



the painted box

by Wendy Thomson

Every night, I lie awake for a while thinking "Tomorrow I'll write a column" and figuring out what to say. But then the "tomorrow" is so hectic and disorganized, nothing gets written.

However, today is December 6, the mail strike is over, a table and chairs arrived yesterday, my husband, sons, and the dogs are all out hunting, and I have no excuse not to sit down on one of the new chairs, put my typewriter on the new table and get to work.

But where do I start? Everything is so different here and there is so much to tell! I've written notes here and there over the past six weeks, and will enclose them when I find them again. They keep getting lost in shuffles.

I guess I should start with our arrival at Buck Creek, Alberta. We pulled into the yard here October 15, the four of us, three dogs, Tansy-cat, and Minnie-the-ferret, not knowing if the farm was still for sale or if the owner had changed his mind. He appeared in the doorway, ushered us into the house for coffee, and within 15 minutes had refused to hear any talk of us finding a motel to stay in while the sale went through and insisted we move in with him and his wife Tillie—if we didn't mind, that was.

So for a week and a half, all of us, both of them, their two dogs, two cats, and four rabbits all snuggled up together, although not all in the house (we brought only Tansy inside with us). While Tillie worked, I house-kept—and Gord and Metro hunted. That's western Ukrainian Polish hospitality for you.

On October 31, we became the proud (?) owners of... what? I think this is what has kept me from writing for so long, trying to figure how to describe the farm. Maybe I should start at the front and

just make my way back. To begin with, we have a quarter-section (160 acres). Thirty-six acres are cleared and in hay, the rest in "bush" which would be called forest 10 years ago. Unfortunately, all trees except for a small patch out by the road were cleared from around the house so it looks rather bare.

