Women of Influence

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Doing the impossible: An international film festival in Yorkton

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From the eyes of Christina Henry, looking across to one of the other canoes in their traveling party, 1919. Colourized by Andrew Kaytor, 2011.

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Blakeney’s work remembered by SAB

Saskatchewan’s former premier, the Honourable Allan Blakeney, passed away on April 16, 2011. He had a long and distinguished public career in our province, holding numerous cabinet posts in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) governments of T.C. Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd, and eventually serving as premier from 1971 to 1982. After retiring from politics, Blakeney taught law and political studies at York University, University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina, was a member of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and served on the board of directors for numerous corporations and volunteer organizations. He was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1992 and awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit in 2000.

Throughout his career, Blakeney was involved with the Saskatchewan Archives Board and a strong supporter of its activities. With his 1980 appointment as Minister of Education, as per the custom of the period, Blakeney was also appointed to the Saskatchewan Archives Board and nominated as chair of the Board, a position he held until the fall of 1992. Blakeney made his first donation of records to the Archives in 1964, beginning a long tradition of regular donations that would continue until just a few months before his passing. In total, he donated over 230 metres of papers, audio recordings, photographs and other records relating to all facets of his career - the largest collection from any former cabinet minister held by the Archives.

As Premier, he further demonstrated his support for the Archives by personally authorizing an initiative to collect personal reminiscences of Saskatchewan political figures and encouraging a strong connection between SAB and the Celebrate Saskatchewan activities for the 75th anniversary of the province. As he stated at the Celebrate Saskatchewan banquet in 1980, SAB protects “the priceless heritage of Saskatchewan.”

Everyone at SAB extends sympathy to his wife Anne, children Barbara, Hugh, David and Margaret, and their families.

Saskatchewan Archives: Evening Hours Pilot Project

Effective Thursday, September 15, 2011, Saskatchewan Archives began a pilot project to offer evening hours once a week at our reading room locations in both Regina and Saskatoon. The reading rooms will be open from 2 pm to 8 pm every Thursday; retrieval services will be offered from 2 pm to 4:30 pm, and again from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. Moreover, retrieval request slips may be completed and submitted by researchers in advance of a research visit. This pilot project will run for at least two months, at which time the hours will be reviewed. Questions regarding this pilot project may be directed to Nadine Charabin, Manager, Reference Services, at niccharabin@archives.gov.sk.ca or at 306-933-5832.

New! SAB Reading Room Hours of Operation

Regina and Saskatoon

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Correction: In our Spring/Summer 2011 issue, an image of Ernst Lindner with his daughter (SAB S-A2, File VII, Photo 107) was incorrectly captioned; usage of this image was not licensed by CARCC.

Hard time for Annie Buller

It is doubtful that Annie Buller ever looked back on her time in Saskatchewan as anything but hard. Because that’s what she served at the infamous prison in North Battleford: one year of hard time. Montreal-born Annie was married and had a young child – but she was also a prominent and vocal proponent of socialism, communism, and the only woman labour organizer in Canada at the time.

It was 1931 and the 35-year-old Annie was in Winnipeg helping to organize the needle trades workers. While there, she was told of the striking coal miners in Estevan whose dangerous jobs returned deplorable wages, and was invited to Bienfait to address the miners and encourage them to organize. After her fiery speech to the miners and their wives at Bienfait, Annie was asked to stay for a new trial – during which she was again convicted to serve three and a half months she was granted a new trial – during which she was again convicted to one year, but without the fine. Leaving behind her husband and ten-year old child back home, Annie returned to her family - but she never ceased her adroit political work for causes she believed in. Learn more about Annie Buller in Louise Watson’s biography. She Was Never Afraid: The Annie Buller Story, which can be found in libraries and online in its entirety at http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/History/Buller/AB4.htm.
On ‘wearing the pants’

In her 1919 trip diary, young Christina Henry takes great delight in reporting that she and her fellow traveler, Nan McKay, are wearing pants. It just made sense while paddling and portaging in the harsh, remote climes of northern Saskatchewan, what else would anyone wear?

