

MEMOIRS

By: M. Kathleen Johnson

I, Mary Kathleen Johnson, (nee, Morrow) was born on a farm, near Owen Sound, Ontario, September 6, 1897. When I was six years old, my parents and family moved to Owen Sound where I received my elementary and most of my secondary education. In 1913 my father, mother and I moved to Victoria, B.C., where I completed my high school studies. I attended the "Normal School" there, graduating in December, 1915.

The following March, the Department of Education offered me the position of teacher at Stellaco, a settlement not far from Fraser Lake. The young lady who had taught there had become ill and a replacement was needed. I accepted the offer and departed for the "North" (as it was referred to in those days) on March 17th. Little did I realize that day that twenty years later I would numbered as one of the pioneer teachers in that part of the country.

The small steamship, "Prince John" took me to Prince Rupert. There were only six passengers and we were royally treated by the Captain and crew. From Prince Rupert I travelled by "G.T.P." (Grand Trunk Pacific) to Endako. I reached my destination in the middle of the night and was met by C.H. Foote with a team and wagon. The entire journey had taken almost four days. Four miles east of the little railroad "divisional", I caught a glimpse of Stellaco school, a log building which had been McNeil's store during construction days. A half a mile beyond was the home of the Foote family where I was warmly welcomed by Mrs. Foote, the three boys, (Roy, Whitney and Hollis) and the hired helper, Alfred Langley. This, too, would be my home during my teaching days at Stellaco. Because I was an inexperienced girl from the city I had much to learn about Pioneer life! Soon I was learning to ride "horse-back" and gladly accepting rides on hand-cars or speeders that travelled on the

railway tracks close by. But I also learned how to walk long distances without tiring.

When Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Foote moved to another place I continued to live in the one-time "road-house" with Mr. and Mrs. Howard Foote until I resigned in June, 1917.

The friendships formed during those first years as teacher endeared me to that part of the country and I often returned to Stellaco and Endako to spend brief, happy holidays.

Before accepting the invitation from the Vanderhoof School Board to teach Div.11 in the brand new school, known as the "Vanderhoof Superior School" then, I had gained further experience at South Fort George and at Telkwa. I assumed my duties in the V.S.S. September, 1921.

Like many places which had their beginning during the building of the railway, Vanderhoof was divided by the tracks. Originally most of the homes, businesses, and hotels were located on the "south-side". The first school was built near the foot of the hill. One of the early teachers was Miss Madeline McKenney (now Mrs. E.E. Lord of Victoria, B.C.)

A forest fire in the mid-twenties left its devastating mark on the south hillside. By then most of the businesses had become established on the other side of the railway line but nevertheless it was an anxious day for everyone. Fortunately, the fire didn't spread in our direction.

Boarding accommodation during my first months in Vanderhoof was granted me at

the home of Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Johnston and later with Mr. and Mrs, E.C. McGeachy... During my last two years on the teaching staff, Miss Mary Mellish (the primary teacher) and I shared a small house near the Johnston residence which was referred to as "the teacherage !"

During the seven years I had the privilege teaching Div.11 only three of the four class rooms were used as such. It was a joy to teach in the new building. During my lengthy term, four different principals were in charge: A.J. Richards, Lewis Wells, Wilbur Foley and Fred Cook. The teachers in the Primary room were, Miss Jennie Richards and Miss Mary Mellish, (now, Mrs. T.G. Murphy of Vancouver.)

The following gentlemen served on the School Board in 1921: E.A. Mitchell, Secretary, J. Paterson and E.C. McGeachy. Later, George Matthews and George Snell were members of the Board.

Since only three rooms in the school were needed for teaching purposes, the extra room was used on occasion for various purposes. One winter "nightclasses" were held for adults who wished to brush up on mathematics and English as well as other subjects. The classes were well attended a fact that was gratifying to me as I had been put in charge of them.

Before "Holy Trinity" Anglican church was built, the Anglicans were granted permission to hold services there. It was also our "music room" after we acquired the Weber piano in 1922. The getting of the piano is a story in itself! We were fortunate in obtaining the used instrument, in good condition, from the music house in Prince George for approximately, \$300.00 and were obliged to meet monthly payments. It was most encouraging to the teaching staff to have the support of the parents and other friends in the community. There were

concerts, dances, card parties and raffles and in a surprisingly short time we were free of debt.

The extra room and the piano were greatly appreciated when the time came to prepare the pupils for the annual Christmas concert and for other programs held throughout the year. These entertainments were held in the small community hall on the "south side". Well do I remember the work involved in the erection of the stage or platform and the hanging of the curtains. The senior pupils seemed to enjoy the diversion.

