

My Soddy Home

A VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK

It's an early morning in September and already my skirts and blouse are filthy! My husband and I are building our first home out here on the prairies, a sod hut, called a 'soddy'

We've been told to build it now in September when the grasses' roots are deep and strong. Wood is scarce on the prairies, but sod from thickly-rooted prairie grass is in abundance, and it's free!

Soddy's are sturdy. They'll stand against fierce northwesterly winds, and they're warm in the winter. Cool in the summer, we're told. It



sounds ideal, however, my neighbour told me her soddy is infested with mice, and there are always bugs in her flour and sugar! Ugh!

We started early this morning, me with my sharp edged shovel. Carving out slabs of grass into 1 foot by 3-foot bricks, about 4 inches deep.

The neighbors have just arrived. They're helping my husband carry, and then lay, the slabs of sod upside down, staggered like bricks, until the walls are about 2 meters high. Our house will be 430 square feet; the minimum size required under the Dominion Lands Act.

Our hut will have two windows and a door using planks as frames. Windows and wooden boards will need to be purchased, but we're trying to save as much money as we can. So we can build a second home, a real house, next spring.

The men are hoping to start the roof by the end of the week. Strong poles will be placed down

the centre of the building to support a ridge pole. Then they'll place rafters made from poles from the ridge to the walls. Finally, a layer of willow branches will be laid down, and then topped with sod.

The inside of our new home will give us the basic shelter, with no frills! The walls will be smoothed and plastered with clay and then whitewashed. I'll stretch sheets of heavy cotton over the ceiling to make it cozy, and cleaner. We'll have to put up with a dirt floor for now.

The neighbour ladies are here now to help with the lunch. They're using our canvas tent as their kitchen. Tight for space. But it's all we have. We've all worked so hard this morning. We'll stop for a bite to eat, but there's no rest yet! The sod hut must be complete before the fall rains begin.

My neighbor has warned me of how the roof can leak in the rainy season. She told me to use an oilcloth tablecloth so I can put our belongings under the table when the roof leaks.

She's also told me that when conditions are dry, a simple spark from the woodstove can easily start a ceiling fire! Oh my!

Just between you and me, I've already started to collect field stone for our next house. Yep! I want a two-story stone house with lots of windows, and a wooden floor.

My Soddy Home was inspired by a story in *Vantage Points 4*.

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.