

# The Golden Link

an  
Address  
by

Miss Eleanor Luxton  
to the  
SOUTHERN ALBERTA  
PIONEER AND OLDTIMERS  
ASSOCIATION



NOV. 1956

## THE GOLDEN LINK

In asking me to address you this evening you have conferred on me a great honour. I have been deeply conscious of this, and when I realize that I am the first woman that has had that honour I am more than ever aware of it. While thinking what to say to you, I realized the utter futility of attempting to say it all.

Every pioneer family has much to be proud of, therefore none can be chosen as unique. Rather I have likened the pioneers to a Golden Link in the chain of development of our country.

Time is the greatest forger in all the links of our nation; and as time goes from infinity to infinity, so a nation goes from its beginning to its end. Compared with time our nation is still in early youth. Yet - even though we are young in aeons of time - many links have been forged in our chain.

The initial strands were started, when our forefathers came to this land in search of adventure, wealth, peace, or security. Whatever had led them here - curiosity, economy, politics, or religion - they in their own ways answered.

Through their great curiosity and spirit of adventure our forefathers explored and opened to the world this country of immense land acreage and countless waterways. Their sense of economy made them seek the wealth of the country through its furs, its fish, its great ranching and farming lands, and its many other natural resources. The beginnings in politics were frequently stormy in the days when our great grandparents and our grandparents were struggling to formulate their ideas and maintain their rights; but out of these struggles grew some of the links which started our nation. Our basic laws of freedom, our great railways, and Confederation came from these efforts.

You and I look around at this amazing country. We see its lakes and mountains; its beautiful rivers with their teeming fish or their power developments; the great stretches of rangeland that used to be; the countless acres of wheat, many with oil or gas developments in their midst. We hear the wail of the Diesel horn, the put-put of the motor boat, or the roar of a jet plane. What does it all mean to us?

We, who are the younger sons and daughters - the great grandsons and granddaughters so to speak - have much to ponder. We proudly refer to ourselves as Native Sons and Native Daughters but do we understand the greatness of our heritage? Do we realize that in all the links of our nation there is one all-enveloping link that underlies the strength of the rest? Too often, in our readiness to accept what we receive so easily we forget "Our Pioneers" who made it all possible. The people the Almighty seemed to have created for this era.

Our pioneers and our forefathers are synonymous for without our parents, our grandparents, our great-grandparents we would not have had pioneers. They were the people who explored, traded, fought, and struggled to live in this new land. They were the men and women with vision to see the future, else they would never have had the courage to go on every day.

The pioneers knew the hardships of cold, starvation, and exhaustive labour. They knew the deadly fear of an unfriendly Indian war party, the heartbreak of waiting for a Chinook to save their cattle, the devastation of great fire or great frost. They realize the ferocity of floods and hurricanes, but equally well they understand the awesome sigh of wind and drought.

These were the people who had to travel thousands of miles in Red River Carts behind oxen or horses; in coaches drawn by six horse teams; or behind tiny steam locomotives that ran so slowly the passengers could get out to pick wild flowers.

They were the builders of their own homes after they had cut the logs or the sod, and sometimes cleared the land by hand. Their hands made the tables, benches and beds - or built the open fireplaces where all cooking was done. The spinning, weaving, knitting, making of clothes and shoes - in fact everything that meant life had to be done by themselves. They had no one within hundreds of miles to help in sickness, birth or death.

But these pioneers never faltered, they always had a goal - and they grew with the

country they were building. They learned to take her rebuffs and still love her beauty. They fought her hostility, yet willingly gave their own lives and the lives of their sons and daughters in the Great Wars of the Motherland.

They found peace and contentment, they had time for pleasure and gaiety as well as time for meditation. They are a great people - these pioneers - in the history of any land. They have witnessed the growth of history - more - they have made the history through their fortitude, their sense of humor, which was often needed, and their love of life.

As one of the Native Daughters I stand among you, and see familiar faces of family after family whose names stand high in our history. With you, the traders and the missionaries, I roam the plains, and see the great herds of buffaloes so countless in numbers they reach from horizon to horizon. I live the heat and excitement of the buffalo hunt even as you did when you depended on these animals for food, for clothes and for protection from the elements. I travel the rivers and streams in your canoes and make the portages with you, suffer the anxious minutes when a boat overturns and lives are in peril from rapids and rocks that are hidden under the churning water. You must have thrilled to the beauty of an Indian camp on the plains with the mountains in the background, the soft evening air and the welcome lights of the campfires in the tepees.

Then, I stop to think - and I remember - the pioneer missionaries knew a different side of life in the early Western land. They travelled far - and they travelled alone - never certain of life from sunrise to sunrise. All their hopes and dreams were centered in the great desire to help the Indians to better their way of life. Toward the fulfillment of that great aim the missionaries never faltered. How often they went alone into a strange camp, with God's will to add to their strength. All through the unsettled years, when many massacres took place elsewhere, the Canadian Indian stood side by side with his white brother, whom, through the living examples of the early missionaries, he had come to respect. Color, creed or race meant nothing to these men of God. They gave their best and they served all men well. We, who are here tonight, might do those missionaries homage in the old, old words - "For greater love hath no man than this - that he gave his life for another."

You pioneers, who are ranchers, regret the loss of the open range, and well you might. Nothing is more wonderful or awe-inspiring than thousands and thousands of head of cattle, feeding on the open plains, or drinking at the water holes, with never a fence in existence. You, too, suffered hardships, when the Nor' Westers blew and the snows fell - with little mercy for your stock. Then you rode like men or devils, you nursed and coddled, you fed and encouraged the flagging animals, and with few exceptions you won. There were the hard winters and the drought of later years, but you saw them through.

