

## Arts and Ideas

# Winter in Canada a pleasurable season

I love winter and I remember with particular pleasure our first winter in Canada, the winter of 1954-55.

We came to Canada in the summer and moved to a farm in Northumberland County at the end of July. The farmer I worked for wasn't a healthy man and very soon he left the work on the farm to me. We lived in a shabby, but beautiful old house, high up on a hill. Today it would be called a heritage house. It had classical proportions and large windows and the rain and wind of many years had taken off all the paint it had been covered with once and left it a silvery grey.

It had six rooms and a kitchen, a few pieces of furniture, no bathroom and no electric light.

From its windows we had a breathtaking view over the undulating fields between Dartford and Hastings. Our first purchase for this house was a huge iron kitchen stove, ancient - already 36 years old - with a water tank that could heat six pails of water. We paid \$10 for the treasure.

The main farm was down the hill and over a road, in a protected spot, sheltered from the north wind by a dense grove of trees. We, up on the hill, however, had to get used to almost constant winds that rattled the dry, old windows just enough to make going to sleep a bit of an act of will.

The night Hurricane Hazel swept over us we feared the glass was going to shatter and we huddled with our children in the kitchen, expecting the roof to fly away at any moment.

The neighboring farmers adopted us newcomers at once. It was the kind of neighborhood where life was lived in unison. The farmers helped each other during harvest time, and every week there was a party somewhere for grown-ups and children alike.

Before we realized it, winter had arrived.

In my memory, we woke up one morning to find the hills blanketed with snow. The farmers located on sideroads, had to deliver their milk with crude, horse-drawn sleighs to the main road, which was the only road that got plowed. A heavenly silence fell over the countryside.

The voices of children, tobogganing somewhere down a hill, could be heard for miles.

To visit a neighbor, we walked across the snow-covered fields, deeply inhaling the crisp, winter air that filled our bodies with joy. How I loved the warm barn at milking time with the gentle cows tucking away huge mountains of hay and sour silage.

A few days before Christmas I walked to a far-away cedar swamp to cut a Christmas tree. We couldn't find the right candles in any of the stores in nearby Warkworth, and the ones we got dripped so continuously that after one day only, the tree was covered in wax. Since we had no other decorations at that time, we liked this not-planned-for-



**John Sommer**  
IDEAS AND THE ARTS

decoration very much. The long period from Christmas until April, when we

were almost cut off from the outside world, seems to have been, in retrospect, a magical time. There were these little pockets of life; a barn with animals, a house with a family.

At night, when I walked home from the evening chores, I saw the faint lights from these dwellings. The stars above me glittered like diamonds, by comparison.

One of the upstairs bedrooms in our house stored, what seemed to be a thousand old issues of the magazine "Saturday Evening Post." We brought them all down to the living room and they

became our introduction to the new continent that was now our home.

The children never tired of the pictures in the magazines and pinned their favorite covers on the walls. To my wife and I, the short stories were just the right material to practice our shaky English on.

Sometimes parcels with books from Germany arrived. We never ran out of reading matter.

On very cold nights we gathered around the iron stove in the kitchen. On nights not quite so cold we sat at the large table in the living room. The woodshed

was filled with chopped wood. The heat from the kitchen stove came in a pipe through the wall into the living room. Like a monstrous snake, the pipe continued to the middle of the livingroom ceiling, turned by 90 degrees and vanished into the ceiling and into an upper floor bedroom.

During the night, when the fire died, the house became as cold as ice. It was the coldest winter of our lives, and yet it also was the warmest winter of our lives.

This winter was the beginning of something that hasn't come to an end yet, it was the beginning of our love affair with Canada.



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