In the beginning there was the land — the grass and sky

Pictorial History of Mankota
Where buffalo Roamed

In 1874 the district was considered the eastern boundary of the diminishing buffalo range. By 1890 the herds were gone forever. Deeply carved paths leading down to watering places, wallows gouged by itchy buffalo, and scattered bones were all that remained when settlers arrived thirty years later.
Sioux

Native of the Wood Mountain country when the traders arrived were the Assiniboine. These were settled on distant reservations.

The Sioux flocked to the area after the Custer Massacre of 1876. Sitting Bull surrendered in 1881 but some of his followers remained. This band was probably the last of the plains Indians to be granted a Reservation—in 1913.
Remains of the Stone Age

Probably a ceremonial stone

A tent ring near ferland

Long ago Indian squaws cooked buffalo steaks over this fireplace uncovered by wind erosion
History began with the Police

Wood Mountain Post - 1912

Traders and Métis began to frequent Wood Mountain in the late 'sixties. Legare, a prominent trader, built a post about the southeast corner of the future R.M. 45. Later he moved to the present Wood Mountain. The N.W.M.P. established a post in 1875.

Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills

The tents in the foreground said to be those of the contractors.
Cattle on the range

Ranching began in the Wood Mountain country about 1890. In the winter of 1906-07 ranchers lost heavily through storm and starvation. The Turkey Track the largest ranch in this area is reputed to have lost 12,000 head of cattle. When settlers arrived their bones lay scattered from Vanguard to Wood Mountain. Ranching is still carried on in the hilly country south of Mankota.
Homestead Rush

On September 1, 1908, southwestern Saskatchewan was thrown open to settlement. During the previous night a thousand prospective homesteaders crowded around the land office at Moose Jaw. In R.M. 45 the first land was filed in December.

In 1908, the future R.M. 45 was uninhabited. The census of 1911 recorded 447 persons. By the following year nearly all the land was filed. The people were largely from Eastern Canada and United States. There was a Russian German settlement and a few other racial origins.

"Trailing In"
Belsher Brothers, the first homesteaders, spring of 1909

Covered wagon
Murphy's Lake View Hotel
A stopping place on the Pole Trail from Moose Jaw.
Sign read "Pork and beans for man and beast."

Spring floods on Pinto Flat sometimes caused delay.

Night on the lone prairie
End of the Trail
Sod Houses

Notice the sage growing on the walls—and the rain water barrels.

Another Type
A homesteader and his family

One of the four women to homestead in her own right

Russian-German Architecture
Sod barn

Roofing was a problem in erecting a sod building. Notice the grass vegetation.

Hauling Poles

The settlers hauled poles for roofing and fuel from the wooded ravines of Wood Mountain and Pinto Butte.
The first furrow was symbolic. It marked the beginning of a new way of life. The native grasses were turned under to be replaced by wheat.

(Negative inverted—note furrow)
A field of breaking.

Oxen Ploughing
About half the homesteaders used oxen instead of horses. An ox might cost $100, a horse twice that price.
Agricultural beginnings
Notice the barreness of the plains and the distant horizon.
Flax in bloom

Flax was grown on breakings. As it rapidly depleted the soil, farmers soon switched to wheat growing.
Haying

Treking to the harvest fields
Each year homesteaders went to the older settled districts to harvest. Wages high. Harvest earnings were practically the sole source of revenue during the first year or so.
The homesteaders of 1909 worked for the same thresher that fall. Near the end of that season their employer absconded with their wages.
Other Homestead Activities

Going for an outing
Horseback riding was a favorite mode of travel.

Oxen were slow.
Seeding the wheat

The annals of agriculture form much of the story of R.M. 45. There is a rhythm to wheat farmers' lives; the planting, the anxiety over weather, the harvesting, the season of quiescence; year in and year out, that is rhythm.

From the air, Mankota is a checker board of farms and fields. The rough land in the foreground, Pinto Butte is outside the boundaries of R.M. 45.

From the southwest corner
A stonepile
A feature of many a field.

Digging Rock
Notice the farm dog.
Summer following
This was done in June.

Russian Thistle
This is a dry season weed. Wet seasons
the tumbling mustard is common.
Discing

Before the drought years farmers thought that frequent tillage was advantageous.
Farmer studying weather

Where the climate is semi-arid, each crop year is a gamble. During the growing season, particularly during June and July, the weather causes anxiety. The difference between a crop and a crop failure is a few summer rains at the right time. Here you see a farmer scanning the evening sky.
Weather Hazards

After the hail storm

Grasshopper damage

“Hopper swarms

My friend John tells this story.

A feller down home was cuttin' his crop the year the hoppers was so bad. I saw him in town one Saturday night, and I sez to him.

"How's yore crop, Ronald?"

"Well sir," he sez, "I've bin cuttin' for nearly a week now an' tonight about quittin' time the first sheaf dropped off the binder."
The golden harvest

Cutting oats
Stocked fields stretching to horizon

This was one of the threshing outfits which operated in R.M. 46. In 1915 Hamilton had a record run of 52 days threshing 34 farms. Smaller machines gradually displaced large outfits.
Stocking oats for fodder

Burning straw stack
On fall and winter evenings burning straw stacks illuminated the landscape.
Farmsteads

Standing against the horizon this farmstead suggests the isolation and loneliness of life in the west.

The barreness of the landscape, the absence of shelterbelts, and the unpainted farm buildings is a depressing sight.
The planting of a grove of trees indicated that a farmer had faith in the country that this was to be his home. Between 1912 and 1944 over 489,000 trees had been planted.
Native Born

The author on the bare prairie.

Pals
Seventeen schools were erected in R.M. 45. The school population reached its height in 1929. In 1918, 86% were in the lower grades. Few tried grade eight before 1924. High school correspondence courses were introduced in 1929.
Churches and Congregation

Milly's church congregation first worshipped in Ruhls sod house.

