

MEMORIES OF LONG AGO

Cora McRae Hill

AT THE SOUND OF BELLS

Deep-buried in the mind, a landscape lies
Beneath the obliterating mist of years,
Until some stab of recollection clears
The long forgetfulness from startled eyes.
The sound of bells may bid the vision

rise -

A church beside a country road appears
Whose vesper chime, so sweet to childish
ears,
Was part of twilight and the fading skies.

Now the awakened spirit sees again
The homestead with its orchard on the
hill,
The meadow path through drifts of
daisy snow.
Remembered joy, inseparable from pain,
Wrenches the heart while, tolling gently
still,
The bells are requiem for the long ago.

- Inez Barclay Kirby

It was on my eighty-fifth birthday that my beloved son,
Edwin McRae Hill, requested me to jot down for him occurrences,
bits of personal history, and any thoughts that came to mind
from out the far distant days before he and I knew each other.
The following notes I have set down as they happened to occur
to me, which accounts in part for their being rather disconnected.

About the year 1855 my paternal grandfather, Alexander
McRae, a native of Dingwall, Scotland, who had lived for some
years in another part of Pictou County, Nova Scotia, secured a
tract of land bordering on Toney River, in Pictou County. Being
a millar by trade, grandfather proceeded to build a dam across
the Toney (which was then a sizable, rushing stream) one and a
quarter miles from where it emptied itself into Northumberland
Strait, the waters lying between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward
Island. There he built two mills, a grist mill and a saw mill.
These were run by a large waterwheel, operated by water coming
over the dam; at least, the wheel seemed huge to me on the very
few occasions when I was permitted to go, with adult escort, be-
neath the mill to see it. Children were not permitted alone
there, as the place had all the requisites for a quick drowning.

A grist mill is one to which farmers bring their grain
of all kinds to be ground into the different kinds of flour or
meal. In pay for his services, the miller takes from the finished
product a certain number of pounds as "toll". Of course,
each man's grist has to go through the mill separately. The

The McRaes, father and sons, became very well known to the farmers of the district who were their patrons over the years and were considered very trustworthy, so there was never any dissatisfaction over the matter of tolls. This fact was made known to me by descendants of those patrons, whom I met in my later years.

As far back as 1816, arrangements were being made for the establishment of a college in Pictou, the shire town of the county. It was to be a theological school. Churches were being established and preachers to man them had to be secured from Scotland, so were not easily obtained. To supply this need, Pictou Academy was formed. It was completed in 1818 and has been an outstanding institution to this day.

All this was long before my time, but family history has it that my father, showing a mental aptitude and a desire for a higher education, was entered at the academy with the expectation that he would become a minister in the Presbyterian Church. I do not know in what year he entered nor for how long he attended, but before his course was finished he had a disagreement with his teachers regarding the Creed, which it was necessary for him to adhere to in every detail before he could become a minister. This he felt unable to do and withdrew from the school without graduation. No doubt it was a disappointment to his parents, for he had received public notice as the first farmer's son to enter the college.

I think it was not long after this that he left home. He spent some years in the Great Lakes region of Canada and in parts of the United States. He taught school in summer seasons

and during one deep winter trapped furs in the forests around Lake Superior. He also worked in mills and one season was head miller in a large mill in Kentucky, in which all helpers were negro slaves. These grew fond of him and shed tears when he left them. I have a letter written by him to his father in 1851 in which he said, regarding his travels, "I have gained more experience and knowledge of the world than I could have in twenty years at home."

I was never told the details of his return home and resumption of work in his father's mill and farm, but I think it was not long afterward (it may have been at my grandmother's death) that grandfather retired from active work and turned over to father the grist mill and a portion of the land and to Uncle Roderick the saw mill and the remaining land.

John McKee
My father was by nature a poet. He loved nature, the birds, the flowers, the native forests, his beloved River Toney, and that beautiful countryside. He wrote many verses, to some of which he added the airs of old songs, and often sang for his children. To my great regret, he never attempted to have his odes published and but few of them are now extant. He was an ardent reader and, since public libraries were there unknown, he bought many books. At the time of my earliest recollection he had a large library.

