

THOMAS SAUNDERS

SCRUB OAK

Thomas Saunders (1909-2005) was born near Dunfermline, Scotland. His family moved to Manitoba in 1920, and he earned a bachelor's degree in arts and theology from United College (now the University of Winnipeg). He served as a minister in Rapid City, Holland, and Winnipeg, and during WWII he served as an army chaplain in Britain and Northwest Europe. After the war he began publishing poems, and his work was described in W. L. Morton's *Manitoba: A History* (1957) as "the first authentic voice of Manitoba and the prairies in poetry." The following poem was published in the October 1945 issue and included in the collection *Scrub Oak* (1949).

I saw an oak once less than three feet high,
A prairie oak, full-grown. It grew in sand
With others of its kind, all taller but
None tall. I've known oaks in a kindlier land
Attain a height and girth and a supply
Of dignity; but these could barely jut
Their jagged arms (they had no trunks) above
The ground. Eking a hard existence, there
They stood, defiant, grim, but still alive.
You'd wonder why these oaks were growing where
They couldn't grow. Some kindly, pleasant grove
Would suit them better, where they'd live and thrive
And prosper as they ought.

Life has a way
Of doing things we don't expect her to:
I don't know why these oak trees should have grown
There where they did in that unlikely view,
Or why persisted in their stubborn sway
Against what odds, unlovely and alone.