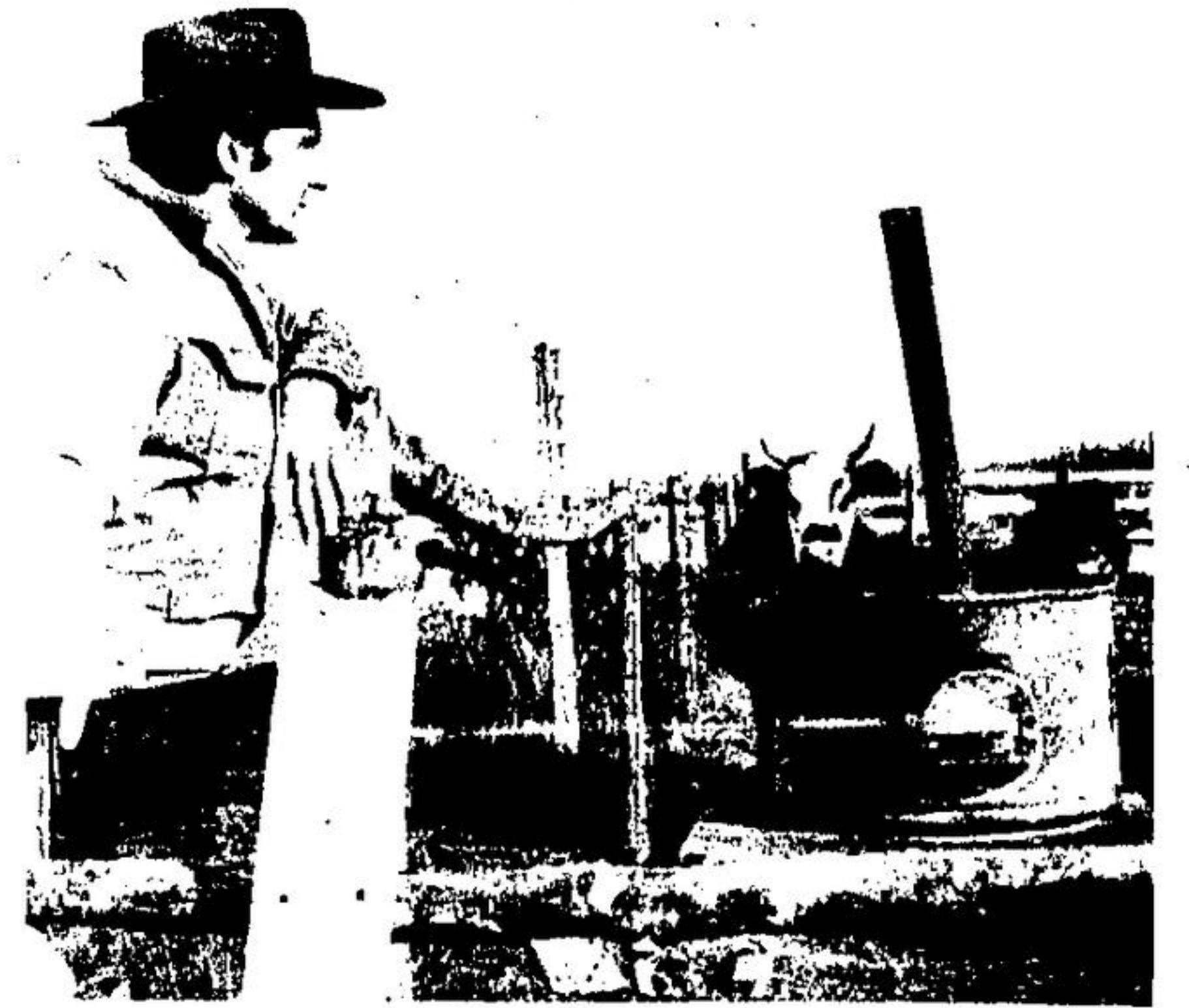
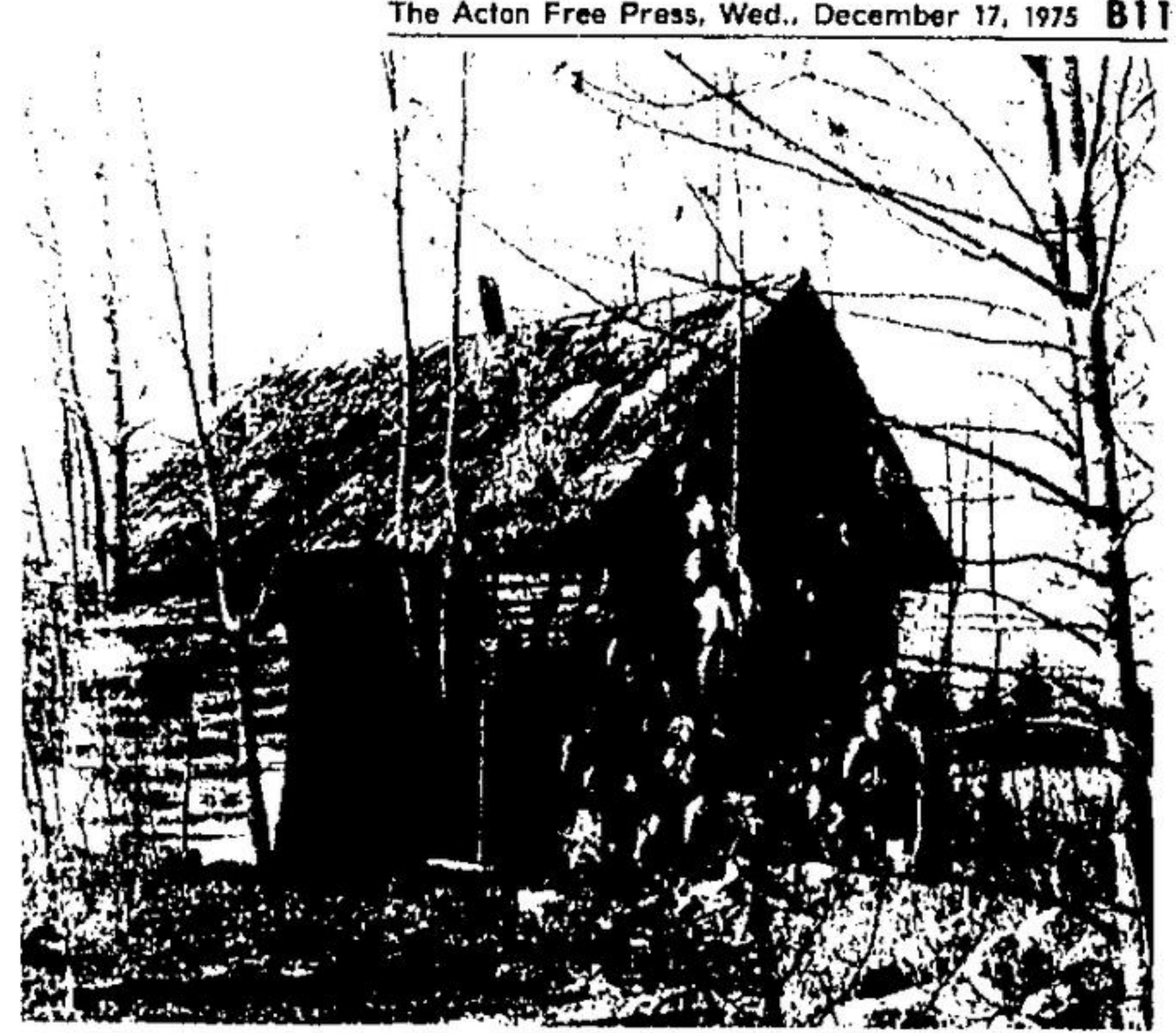
The ones out front were left because of two pioneer log buildings there. One has been used for chickens the past few years; the larger one has an unbelievable and mind-boggling accumulation of odds and ends from I don't know how many years back. We haven't had time to poke around and see just what there is, and I wouldn't even know where to begin to sort it out.

The house is third back from the road. I should mention here that in past years in this township, if a person owned over 40 acres, he could build pretty well as they pleased, what they pleased; and some of the buildings look it.

However, although this house is small and plain and not too attractive (as yet), it is better than many in the area. And it even has indoor plumbing! Actually, it doesn't matter that it's small, because we have almost no furniture anyhow.

At the front of the house is the living room (with a stereo, the TV on a packing box, and an old mattress to sit on), and our 7 x 11 foot bedroom, holding the bed down one end (with two inches to spare) and our two suitcases up the other.

The back of the house consists of the boys' bedroom with their two mattresses, and the kitchen in which I now sit. A bit is tacked on the back for the bathroom and back porch. (If it were a modern house, it would be called a mudroom.)



WITH WINTER come to Buck Creek, Alberta, someone comes out twice a day to build a fire in the box in the cattle's water tank to melt the ice.



WENDY AND GORD Thomson and boys' new outbuildings including two log cabins. home at Buck Creek, Alberta. There are 11



NOT A STRAW hut in the foothills, but a hay stack a few miles from the Thomsons' new home in Alberta. Cattle have eaten it into the "hut" shape.



SUE AND McPhee, the Thomson family dogs.

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