This was a double disaster to us, both in our loss and in the fact that we had come to this strange land just to be with him.

Brother John of Lanning's Survey Party,
Hauling provisions up to the Canyon

My mother was a real old pioneer, for she settled with four of my brothers, Dick, Charlie, John and Albert, on Sam's farm, and oftentimes she stayed there alone while the boys were all away on survey parties and so on.

I had a position in Cochrane by that time with B. Rothschild. One day word came to me that Mother was

worried about the bush fires that were burning all about that summer. I hurried out from town and remember jumping over burning twigs and bits of logs. When I arrived I found fires burning all around the house, and in no time the road I had come in by was closed by fire across the trail. For three days we were surrounded and our house would likely have gone in the fire except for the help of Mr. R. Armstrong and two other neighbours. Chickens and a pig that we had in outhouses were completely burned and we were nearly suffocated with smoke, but on the third day it rained and my mother thanked God.

The fire swept the forest in places and left
Its ravaging marks, like a demon let loose.
Beautiful trees destroyed in their youth
Leaving the ground bare, desolate, uncouth.
Beautiful forest, once so green,
Look at you now, pitiable thing,
Black burnt timber, no birds in you sing.
A vast stretch of wasteland
To burn, what a sin! S.S.

Christmas 1922 was spent with the Phillips family. I was up visiting Mother at the time. Mrs. Phillips had won a goose which made a perfect Christmas dinner with Christmas pudding. "Dad" Hannah and Mike Steen were there also and after supper we played games, Blow-ball and Forfeits. "Dad" Hannah was called on for a song. He had a very good voice and knew any number of songs. While talking he stuttered, but when singing he was never bothered. His song that day was "Pills and Things"