With the farmer came a new era in this great land, and you who are farmers have faced many problems as well as many rewards. You were the men who brought their families and planned to live by the land and the work of your hands. Yours was the tedious task of breaking land by plow and oxen, of sowing crops, of cutting and threshing, or grinding by hand. But you have lived to see the finest crops, the hardest wheat, the best oats and barley that the world can produce. You can now stand and look over the land at the waving wheat fields or the stooked acres and realize that you laboured well.

You cowboys - and many of you started out in this country as such - know the severity of the elements, the beauty of the warm sun after a long night of herding cattle. You remember the rough and tumble of early days. Perhaps you think, with some nostalgia, of the great roundups - the burning fires with the branding irons, the smell of singed hair. It was but yesterday that you played a joke on your best friend or your worst enemy. You have joined in the march of progress - riding the grub line is almost a thing of the past. Yet our roster of pioneers would not be complete without you.

You, who have been and are still pioneer newspaper men, know many stories and tales of life. Some of these touch you personally, many of them have been news but in all of them you have lived the lives of pioneers. A wedding, a picnic, a dance on a cold winter night, a murder, cattle rustling, whatever the event, it generally involved riding miles to cover - but you gloried in every minute of it. The early newspaper has gone

down in the pages of history as one of the invaluable documents of all time.

To the foresight of you, the industrialists, we of the present owe much of our prosperity and the development of the natural resources of our land. You had the vision of a nation with great cities, bound together by railroad arteries, whose industries must be fed from the forests, the mines, the oil and gas deposits. How right you were to cling to those visions, which were first inspired by early discoveries and many heartbreaks to the first men who tried them. Today you are pioneers of a world Industrial Nation which will take its place more and more as the years pass by.

Your lives were not all drudgery either, you brought out ideas of sport and you insisted that these should be incorporated into your daily living. You were naturally fine horsemen, and you were the proud owners and exhibitors of thoroughbred horses. Your high steppers, your trotters, and your jumpers took a back seat to none. Horse racing was part of your lives. Others of you were keen polo players, who travelled across Canada and into the States to bring back trophies and honour. Hockey, which is a national sport, had its beginnings with you and today you, as pioneers, cheer your favorite team on to victory - no longer active players but just as keen sportsmen. So it goes through all the sports and activities of normal lives well lived.

"Maintiens le Droit" - such a stirring motto - and yet so fitting for the most vivid figure which exists in the world, - the Red Coated Mounted Policeman of the Plains. To pioneers and to Indians alike his word meant law - and his words spelled integrity. With the North West Mounted Police came peace, security, and confidence in the future of the land. They were the men, who, singlehanded - in all kinds of weather - rode the plains to stop the cattle rustlers, the whiskey traders, the incipient rebellions. We look at them with awe and respect - we salute them for their bravery and courage to always carry out their duty. They were Men! Men such as this country never equalled - and they too, were pioneers - for they brought the law where no law had ever been. Indeed, they "Maintained the Right" as no one else could have done.

In this large gathering there remains one group that I have not saluted. You, the pioneer women, mothers and wives, deserve a place of your own. Without you the dreams of your men would never have been realized. You too, worked with your hands, you toiled early and late to make a home for your family. You cooked over the open fire on the prairie or over the fireplace in the cabin, and many of you had never done it before. You made bannock or bread for the first time, you gathered wild berries to be dried so you might make an extra special effort when a holiday came round. How often did you long for a different dress, a change of surroundings, a few of the conveniences of your parent's homes? More, how many times would you have welcomed another woman to talk to, one with whom you could share an hour's experience. Maybe you sometimes rebelled, perhaps shed a few tears, but I dare say, seldom, if ever did your husbands know. You had the strength of will and the love within you to hold to a task, to encourage your men when things were their darkest and always, to bury within yourself your own longings.

We are the grandchildren and we little realize the fear and agony of hours you spent alone with your children, our parents. Often your men had to be away, and you were faced with the fear of danger from wild animals, marauding Indians or sudden prairie fire. When darkness came and your husband had not yet returned you must have often wondered what accident had caused his delay. Your vivid imagination would picture him helpless, thrown from his horse, overpowered by some spring flood or wandering lost in a new country. Today, we can only imagine your intense relief, when you heard the familiar sound of horse or voice - and you would go to the door to meet with a cheery word - another pioneer - your husband.

So - you all have been the builders of a great country - Your kindness, understanding and generosity have made the real pioneer spirit of Good Fellowship, where the pot is always boiling, where the handclasp is always firm, and where any traveller is sure of a hearty welcome thrown in.

We, of the younger generation, may seem to forget that without you we could never have been. For this reason, tonight, I am trying so hard to show that in you - our parents, our grandparents, our great grandparents - lies our strongest link.

Without you we would be nothing.

Many of our early pioneers have crossed the Great Divide but they have never really left us. Their toil, their fineness of spirit, and their whole-hearted generosity linger around us. Those pioneers and you pioneers, who are here tonight, are like the country to which you gave your youth. You have all seen the mountains gleaming in the background yet dominating the scene, the startling beauty of the foothills and the open prairie. 'It is all unimagineable to one who has not seen it, and indescribable to one who has.' A little while you spend here, but long enough to let the glory of it stamp itself upon your souls.

Even as the country has left its mark on you - so the pioneers have stamped their glory on succeeding generations. We love you and honour you, we marvel at what you did. Those departed Pioneers, and you - the living Pioneers - are the all enveloping - the Golden Link - so to speak - covering the bonds of steel which you have helped time to forge.

We, your descendents, can only hope that we have managed to absorb some of your fineness of spirit and your ability to do things, so that the Golden Link - the Pioneers - will continue with memory undimmed from generation to generation.

All rights reserved.



**FAITH IN THE FUTURE**