“How will we ever be able to afford it?” questioned Olaf.

“I don’t know, but I want to know more about that new school. It sounds like exactly what we need out here where there is no school beyond the grade school within reasonable distance. If the kids are home in the growing season, you could take on that additional eighty acres of good fieldland that our neighbor wants to rent out on shares,” said Mary, almost all in one breath. She had an unusual tone of excitement when she thought of the welfare and future of the children and the family working together as a team.

The railroads pushed northward. One could get on the train and go all the way to Minneapolis and beyond. A county agent was coming within the next year if the county board of commissioners could agree on the idea. Some farmers weren’t sure it would be worthwhile. Others couldn’t wait. The new school of agriculture sounded good. Boys and girls had to stay there, and most of them stayed for the full six months, coming home only at Christmas time. The teachers stayed right with them at the school. There were some rumors of the boys and girls running wild, but those rumors were found to be untrue. A number of the teachers were these new agriculturists who did research as well as teaching. Those who were worried about spiritual life were encouraged to learn that there were chapel services every Sunday evening. It all sounded like a good home away from home and a chance to get some additional schooling.

It was the spring of 1910. The oldest Nelson child, Paul, had returned from the six-month term at the school of agriculture. He had been home only at Christmas during the six months.

Olaf and Mary met Paul at the railroad station, loaded up the trunk in the buggy, bought a few supplies at the general store, and headed back to the farm. The road by this time had been improved south of Hallock so the trip could be made under most weather conditions except when there were blizzards or in the spring when the frost went out and the surface was soft.

Paul was just full of talk. He told his parents that the new superintendent of the School and Experiment Station was a real doer.

“He even comes to visit our classes and teaches a class in leadership.”

He said there was going to be a Short Course, the teachers called it, for men and women from farms, that it would go on for about three or four days, and there would be something called a Crops Show where farmers could bring in a sample of the grain they had grown. A judge would decide which was the best sample, and the grower of the championship grains would be awarded a new silo.

This Crops Show idea was almost too much for Olaf. He wondered about it all, but yet he knew Mary would want to go. Paul said he’d come home and take care of the cattle while they went to the Short Course.

“How much is it going to cost?” asked Olaf.

“I don’t know,” answered Paul.

“I’ve saved a little money so we could take a trip some day,” confessed Mary. “That could be our trip. When’s it going to be?”

“They are talking about December, after the students go home for Christmas vacation so there would be room for people to stay in the students’ rooms. And you know, Dad, Mr. Selvig said that the men had to bring their wives.”

“Looks like we’ll be going, money or not,” said Olaf. “I’m sure glad that Mom saved a few nickels in a sock somewhere.”

The summer of 1910 was a bountiful crop year in the region. Carloads of grain were being shipped to the new markets. The bank was paid off for the new grain binder. Anne, the daughter, started at the Aggie School, as it was called, in the fall. Too, some mail came from the School and Experiment Station inviting Olaf and Mary to the Short Course and Farm Crops Show to be held in the new Kiehl building with its shiny auditorium, gymnasium, and seating space. Of all things, it had up-to-date moving picture equipment!

The Short Course and Crops Show became the talk of the neighborhood, and when the time came just before Christmas in 1910, Olaf and Mary and a few other neighbors got together with teams and sleigh and traveled to town. They left the horses in the livery barn and took the train to Crookston from Hallock. A neighbor who didn’t go looked in on Paul and Anne, for they were taking care of the livestock while Dad and Mom were away at that first Farm Crops Show and Short Course. About 250 people showed up, including the Nelsons, from as far away as Roseau, Staples, Ada, Moorhead, and Warren. The Nelsons stayed in Paul’s room at the school. They ate the good food, listened and talked, and talked and talked. They sang songs. The staff of the Northwest School provided some instrumental music. It was really all too exciting to waste very much time sleeping. They heard some agricultural and home economics speakers from the Department of Agriculture at St. Paul. Their state senator spoke to them. The railroad agent brought them news of additional railroad land being available for farming at very attractive prices. From the research at the experiment farm, they learned some new ideas about how to drain land. Several varieties of crops had been tried, and these ideas were shared with visiting farmers.

Tired, they boarded the train for home on the Friday before Christmas, having made many new friends. They picked up more ideas than their heads could hold, and they had a lot of good wholesome fun. They returned refreshed and ready to do battle with making a living on that Kittson County farm. Not only that, Olaf was given honorable mention on his sample of wheat. The judge said all it needed to be a champion sample was to be cleaned up a bit. The quality of grain was as good as the championship sample, and Olaf learned that samples had to be prepared for show.

The writer of this book chooses to leave the saga of the pioneer Nelson family establishing themselves here in the Red River Basin and joining the enthusiastic visitors to the first Red River Valley Winter Shows, entitled then the Short Course and Farm Crops Show. The people at the first Short Course didn’t like the holiday season schedule because of the interference with family and church celebrations. The date was changed immediately, and the next Short Course was scheduled well into January. Olaf, Mary and family didn’t miss a Winter Show during their lives in the Red River Basin. Olaf served on the board of managers and on the Livestock Association for many years. Mary assisted with women’s activities. The third generation of Nelsons now join nearly 40,000 people attending the midwinter show.