On the resumption of life at Toney River (I have been told by descendants of his companions there), he became very popular with the young folks of the community. I suppose it was the result of his having gained a measure of worldly experience,

coupled with his social disposition and education, that made him seem "different" from the native swains. In those days, careers other than marriage for women were never thought of, unless one happened to be a poetess or wished to sail to foreign lands as a missionary to the heathen. That being the case, naturally alert young women tried to do the best they could for themselves in the matrimonial field, and my father was considered a "good catch". But although caps were set for him on all sides, he enjoyed the friendship of all but fell for no particular one.

Winter evenings were long in the country. To help pass them, father started a singing class, or school, as they called it them. The object was not voice culture, as it is known today, but the pupils were taught to "sing from notes". The teacher's only instrumental aid was a tuning fork. They met in the school house, so as to have the use of a blackboard.

The class was popular with the young generation and was approved by their elders, who in that day supervised their activities closely. One of the pupils was a young orphan girl, Mary Robertson, eighteen years of age. She lived on a farm near the school, where she kept house for two brothers, they having lost both parents early in their lives. She was quiet, demure and pretty and knew none of the wiles used by the older girls. Nevertheless, the event which was to be of great moment in my life occurred when the teacher fell in love with and married her, for it was she who became my dearly loved mother. In her I could never find a fault and I can think of but one word that nearly describes her, and that word is "angel".

At the time of their marriage, Grandfather McRae still had some of his family around him in the large, old, interesting McRae house, which stood on an eminence from which one could look down on the mill property, the winding public highway, and the picturesque wooden bridge spanning the river. So it was necessary that a new house for the young couple be built. Accordingly, just across a field of clover from the old house a new cottage was built for my father, which he named "Sunny Summit". It also stood on the hill, surrounded by a stately evergreen forest. It is somewhat described by him in a song he composed for mother when he was wooing her. I remember but one stanza:

"Come, Mary, my kind little Mary,
To my cottage that stands on the hill,
Overlooking the dark, winding Toney,
The smooth, glassy pond and the mill."

*John & Mary
Mar. 1865
Circa 1868*

Their life there began in 1865 and mine in 1868. The thirteen years I lived on "Sunny Summit" were the golden ones of a happy childhood, a well-provided for home, and carefree outdoor play amid a beautiful setting. The house still stands and, although eighty-nine years old, greatly belies that age. I love every one of its eight rooms and hospitable entrance hall and deeply regret that I can never again sleep beneath its roof.

Winters were severe and snows deep in Nova Scotia in the time of my childhood, much more so, I have been led to believe, than in the present century. Education was not compulsory, and children were sent to school at their parents' discretion. Public school opened early in the autumn and continued late into summer - usually, as I remember, into July - for the benefit of children too small to withstand the rigors of the

deep winters. My formal education began in the year 1876, in the little gray one-room schoolhouse one-and-a-quarter miles from my home and near the spot where the Toney River spills into the blue waters of Northumberland Strait. I have but one clear memory of my first day at school. That is of the moment when the teacher approached my desk with pad and pencil and asked my name. Then she said, "And how old are you, Cora?" I remember distinctly my answer: "I am eight years." Beyond that terse interview, I have no further recollection of the day, momentous as it must have seemed to me at the time. However, I had learned to read long before and had consumed many story books and items of information from my mother's magazines, my favorite of those being "Godey's Ladies Book". So I was well beyond the Primer and First Reader classes and during the five years I was a pupil in the Toney River school I had no trouble finishing the Sixth Reader (the highest class), with the attending requirements in arithmetic, spelling and penmanship.

I attended school only in mild weather and enjoyed the company of several cousins and other little girls on the one-and-a-quarter mile trek to and from school. I did not like to go alone, however, for occasionally I had to pass a horse or a cow that had been turned loose to graze by the highway, and I was mortally afraid of them.

School days were happy days. The building was but a short walk to the banks that rose above the beach of Northumberland Strait and, when the teacher went home to lunch at noon, we often went there to play. Those waters were a lovely blue,

showing off their whitecaps to good advantage, and the beach was shell-strewn.

Toney River, for most of the distance that I knew it, was bordered by high banks on either side and, at the time my forebears settled there, these were covered by "the forest primeval". The stream was wide and deep. As years passed, however, the forest was slowly but surely reduced by the logging industry and it became increasingly evident that the river and the power of its waters to operate machinery was also being reduced. So, while we children lived happily, oblivious of the fact that just around the corner on life's road there was approaching a new era for us and an entire change in our way of life, our parents, daily realizing the failure of the power, knew that something had to be done. Father saw that the only way to continue the business would be to install steam power and, since he had been making only a good living but amassing no fortune, he considered the change impossible to make.

