

This is encouraging! Families, moving into the area, joining their fathers, husbands and brothers to build this place!

I'm James Hartney. Its 1884. 1884! We hear rumours of the railroad coming to Brandon in a couple years. That'll make it easier. Settlers coming to southwest Manitoba have a long trek with oxcart. I came three years ago. Bought two sections of land and hired men to work it. Men here live mostly as bachelors. They need cash to invest in their own farms, so they can bring their families from Ontario.

Sam Long and John Fee were the first European settlers in the area. That was 1881. They built a soddy and began plowing, planting and putting up hay. They both went to the city to find work that first winter. When they came back, they found their home crowded with seventeen people. All needing temporary shelter while they built their own sod homes. Imagine! In the Spring of '82, theirs was the only shelter.

My wife Sarah Jane and our family arrived two years ago. Our success started when we imported a carload of Red Fife wheat from Minnesota. After keeping enough for our own crops, we sold the rest to our neighbors. Red Fife makes great tasting bread and grows well on freshly broken soil. We've had great crops, so our reputation as a first-class wheat producing district has been established!

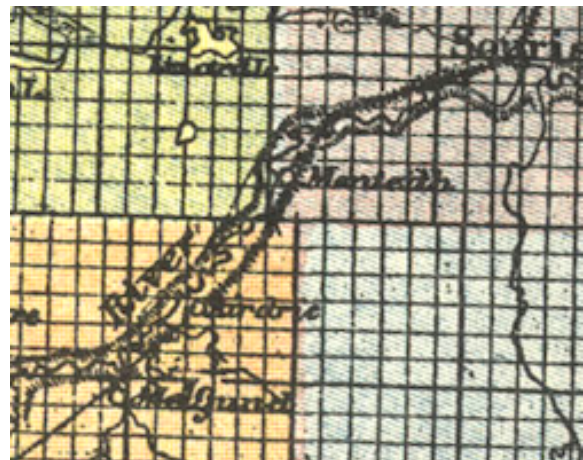
Settlers keep arriving. At first, our farm was the centre of the new community. We got the right to open a post office, which, somehow, was named "Hartney". We also set up a store and a bit later, a blacksmith shop! It looks now like the railroad may come through about ½ mile north. So, like many places, we may move the community.

But, here we are for now. Rough shanties are being replaced by comfortable wood framed structures. So families can settle in. Seeing a community grow out of the prairie soil is a wonder to behold. And, let me add, we now have a school. It's just outside the village. It's comforting to see children walk to and from school. Unlike out east, we don't worry about children being out and about. And parents are too busy to spoil their children! Children who live in the village often walk with their teacher.

Some have to cross the Souris in a row boat. Then walk two miles to school! If the river's high, they just don't get to school.

One thing we don't have enough of is quality wood for firewood, lumber and fence posts. It's becoming a tradition for families to head to Turtle Mountain in winter to cut wood. That's a 60 km trek! We start at 4 am the first day. Let the horses rest the second, as we cut with saws and axes and load the sleighs. Before dawn the third day, we head back, getting home well after dark, as it's a heavy load for our horses. The fourth day is the best. We wake up knowing we'll be warm through the winter. In this climate, that's a great feeling!

This is the community of Hartney. Sarah and I are so proud it carries our name.



*The CPR originally selected the name "Airdrie". Locals insisted on "Hartney".*

*Hartney Beginning is bases upon a story written for Vantage Points 1.*

*Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.*