Easy for me to say in 2011, but Christina makes it clear that the people they met during their trip were shocked to see them in pants – at first reference, they think aboriginal people have never seen women in trousers, but as the trip goes on, they are subsequently stared at by the HBC factor, then by his men, and finally “crowds of people” at one of their stops.

I remember when my own mother started wearing pants; it was the late Sixties. Prior to that, she wore ‘shifts’ – inexpensive cotton housedresses, usually worn with an apron – while vacuuming, scrubbing floors, gardening. In photos of our family picking mayflowers in the woods, Mum is in a dress.

Around the same time my mother was emancipated from dresses, the United States passed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, insisting that public education treat males and females equally, thus changing the dress codes for public schools that required female students to wear dresses.

Freedom was a permanent-press pantsuit – ‘double-knit’ atrocities that never actually became wet while being washed. One day in the future, archaeologists will find those non-biodegradable pantsuits and make sweeping conjectures about our culture.

Long before the ‘women’s lib’ movement of the Sixties/Seventies when pants for women symbolized freedom, the wearing of pants was a symbol of power. Just think – to this day, what does it mean if a woman ‘wears the pants in the family?’ It means the man of the house isn’t exactly the ‘king of the castle!’ A website dedicated to the origins of idiom (phrases.org.uk) explains that the person who ‘wears the pants’ (or the trousers) is the dominant member of a household. Yet no one ever says that the husband wears the pants: rather the expression implies the normal order has been overturned by a domineering woman. This is not about equality: there’s room for only one pair of pants in the household!

The phrase reportedly made its first appearance in print right here on the Canadian prairie the Manitoba Daily Free Press in November 1880 wrote about the domestic life of fur traders and their ‘country wives.’ “The squaws are very beautiful … they sometimes wear the trousers or boss the white Indians, their husbands.” So in Canadian society, the phrase predated Canadian society, the phrase predated the actual wearing of the pants – no wonder Christina Henry and her friend Nan were so self-conscious.

While the shapelessness of skirts provided much-expected modesty, pants were about power and influence. By the time my mother was donning pants, one of our feature subjects, Anne Davies, had graduated from university, traveled, worked, married and was helping to run the family farm and writing a newspaper column while raising her four children. And Miss Nettie Kryski, who remained unmarried her entire life, had already spent nearly three decades conceiving, growing and promoting the Yorkton Film Festival – focusing attention on Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and Canadian film at the same time. A married woman and a single woman, different lives in the same place and time, both clearly influencing the lives of people far beyond their own households.

And while I cannot imagine that the women of the 1920s I.O.D.E. ever literally wore pants while implementing their war art program in Canadian schools, would anyone say they were not influential, not domineering – not ‘wearing the pants?’ Their own identities were generally subsumed by their husbands but they were nevertheless making powerful decisions about what children across the country would be indoctrinated into at school. Pants or no pants would anyone deny they wielded great power and influence?

In 1996 my late friend, Dr. Barbara Powell, and I published a book of resources for women’s history available at the Saskatchewan Archives. Piecing the Quilt includes over 1400 separate entries to diverse women’s papers. Of the 50-odd photographs we selected to illustrate the diversity of Saskatchewan women, where you can tell, the women are wearing dresses: nuns, nurses, farmers, physicians, teachers – even our suffragists!

In this issue, you’ll enjoy an array of articles about ordinary yet influential women in Saskatchewan, spanning more than a century. Look at the image of Annie Buller – the very image that was used to send her to prison for having too much influence – she’s wearing a dress. But she’s also ‘wearing the pants!’

Myrna Williams, Editor
The little engine that could: Nettie Kryski and the Yorkton Film Festival

By Kathy Morrell

In 1947, a group of volunteers — those heroes of Saskatchewan culture — established what would become the Yorkton International Film Festival (YFF) in a city many considered too small and too isolated for a major documentary competition. Within this group was one determined, soft-spoken little woman. Her name was Antoinette Kryski, but everyone called her Nettie. She was not the champion who heralded the pages of the national newspapers. She was not the centre of attention at festival events. She was the one with the smile, the one with determination, the one whose meticulous attention to detail got the job done. In a recent interview, Elwyn Vermette, long-time YFF board member and former chair, called Nettie the glue that held the festival together.