For some years previous to this, my father had been interested in what was termed the "Free Thought Movement", which, as I now recall, seemed to have taken by storm the part of the country bordering on Boston and New York. Father subscribed for and read publications advocating freedom of thinking on religious matters, especially freedom from church domination, and favoring unorthodoxy in general. One of those I remember, published, I think, in Boston, was entitled "The Banner of Light". It advocated spiritualism. Another, from New York, was called "The Truth Seeker" and was edited by one D. M. Bennett. Father was

*Cora's
classmate*

rather inclined toward spiritualism and it was for a lecturer and writer on that subject, Cora L. V. Richmond, that I was named.

It was, I am sure, in one of those periodicals that father learned of a new town being founded in southwest Missouri, to be inhabited by "free thinkers" only, and where no lots would be sold to anyone belonging to any Christian sect. The project was undertaken by a wealthy man, G. H. Walser, who had the distinction of being the best criminal lawyer in the State of Missouri. He owned all the land on which the town was platted. It was in the midst of rich farm land and was underlaid with soft coal.

*Move to
free-thinker
community*

My father, I am sorry to say, got in correspondence with the promoter and received every encouragement to emigrate to that far-away place. The outcome was that in the autumn of 1881 the decision was made. The dear old home was sold and preparations were hurriedly made for the journey of over two thousand miles. There were seven of us children, the youngest aged just three months. I vividly recall the sad eve of our departure, when neighbors from miles around gathered at our home to say farewell. While they sat all around the room, father stood up and sang for them the farewell song he had composed for them, while many tears were shed. I shall always keep my printed copy of that song, one verse of which ran:

*to the date (K)
of
youngest*

"Adieu the winding Toney, farewell the old
grist mill,
My cottage home so cozy, in the spruce grove
on the hill.
The dear birthplace of my children,
I shall love it 'til I die,
When far off in Missouri my luck anew I try."

Mary opp'd trip.

To us children, although very sad at parting with our many cousins, the whole thing was a thrilling adventure, but in more mature years I knew it was anything but that to my dear, brave mother.

Relatives and friends volunteered to deliver us and our baggage to the ferry boat that would take us across Pictou Harbor, where we connected with the train. We were honored by having His Honor, the Mayor of Pictou, and other dignitaries, come on the boat to shake my father's hand and wish us well.

The trains of that day boasted no "sleepers" and were heated by a small heating stove in one end of each car. We had to bed down with pillows as best we could on our daytime seats. The trip required one week and by the second day out my mother's trials began. Baby Johnny was bottle fed and was accustomed to fresh milk, but for the trip canned milk had to be used which, it soon became evident, did not agree with him. He became ill and of course required all mother's attention, so the care of our two-year-old sister, Janet, devolved upon Sister Emma and me. We adored her and she was not difficult to handle, so all went fairly well with us, except that before the trip was half over she accidentally dropped her much loved new hat out the window, to the despair of the three of us.

It was mostly a "through" trip and I recall only three changes of trains, one when we children were rudely awakened after midnight and hustled off the train at Chaudiere Junction (somewhere in Canada). There was another at Chicago and one at Kansas City. Finally we arrived at the little village of

*Liberal
Mo.*

Liberal, in the southwest corner of Missouri, thoroughly sick of trains, mother all but completely exhausted, and the baby in weak condition. We rejoiced to find the only hotel was just across the street from the depot and I will always be deeply grateful to the motherly middle-aged lady who ran the place. She insisted on taking over Baby Johnny and on my mother's going immediately to bed. I don't know how she did it, but in two or three days she had the baby back on his feed and as well as ever. Mother, being a strong woman, was quite recovered after a night's uninterrupted sleep.

As soon as our trunks, with bedding, linens, etc., arrived from home, father rented a little cottage near the hotel to house us for the winter, as it was now early December. The house provided small heating and cooking stoves, to which we added the minimum of other furniture, a table, beds, and chairs, which we procured from people having them for disposal, there being no furniture store in the town as yet. It seemed a bare place to me and must have seemed primitive to mother, but she was not one to complain when the best possible was being done.

With the coming of spring, father bought a lot, had a little four-room cottage built, and at once began to turn the place into a garden spot by planting small fruit, flowers and trees.