The same congregation ten years later worshipping in the school house.
McCord United Church

Belonging to group on the previous page.

Church - first church building erected in 1913.

Billimun Catholic Church

The first mass was held in a tent in the prairie district.

Its predecessor was destroyed by fire a week after its erection.
The Rural Municipality of Mankota, no. 45, was organized in January 1913. Of the 34 by-laws passed by 1928, 3 related to roads, 6 to insect and animal pests, 1 to weeds, and 9 to herd laws and pound keepers.
The first post office

Gravesborough was opened in 1922. In 1922 there were eight offices. Mail was delivered twice a week.

Notice the boards on the house run vertically. These people came from a wetter climate.

Until the radio was introduced in or about 1925 the weekly newspaper and farm magazines were the main link of the farm home with the outside world.

Telephone line

Three rural telephone companies were organized in 1917 by farmers in the municipality north and in the northern part of R.M. 45.
Locals of the Sask. Grain Growers Association, both men and women's were very active. This group was active in many community enterprises. Later the group re-organized as a Homemakers' Club.

"Old maids convention"

the cast of a community play. Most of the women in the above picture were in the cast.

The ball game at Kaybells picnic on annual event.
Agricultural Exhibition

The two day fair was the social event of the summer. It represented the great community effort. The first day was devoted to exhibiting, the second to sports. The first fair was held in 1913.

Camping at the fair
This picture was taken beside Wood River.
Wood Mountain
1912

Ride 'im cowboy

Steer riding
The farm boys liked a spirited pony and a cowboy hat.
Touring Car

Proud owner in his new sedan.
From Trail to Highway

Prairie trail

Country road - looking east across Wood Valley

This highway was a provincial relief project

Highway no. 19

Highway maintenance.
Transportation Problem

Farmer's grain pile.

As more land came under cultivation and the production of each farm increased the need for better marketing facilities became more acute.

Public meetings were held. Petitions were circulated. Delegations were sent to wait upon railway officials and cabinet ministers.

Hauling Grain

Homesteaders hauled grain 80 miles to market after 1914 from 12 to 30 miles. For many it was a two-day trip.
One of the three market centres 12 miles north of R.M. 45.

Waiting at the elevators

Loaded wheat wagons awaiting their turn at the elevators in Meyronne.
Coming of the Railway

Building the grade

Laying the steel

Late in 1938 the first reached the village of Mankota - the end of steel.
120,000 bushels of wheat

Before the steel arrived, grain agents began buying grain and piling it on the ground. Fortunately it was a dry fall.

Ferland in winter

This picture taken during the village's second winter, suggests coldness and isolation—a small community frozen until the spring thaw.
The Three Towns

Ferland

McLeod

Wind chargers supply electric power in farm homes and several homes in Ferland.
Noontime siesta

Main street - Mankota

Mc Cord

Perland
Drought

A black blizzard

The great drouth cycle of the 1930's held the Great Plains in its grip from 1929 to 1937. Dust storms, soil erosion, insect pests, and repeated crop failures tried the spirit of the people.

Sang a local poetess
I say to myself, "It's honest brown earth,
The cream of the summer fallow."
But to find it in food is no for mirth,
Nor smell it at night on my pillow.

The blow-out represents about a quarter section of land. It has eroded to the hardpan and the soil has spilled over into adjacent fields.

Seen from the air
A buried fence

Russian thistles caught and held the drifting sands.
Abandoned

farm buildings

Anderson chariot

When farmers could no longer afford gasoline for their cars, they used chassis and wheels to construct horse-drawn vehicles. There were many models. The two wheeled vehicles were dubbed Anderson chariots in dubious honor of the provincial premier; the four wheeled rigs, Bennet buggies after the dominion prime minister.
At an early hour on a winter morning a long line of wagons and teams, stretching back nearly a third of a mile await the distribution of relief fodder. In the winter of 1930-31, 413 carloads of feed were distributed in R.M. 45.
The Last Round-up

In 1937 came the worst drouth year of all. The provincial government decreed that only a minimum number of cattle could be kept by farmers; the surplus must be sold. In September over 2,000 head of cattle were shipped out of the village of Mankota in two days.

Notice how clearly the small stones show up when there is no vegetative cover.

Notice the dust in the distance.
And the rains came

In the crop season of 1931-32, not a bushel of grain was marketed. In 1937-38, 7000 bushels; in 1943-44, 1,843,000. R.M. 45 had staged a "come back."
Mechanization of Farms brought about a revolution in farm life. Working hours were shortened while farmers could farm more land with less help.

It is a question whether the drought retarded or stimulated the displacement of horses by the tractor. The problem of fodder in dry years was an argument for switching to mechanical power.

One of the first tractors in R.M. 45

Assembling a carload of tractors
Tiller - combine
Discarded Machinery

Every farm yard had a corner filled with obsolete and worn-out machinery. During the war, much of this was sold as scrap.
Old Dobbin was turned to pasture after the mechanization of farms. Many farmers could not bear to dispose of all their horse power. Finally many of these found their way to the government horse meat plant at Swift Current.
Boys' and Girls' Clubs

A boys' grain club and a girls' poultry club. The man standing above the chicken coop, M. Mac Taggart, organized the agricultural activities shown in these pictures.

Farm boys judging horses
Members of the calf club display their calves.
Farm crowd listening to a speaker.

at the end of the day at the agricultural field day at Mac Taqqorts.

A co-operative retail oil business, farmer owned.
Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act

dam at Ferland
Many dams were constructed in R.M. 65 under this program.
Spring

A time of hope. What will the crop season be like?
Upper Wood Valley

Wood River

at Summer Cove