Nettie's work at the festival began in 1947 when an employee with the National Film Board (NFB) in Regina, called a meeting of Yorkton organizations with a view to creating a film council. From 1940 to 1945, the NFB had hired projectionists to show its films across rural Canada, to lift the spirits of the people during war. With peace, the NFB faced a drastic cut to its budget. A new way had to be found to distribute their documentaries. That new way was the establishment of volunteer film councils to take on the role of a distribution service.

Nettie attended that first meeting April 17, 1947, representing her chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.). She had always been an active member of the group. Her grandmother, Ellen D'Aoust, was Scottish by origin, and passed down her pride in all things British to her daughter, Aurelia Kryski and her granddaughter, Nettie. After high school, Nettie attended Success Business College, trained as a secretary and found employment with the law firm of Patrick, Doherty and Milligan and then for McPhee, Smith and Matheson. She worked at the law office, but her vocation was the film festival.

She contracted tuberculosis as a young woman and spent time in the sanitarium at Fort Qu'Appelle. In her letters, Nettie often complained of colds that kept her home. In their replies, friends in film councils outside Yorkton showed a constant concern for her health. Her letters from Mabel Littlejohn, film librarian at the Saskatoon Public Library, were a mix of film council business and friendly personal concern.

In a letter written June 1, 1956, Jim Lysyshyn, NFB field man for East Central Saskatchewan, wrote, “I hereby hope nothing serious comes out of this (your medical tests) and that you'll be able to carry on in the outside world...although perhaps at a slower speed.” He asked that she drop him a line at the Banff School of Fine Arts where he would be attending a conference of the National Film Board. In her reply of July 8, 1956, Nettie wrote, “Since writing to you I have had two bronchograms but as yet haven’t had a report on them. They weren’t bad, except I did get nauseated when I first ate (you know that 3 hour wait)! Expect I shall be a real guinea pig before they decide whether or not anything should be done about my bronchiectasis. I may just wind up living with it.” The exchange told so much about Nettie’s perspective on life. It can be assumed that Nettie’s bronchial condition was the result of the tuberculosis. Lysyshyn could well sympathize with her. He had spent more than a year in treatment for the disease at the sanatorium at Fort Qu’Appelle. Nettie had gone to visit him there. Lysyshyn knew clearly what it was to spend a year as an invalid; he knew too the hope “that you’ll be able to carry on in the outside world (i.e. outside the sanatorium).”

From the letters on file, it is clear that Nettie formed many close friendships with the folks who toiled away in the film council movement. Some say, in fact, that her film buddies became the family Nettie never had.

Nettie invested much of her spare time in the work of the Yorkton Film Council (YFC). She sent letters to Yorkton organizations asking for three things: they become members of the organization, they appoint a working representative to the council and they donate towards the purchase of a projector, screen and films. Cheques appeared as if by magic — not in great amounts, but in dribs and drabs — the I.O.D.E, St. Andrew’s Sunday School, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Yorkton and District Board of Trade, the Registered Nurses’ Association, the service clubs. Nettie sent thank you letters. By January 1949, the Yorkton Film Council had raised $778 of the required $983.25. And don’t forget that 25 cents Nettie certainly didn’t.

In addition to raising money, the council members trained projectionists – 24 by October 1951. They previewed documentaries and wrote summaries and critiques so that local organizations and schools could judge the suitability of a particular film for their purposes. They purchased films for the rental depot operated from Avalon Studios. By October 1951, the group owned 11 films with the expectation to buy 14 more over the coming season. In a letter to the I.O.D.E, Nettie Kryski explained that “each year since the formation of the Film Council the use of films has increased, and during the past year approximately 600 films were shown to 14,156 persons in this district.” The Yorkton Film Council, however, was not allowed to rest on its laurels for any extended period of time. In 1953, the group joined a new association, the Federation of Film Councils of Northern Saskatchewan, a group formed under the auspices of the NFB. Officers of the new organization included two film stalwarts from Yorkton: Nettie
Kryski and Paul Welgen. As a member of the Federation, the YFC took on a new and extended role in film distribution. Each month the Saskatoon office of the NFB would send Yorkton two boxes or blocks of its films for distribution to the two rural circuits under the council’s responsibility. The first block went to Lestock, Muscowequan, Jasmin, Hubbard, Iruna, Goodeve, and Punnichy, towns along Highway #15 north and west of Melville. The second block traveled west to Dysart and Southey, then on to Grayson, a village south of Yorkton, before ending the circuit at Bredenbury and Ebenezer. The two blocks were then sent out in reverse order – the second to the towns along Highway #15, the first the route from Dysart to Ebenezer. The films were due back in Saskatoon shortly after completion of the two-month schedule, so they could be sent out to other film councils in Northern Saskatchewan for distribution to rural communities.