The country was strange to us children. A prairie country, where we could see for miles, contrasted greatly with the wooded landscape of the old home, and our all-out freedom there with the restrictions of a town lot and neighbors just across the fence.

The first spring and summer were very trying to all of us. It was supposedly the change of climate from the far north seashore to the south that caused each of us children (who had never been ill before) to have a spell of sickness. My five-year-old brother Alec had a severe case of fever and was never again so sturdy as before. My ailment was "fever and ague" chills and I will never forget how chilly they were nor the heat of the fever that followed each one.

Our parents somehow kept going, however, and father's garden provided us with vegetables and fruit that summer. Not a few settlers (of the "free thought" variety) were coming in and buying land for homes. Most of them were progressive and intellectually inclined and the town seemed to have a prosperous future at that time. There was a Town Hall meeting house, which stood in lieu of a church and had a stage fitted for theatrical performances. In this building they had "Instruction School" for children every Sunday morning. It was there I was first told the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. There were also morning and evening meetings for adults, where speeches were made and discussions held on many secular topics. There were also frequent lectures by visiting intellectuals, but they were never able to secure a visit from Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, then so noted as an agnostic orator, whom they much desired. I feel sure of one thing, however - that during the eight years we spent in Liberal it was visited by every species of crank existing in the nation at that time. Many came intending to remain, but after finding that Mr. Walser was running the

town contrary to their special "ism" or formula, they left in disgust.

There was a goodly sprinkling of spiritualists among the citizens, to whom Mr. Walser did not object. There were enough of them, in fact, that before we left they built a church for themselves and held regular Sunday meetings and had visiting lecturers.

Father, having been three terms in the County Council in Nova Scotia, was a good public speaker and was popular at public meetings. He and mother made many friends and seemed to be happy and to be looking hopefully for improved conditions and a prosperous future for the town and their family. The settlers being all new people, coming from all parts of the United States and Canada (there was one old Scottish bachelor from Sidney, Australia), and a few foreigners, made for a variety of associations.

Father leased an acreage at the edge of town, where he worked hard all through the hot summer at gardening and provided a substantial part of the family living. He even grew the sort of cane from which sorghum syrup was made by someone who had a mill for that purpose. But as the winter of 1883 approached, the funds father had left after building our house and carrying us through the first year were greatly depleted. No industries had been established to furnish work, as had been predicted by the founder, and the situation was grave for a family of seven children. To make a long story short, the grim necessity loomed for each of us older children to find some way to help toward our own support.

*Fair
problems*

A Warren
My older brother, by then in his sixteenth year, was obliged, to the sorrow of us all, to enter the coal mines, there being nothing for him above ground. It was bleak for a youngster, but he was brave, and mother, full of sympathy for him, did all in her power to make cheerful his few hours at home.

We lived not far from the main street of the town and on that street a middle-aged couple, Captain and Mrs. Greeley, kept a general store (dry goods, groceries and notions). He was a cousin of Horace Greeley and had been a captain in the Civil War. They were kindly and loved children, but were childless. When they heard of our dilemma, they proposed taking me into their home as a helper. I later realized their desire was only to help my parents, for they did not need me. I had little to do and was paid only by their furnishing all clothing needed by my sister Emma and me and by their sending me to public school, which opened that fall.

neighbors help

They lived in a large room at the rear of the store building and they made a midget room for me by curtaining off a portion of the store room, where I slept.

I moved there in the fall of 1882. Mrs. Greeley asked me to call her "Auntie" and not to feel that I was working for her, but living with her, and that that was my home. The Greeleys proved to be the two best friends I ever had. I was content living with them and only unhappy on "washday", when it was my job to run the washing machine, which was operated by hand and was really too heavy for me, which I am sure Auntie did not realize.

It was not long after I went to the Greeleys that Emma, then twelve years of age, was given the opportunity to go into the printing office where Mr. Walser's paper was published, as an apprentice to learn the trade of setting type by hand. She was quick to learn and in a few weeks was given a job at \$3.00 a week. From that time on, the three of us older children were able to contribute appreciably to the family living.

Thus began my career of "making my own way in the world" and I do not think we children considered it a hardship, but rather as a responsibility to our parents, with whose poverty we sympathized.