During the first two or three years after the school was built, the grounds with its clay soil, presented problems when it was wet. I well remember the day I became mired as I was returning to school at noon hour during a heavy rain! It was with difficulty I reached the building and I was quite a sorry sight.

Our janitors, Mr. Gee and his son, had their work doubled during such weather. Finally a board sidewalk was built leading to the front of the school from Burrard Avenue, the benefit of which was quickly appreciated.

As soon as it was practical to do so, a tennis court and a baseball diamond were made available on the grounds. Those play areas were intended not only for the pupils, but others in the community^{also} had an opportunity to indulge in games of baseball or tennis too. A few evergreen trees were planted by teachers and pupils in front of the school while L. Wells was principal.

The first weekly movie shows were held in the^{small} community hall and were very popular. Frequent dances also attracted both the young and the not-so-young. If lunch was to be served at a dance, the ladies catered with the able

assistance of Mrs. Hanson who lived close by. She allowed us to prepare the coffee in a large boiler on her kitchen stove. Then a couple of stalwart young men carried the aromatic beverage into the hall while the "Supper Waltz" was being played.

We were fortunate in having a number of talented people in the village and vicinity. Mr. A. Brain with his trombone, and his son, Leslie, with his drums, were responsible for the formation of a fine dance orchestra. There was also a High School group of young musicians who helped out from time to time. Several talented pianists will be remembered, Mrs. ~~Jay~~ Johnson, Mrs. Steve Holmes, Mrs. Elackstock, Miss Aleita Mitchell (now Mrs. Gilbert Wilks of San Diego) and Miss Margaret Bowman to mention a few.

Herb Moore, the Indian agent at that time, organized a choir at the United church and later, the Choral Society which provided entertainment on special occasions. Herb will be remembered for his contributions to the Choral activities in the community and for his prevailing good humor.

There was also a Drama club, with Mr. and Mrs. Bowman, Sr., as directors. Perhaps there are still folks in Vanderhoof who recall seeing the production of "Savage Land" which was acclaimed a great success !

The Bowman Trio composed of Mr. Bowman, (cello) son Bill (violin) and Margaret at the piano provided many musical treats.

Others who contributed to our entertainment generously when called upon were, Sam Cocker with his humorous anecdotes and his violin, Cecil Hartley our local comedian, Mrs. Greta McCorkell and Lois Johnson (Mrs. Harold Averill) with their fine voices ... to mention only a few.

The Vanderhoof Public Library had its beginning about 1924. One evening some of the young ladies met at the home of Jean Edstrom for a social time. Before we dispersed however, we had decided to form a "club". We called ourselves the "U.T.C." (Unclaimed Treasures' Club) ! A suggestion was made that we devote our efforts towards the formation of a small library for our village. Soon after the members of the U.T.C. were busy learning parts for the 'play', the presentation of which was well received. The proceeds from the tickets helped to purchase the first books. We applied to the Provincial Library (Victoria) for assistance which was readily granted. A shipment of books arrived soon on the understanding that when we returned it another would be sent. We had "book showers" and were fortunate in being able to obtain a number of used books in good condition from the Telkwa Library. Our immediate need was to find a place where those interested could come and select a book they wished to read. The members of the "Board of Trade" made a small room in their building available. The duties of Librarian were assigned to different members of the U.T.C. in turn. As the number of books increased it was found necessary to move our Library to larger quarters. For a while a room in the Charleston Building was loaned us, and later a corner in Bowman's store on Burrard Avenue attracted many readers. By that time, the majority of the "treasures" had been claimed and others interested in the up-keep of the small library offered their services. Today the splendid Vanderhoof Public Library is a credit to those people who answered the challenge.

There were two churches in Vanderhoof when I arrived: the United Church and the Roman Catholic Church. For a short while the Anglicans held services in the United Church. Rev. George Gray came from Chilco to conduct them.

Many will remember Rev. Bob McFarlane, who along with his wife, did much for the social and spiritual uplift of the entire community. The United Church was the focal point not only on Sunday evenings but frequently during the week. Discussions and debates kept us all interested.

I wish I could remember the name of the minister who followed Rev. Bob. He often brought his violin to church on a Sunday evening and accompanied the organist. He, too, was a gifted person.

After Rev. Gray returned to England, Rev. L Hales was the rector and he conducted the services in the school. He was followed by the Rev. Stanley Steer, who became Bishop of Saskatoon a number of years later. Other Anglican clergymen (during my time) were Rev. B.S. Prockter (now Canon Prockter of Regina) Rev. C. Brown who served in World War 11 and Rev. Mc Cormick.