Things went forward thus for a year or two. We children, excepting our eldest brother, attended school, Emma getting time off for her classes. Mother secured a second-hand sewing machine for a song and made all our clothes. She and father still wore the clothes they had brought from home. After a year underground, my brother found work on the railroad as a section hand and was much happier. (*Quaren*)

So things were until the winter of 1884, when grim tragedy struck. There came a snowstorm, the first little Johnny had seen, and the ground was white. Our house was warmed by a small coal heater and my mother, having to go a short distance to the grocery in my father's absence, added fuel so the little ones would be warm while she was out. She was no sooner out of sight, however, than they went outdoors to play in the snow. The two older ones, absorbed in building a snow man, did not notice three-year-old Johnny entering the house with his little pail of snow, which he enjoyed putting on the stove to see it melt. The little stove

Johnny's death by fire

had become red hot and his clothing, brushing it, caught fire. When he ran screaming from the house, the others were unable to overtake him and by the time a passerby caught and rolled him in the snow he was so badly burned that he lapsed into unconsciousness and died at midnight that night. He was a beautiful child and his father's namesake. My mother was prostrated and I stayed at home with her for awhile.

The following summer, a man of wealth from Wisconsin opened a grist mill in town and father was engaged as miller, but the venture proved unprofitable and after a few months it was given up and father again was left to his gardening.

Sometime during 1886, Mr. Walser and some other intellectuals conceived the idea of opening a free thought college in Liberal. They acquired the services of three graduates of Kansas Normal College at Fort Scott, Kansas, a school of high standing at that time. These men, of course, were "free thinkers" or "liberals", as sometimes called. All arrangements completed, the "Free Thought University" opened in the fall of 1886. The town hall and a nearby two-story former rooming house were used for the auditorium and classrooms. Tuition was made as low as possible, as the plan was for a nonprofit institution. An organization was formed to aid promising students of small means to enter by making them loans, which they were supposed to repay after graduation. Emma took advantage of this and my friends, the Greeleys, financed me. We enrolled for a course that would fit us for

teaching, but could take extra studies, if we wished, such as elocution or dramatics.

These studies opened up a new world to me. I was seventeen, and I found the acquaintance with teachers and students from other places, there being a sprinkling from distant "free-thinking" homes, very exhilarating. I was a shy and self-conscious creature and I owe much to our teacher of elocution for bringing me out of that. In one semester I improved so much that I could appear at public entertainments in recitations, take part in a play, deliver a little oration, or sing, without reluctance or embarrassment.

This teacher's name was Roy V. Hoffman. He was much interested in the military, and one semester he organized a dozen of us school girls into a class for military drill outside of school hours, using brooms for guns. He called us his "Broom Brigade". We thought it fun and it taught us to stand erect. Professor Hoffman was just one year with the school, then he left to pursue his own education elsewhere. I did not hear of him again until over thirty years later, when, following World War I, I ran across a newspaper write-up of the military career and a picture of "Brigadier-General Roy V. Hoffman". His home then was in Oklahoma and mine in Seattle.

Emma and I continued in school through the year of 1888, that much study being required to obtain a teaching certificate. But although we were both contributing to the family support, it became more and more evident that it was not enough, even with the added help of our younger brother, Denton, who by then had a job as helper in a grocery store, for Father's health continued

Cora's personality

By R's degree for teaching

to fail and he had become so afflicted with rheumatism that he could do no work at all.

*John's -
debilitating
rheum. ism*

There was no commercial department in the college and to get country schools and teach seemed to be the only way open. In the meantime, my aforementioned Uncle Roderick also had left Nova Scotia and settled in Nebraska, where he and father had a cousin living. John McIntosh had emigrated to Nebraska years before, as a young married man, and had homesteaded a large farm. Being a carpenter by trade, he built a big house on it, and also built many houses for the new settlers who were rapidly taking up farms there, so he did well financially. It was he who induced Uncle Roderick, who also had a family of seven children, to locate there. Uncle Roderick was living on a rented farm a few miles from the town of Schuyler, the county seat, which had a population of about two thousand.

We were in correspondence with our uncle and cousins and they shared our concern over father's illness. Father himself had come to believe that the Missouri climate and highly mineral drinking water we had there were detrimental to his health. The relatives urged us by letter to bring him to Nebraska, seeming to feel sure it would be best for all of us. They assured us we girls would have no trouble getting schools to teach. To father, however, being barely able to walk and with his home under mortgage, a move seemed impossible. Consequently, Emma and I, after much private discussion, decided we should go to Nebraska, obtain schools, and save the means to transport the family as soon as we could do so. But the problem now looked us squarely in the face of how, being penniless, we could do that. Our school closed in May, 1888.

*to
Nebr.*

John McIntosh had guaranteed one of us the school in his district, but to insure getting it we would have to attend a session of "Teachers Institute," which met in July at Schuyler.

We girls deeply pondered the problem of financing two train fares and boarding expense for ten days of Teachers Institute, and decided to take a bold step, unknown to our parents. Our mother had a bachelor brother living in Wisconsin, who had once visited us in Nova Scotia when we were young. He and mother corresponded at rather long intervals, but he did not know of our poverty. He was reputed to be in at least comfortable circumstances and we girls decided to appeal to him for aid -- a thing we knew our parents would not think of doing. With fear and trembling, we wrote him a letter, laying our whole situation before him and asking for a loan of \$60, which we promised to repay with interest after we had obtained schools and had our father moved to Nebraska. We waited with heavy hearts and not a little feeling of guilt; but in as short a time as was possible we received his answer, which included, to our great joy, the \$60 and his assurance that it was a gift, not a loan. That dear man has passed to his reward years ago, but my gratitude to him has never abated. Our parents condoned our act, thinking we could some day do something good for Uncle Alex, whom we never saw afterward, but who at his demise years later left my mother a generous legacy.

Great excitement prevailed on our part as mother hastily prepared our clothing for at least one year's absence from home and we were gotten ready to board the train for Schuyler, Nebraska. We left Liberal on July 4, 1888. It was sad saying goodbye to father. He was very dear to me and he was so poorly that I feared I might never again see him alive.

The closing day of school also was sad for Emma and me,

knowing , as we did, that it was our last attendance. We said sorrowful goodbyes to each and all. Little did I realize then that, with the exception of two girls whose homes were in Liberal, I would never again see any of them. We were not aware of it then, but during our last year disagreements had occurred between the board of directors and Mr. Walser. I cannot now recall the details, but the outcome was that Mr. Walser withdrew his support, without which the college could not exist, and it was consequently closed that summer. Thus the "Free Thought University" passed to oblivion. However, the students and part of the faculty held a day of reunion the following summer, which we were unable to attend. They sent each of us a little autograph album containing their names and sentiments of esteem and regard. I still have and shall always cherish that little book as a treasure from the long ago of vanished dreams. The college President, a very talented young man, whom we all admired, went to Illinois, where he entered the law office of an uncle, with the intention of entering that profession; but he became afflicted with tuberculosis, for which there was then no known cure, and he died within three years of our parting.

I could not have believed at that time that sixty years would elapse before I could visit Liberal again and place flowers on the graves of my dear ones, but so it was. When I did return, I found a well-kept cemetery, some of the stones bearing names I knew, but no trace of the old town we had known. All traces of the Free Thought element had disappeared. The hotel, the Greeley store building, the Walser mansion on the hill, all had been destroyed by fire. Also the law office and printing office of

Mr. Walser were gone, and on the site of those offices stood a little white church, the large lettered sign of which spelled out "Church of God". Liberal was virtually a ghost town, at which a railway train made but one stop at one o'clock in the morning to deliver the mail sack to a night watchman. There is still a remnant of the family of one of our old friends there who every year place flowers on my father's grave. They are now Christian people, for whom I have the highest regard.

*Cora:
46 yrs
in
Nebr.
1888
46
1924*

With our arrival in Nebraska began another era in my life, an era that was to last for forty-six years, a time of intermingled great happiness and deep sorrow, such as is the warp and woof of every human life.

We arrived at Schuyler, a county seat town, on July 4, 1888, and were met by Uncle Roderick's entire family and by John McIntosh. They took us to an old-time "boarding House" which was run by an elderly Scottish widow, also a native of Nova Scotia, whose late husband had been a relative of Mrs. McIntosh. Mrs. McDonald was the clannish sort of Scot and seemed to take us to heart at once. It was much nicer to be there than at a strange hotel, and we were grateful.

We spent the first week-end at Uncle Rod's farm home, five miles out, and were taken to the McIntosh home, twelve miles out, where we met his bachelor brother, Alexander, introduced to us as "Uncle Alec", and their two children, Evalina, aged fourteen, and "Little Alec", aged eleven, who were to be pupils in my school.