The post office was housed in Paterson's Clothing store on Burrard Avenue. Mrs. Paterson and Jean Edstrom ably assisted Mr. Paterson with his duties as Post Master.

In winter the open-air rink was well patronized and the hockey matches attracted many fans. Those who participated won't ever forget the winter carivals which featured a "Queen" and her attendants, and of course, the "King" who presided over all the events arranged for the entire week.

Years had passed since the "Grand Trunk Pacific" had become a part of the Canadian National Railway. We had adequate train service. If I remember correctly, the passenger train from the west and the one from the east arrived three times a week, and many freight trains made stops at Vanderhoof. The first station was destroyed by fire, if I am not mistaken.

There were two "banks" in Vanderhoof in 1921. After a short time one of them was closed. The other (the Bank of Commerce?) was still attending to the financial needs of the community when I left the district. I well remember Mr. Elackstck and Mr. Laird who had been managers.

The editor of "The Nechako Chronicle" was Mr. Bill Rimes. Being a very friendly person, a party was never complete without Bill's presence.

When I came to Vanderhoof there were two hotels, one on the south side and the other where the post office is now located. The latter was owned and managed by Mr. Wm. Day.

Mr. Dick Henley was the provincial constable. Mr. Jack Charleston had the office of Notary Public and Mr. George Ogston was the land agent.

A group of Estonians arrived from their homeland in the mid-twenties. Their intention was to form a settlement close to Stuart Lake. A reception was held for them upon their arrival in the Board of Trade Building. We were greatly impressed by the eager enthusiasm of these new comers.

During the years I taught in Vanderhoof, there were many places of business. It is quite possible that I have forgotten a few, but I shall list those I remember:

Drug Dtore ----- E.A. Mitchell
Hardware Store ----- McCorkell Bros. (later, Taylor Bros.)
General Merchandise - J.M. Johnston
General Merchandise - E.C. McGeachy
Grocery ----- Harry Ingham (later, Steve Holmes)
(Harry's brother repaired shoes)
Grocery ----- E. Smedley

Grocery ----- Cecil Hartley
Grocery ----- Mrs. Murphy
Butcher Shop ----- Mr. Irving
Bakery and Confectionery - Burdett's
Clothing and Dry Goods --- J. Paterson
Ladies wear ----- Bowman's
Lumber yard ----- G. Matthews (manager)
the Creamery ----- Mr. Valentine (manager)
Blacksmith ----- Knights
Garage ----- Bert Richards and Warren Johnson

Arthur Johnson and I were married December 22, 1927 by Rev. L. Hales. Our attendants were Miss Mary Mellish and Cecil Steele. I completed the term before moving to the farm two and a half miles west of the village. Arthur and his uncle were interested in raising silver foxes as well as in general farming.

In 1931 our little home, and all its contents, was destroyed by fire. Some land was purchased directly north of the Johnston farm where a new home was built and where we continued to engage in fur-farming.

It was the time of the "great depression" and I was grateful to be given the opportunity to help out by teaching again. From September 1938 until June 1940, I taught at Orange Valley, near Lejac. Out^o three children, (Marianne, Deirdre and David) and I lived in the teacherage connected to the school. Four children whose homes were across Fraser Lake stayed with us during the days school was in session. In September 1940 we went to Endako where I

taught until the following June. In 1941 my husband's father died and we moved to Hanley, Saskatchewan to take over the farm.

Life on the Prairies was vastly different to that which we had known in the Nechako Valley, but it wasn't long before we had become established in a very friendly community.

I was widowed in December 1967 and moved to Saskatoon in 1969.

I have visited friends in Vanderhoof a number of times since moving to Saskatchewan and have greatly enjoyed renewing old friendships. I was especially impressed with the many changes that had taken place when I came again during the summer of 1977. The four-room school had been demolished and a fine large one served the educational needs of an ever expanding area. There is also another school on the south side. There are several new churches and I noticed that the United Church had been enlarged. I was amazed at the number of fine homes and apartment buildings that had been constructed not only in the village but in close proximity. Hotels, large stores, banks, garages and a saw-mill close by all attest to a thriving community. There is a hospital situated on the hill overlooking the Nechako River and near it are homes for the Senior Citizens. It is regrettable, however, that these homes are so far from the business section. The tourist park beyond the bridge is a credit to Vanderhoof.

As we drove to Fort St. James on a well maintained highway, I thought back to the days when "pack trains" left Vanderhoof for the mining areas beyond the Fort., and when a trip by automobile along the winding dusty road was an adventure.

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