After renewing acquaintance with our cousins, we remained at Mrs. McDonald's, as the teachers' institute opened that week and would last two weeks. Excitement over the new venture warded

off the real homesickness we were to feel later on. Other teachers and would-be teachers came to stay at Mrs. McDonald's and we made new acquaintances. I underwent mixed feelings, as already the change of mental atmosphere from that which we had known to that which prevailed there began to be felt.

The institute wound up with written exams in the subjects taught in the country schools and were not, I believe, above the present-day eighth grade or junior high levels. At least, they were not at all beyond the preparation we had had and we received our certificates. However, although prepared to receive a certificate, I was in no way prepared in the technique of taking charge of a school of foreign children, some of whom could not converse in ~~English~~, and now, sixty-six years later, I yet quake to think of my feelings when I learned that was to be my fate. How I yearned for a word of advice from one of my old teachers or my father, but, that being impossible to obtain, I kept my fears to myself and gleaned what information I could as to the methods of former teachers, all of whom had lived at the McIntosh home.

I went to live with the McIntoshes in August. In horse-and-buggy days it seemed a long way from town. They had been first settlers, but later a wave of natives of Bohemia had taken up homesteads all around them. With the exception of a mere sprinkling of Danes and one Irish family, all their neighbors were Bohemians. The farms were large and neighbors were not close.

The rural post office was close by the school house and the postmaster was a Bohemian named John Swobota. He was also one of the school directors. The post office was called Praha. Little Alec McIntosh usually went for the mail two or three times a week.

I opened my first school September 1, 1888. The months of September, October and November were called the fall term. For those I was paid \$35 a month and, that being my first appreciable earnings, it seemed a colossal sum to me. During the four winter months they increased it to \$40, the attendance being larger. I do not remember the number of pupils at the opening, but they were the smaller children, the older ones being needed at home during the corn harvesting. They were sweet and docile little things and I had no trouble whatever with them.

After a month of fears and misgivings, I began to get hold of my job and confidence came that I could handle the winter attendance of older youngsters that I would then have to encounter. The few big boys who came were well behaved and I did my best to help them get hold of the English language, which seemed their greatest need and desire.

With the exception of the Swobotas, no homes were near the school and I suppose it was on that account, and the language difficulty, that I was never invited to them to meet the parents. However, I was very grateful to learn from Mr. Swobota that I was satisfactory, because the children liked me. My fears being thus somewhat allayed, I was able to carry on through the winter months, the most homesick time of my entire life. The McIntoshes were most kind to me and treated me as one of their own, so I kept my distressed feelings to myself until safe in my little top-story room at night, where I freely shed copious tears.

In the meantime, Sister Emma, who had remained at Uncle Rod's

Emma
home, had been given the opportunity to get on the payroll of Schuyler's leading newspaper, "The Quill" as typesetter. She secured board and room at the home of the publisher of the paper, who lived with his widowed mother. How I envied her, working for someone who told her what to do instead of carrying the responsibility of conducting a country school! She was a success and held the job for several years. One of our boy cousins, Dan or Sandy McRae, usually took her to Uncle Rod's home to spend Sunday and we met there or at the McIntoshes, where we compared homesick notes and letters.

But the news from home was far from good. Father continued to fail and rheumatism made it difficult for him to walk even a short distance. Our relatives redoubled their efforts to induce him to change climate. Emma was making a good salary for those days and John McIntosh proposed that I save the money I had been paying them for board toward the expenses of the move, which I did, and the rest of my salary besides.

There was no doctor at Liberal that year and, although father was rather hopeless, we got his consent to come, for he wished mother to be near us. The homesickness then vanished and we went to work with vim, born of hope, to get ready to have the folks move in the spring of 1889. Never will I forget the enthusiasm we felt as the cold Nebraska spring waned into summer.

Everyone helped us plan for a home to take them to. Years before, a sea captain named Samuel Curry, a native of our old home town of Pictou, Nova Scotia, had emigrated to Schuyler and had built himself a substantial house of seven rooms. At the time of our need, he had moved on to the seacoast at Seattle, leaving his home in the care of an agent. Fortunately for us, it was now for rent at \$10

(ages)

a month. We arranged to take the house and the week the folks were to arrive we took possession. As soon as father wired us the hour of their arrival, we had food and fuel put in and the necessary furnishings, including a comfortable bed for him. It was a happy day for us all when they arrived in late afternoon and father was able to walk, with the aid of a cane, to the carriage our cousin had waiting. Little Sister Janet was nine years and Brother Alec eleven. Mother was so pleased with the house that she cried. After the cramped Liberal cottage, it seemed a palace.

After a hot supper, we tucked father in bed. He wanted to be up and dressed before John McIntosh came to see him next day. He was, and the meeting between them was a touching one. They had not seen each other since as boys they had played together in Nova Scotia, before my father was moved to Toney River and John had emigrated west. As father grasped John's hand, he said, "Oh, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh!" Then their eyes filled with tears and neither could speak.

We secured for father a doctor who was recommended to us as the best in town and after a short time he seemed to improve and even to have some hope that he might recover. He was up each day and the rigors of rheumatism abated so much that he could walk about the yard and by midsummer could ride out to Uncle Rod's home to spend an occasional Sunday, but he never got as far as the McIntosh place.

As August waned and no other opening appeared for me, I had to prepare to take over my school again for the year 1889-90, much as I regretted leaving home, even with my cousin's promise to take me to town every Saturday, weather permitting.

By this time, my older brother, Alvaren, had come home and had a job on a near-to-town cattle ranch, and fourteen-year-old Brother ^{the} Denton, who had been left behind in Missouri to hold his job there until work could be found for him in Schuyler, also had arrived and had gone to work in a general store in Schuyler, his first experience with driving a horse. He was a sincere, dependable boy and steadily won his way upward. He was never unemployed during his many years in Schuyler.

I opened the Praha school September 1 with high hope and happiness, but as fall passed into winter, father's illness entered a new phase of critical aspect, one which his doctor, in consultation with others whom he called, did not seem able to cope with. Before the new year he became bedfast and, to make a painful story short, on February 14, 1890, I received word that he had passed away. It was a great grief to me, for I revered and admired him deeply.

John McIntosh and Mr. Swobota secured permission for me to close school for one week. Father had many friends in Missouri and had not been well enough to meet people or make new friends in Nebraska, so during his last days he confided to mother that, if it were possible, he wished to be buried beside little Johnny in the Liberal cemetery. We were without means for this, but again our kind relatives came to our aid and we secured the necessary funds, John McIntosh signing our note with us, so that mother, accompanied with Uncle Roderick, was able to grant father's last wish and take his remains to Liberal for burial. The obituary notice in the Liberal paper said they were met at the station by almost the entire population of the town. Burial service was held in the Spiritualist Church. The pastor, Dr. Allen, made the address, and Mr. Walser also delivered a eulogy. Thus ended the career of a man of fine mind and unimpeachable character, of whom I can

never think without deep emotion.

During the long, cold winters of 1888 and 1889, the monotony was occasionally broken for me (thanks to the kindness of my cousins Dan and Alex McRae) by attendance at dancing parties, which were held in their neighborhood at one or another of the farm homes that had parlors large enough to accommodate the square dance, the waltz and the schottische. Of course, I could attend only those held on Friday evenings.

It was nearing the end of my last year of teaching that at one of those parties I was privileged to meet the best man in the world. His name was Stephen Richard Hill and he, in partnership with an older brother, lived on a large farm which they had leased from their father, who lived in another state. Steve was six years older than I and had also taught country schools as his first venture.

From the first meeting, I found him more interesting than the younger farmers, although the thought that there might ever be a serious attachment did not enter my head until much later. But it was interesting to converse with him on topics that were over the heads of the younger lads, and before many weeks it became the natural thing for him to take me to and from all parties and public entertainments in Schuyler. That was so long before "movies", but we attended all good theatricals that came our way and gradually casual acquaintance became warm friendship and then romance. In short, we fell deeply in love and on Christmas Eve, 1891, we were married in the old Curry house of happy and poignant memories. Reverend T. W. Laird officiated, Steve's brother James was best man and my sister Emma bridesmaid.

During the forty-three years following, filled with the varied experiences common to human life, I never had cause to nor did

did I ~~change~~ my early estimate of Steve as the best man in the world. He was charitable, he was kind, and I have known no one who came nearer to fulfilling the scriptural command to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

--Cora McRae Hill.