There were ongoing issues in the new system. Blocks of films would arrive late. Someone would forget to include all the films in the box when they were shipped onto the next district. Prints of the same film were sometimes mixed up. Districts would neglect to send on the statistics cards showing the number of showings and the number in the audience. The same film were sometimes mixed up. Districts would neglect to send on the statistics cards showing the number of showings and the number in the audience. The following, an excerpt from a Kryski letter, is typical.

Now for more grief: I have checked every film in our library and cannot find Down in the Forest. There is no record of it. You also mention that we have also checked through our record book and our library and cannot find Down in the Forest. I suppose to be on long term loan to us. I have print #117 which I think perhaps belongs to Block 18. But perhaps it doesn’t. Do you happen to have the loan from the NFB and various corporations. It was destroyed the Smith Block that contained Avalon Studios. The major problem, however, was the loss of Avalon Studios as film depot and rental agency. The solution – the Yorkton Public Library took over responsibility for storage and distribution of the films.

No longer charged with distributing films, Nettie and the YFC could now concentrate on the film festival — for which it had gained a truly national reputation. The project he was proposing was a documentary film festival to “steal some of the glitter from the Hollywood Oscar.” Lysyshyn had heard that the Edinburgh Festival of Arts was to add a film section, a totally new offering in its festival lineup. In his mind, the Yorkton Film Council could be as important, glamorous in their own right.

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The response was tremendous. It seemed that everyone stepped up to the council’s assistance. The NFB lent the organization a projector – one in need of repair to be sure – but still the council had a projector. Shell Oil said they were prepared to absorb the loss of their film, Screw Drivers and Screw Jays. The Canadian Cancer Society assured Nettie that their films were insured and not to worry about their loss. Once again, the people of Yorkton came to the assistance of the YFC. Local groups and organizations donated enough money that the council had the funds to replace its equipment. The major problem, however, was the loss of Avalon Studios as film depot and rental agency. The solution – the Yorkton Public Library took over responsibility for storage and distribution of the films.

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TRIAL BY FIRE

In February 1957, the YFC film distribution responsibility ended in flames – literally. Fire destroyed the Smith Block that contained Avalon Studios. All that was left of the business, according to The Yorkton Enterprise, was its name. The Yorkton Film Council lost everything in the fire – two projectors and cases, one screen, a filmstrip and slide projector with 24 filmstrips, splicer, rewind, and the films – some belonging to the council, others on loan from the NFB and various corporations. It was a devastating blow. While the city cleaned up the gutted remains of the building, Nettie and friends began rebuilding the Yorkton Film Council. Once again, Nettie wrote to local organizations asking for donations, pleading for the $1800 to replace their equipment.

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YFC AND THE FILM FESTIVAL

Ten years before the fire that brought an end to its film distribution role, the NFB field man James Lysyshyn proposed an innovative project for the Yorkton Film Council to consider.

“This was the era of great film stars who won Oscars and filled Canadian movie houses,” he wrote in his history of the festival. “I searched for an idea which would restore the prestige of documentary films, as a way of convincing people that serious films could be important, glamorous in their own right.”

The project he was proposing was a documentary film festival to “steal some of the glitter from the Hollywood Oscar.” Lysyshyn had heard that the Edinburgh Festival of Arts was to add a film section, a totally new offering in its festival lineup. In his mind, the Yorkton Film Council could be as important, glamorous in their own right.

At first, however, this group was not so willing to take on the task. Nettie Kryski was a hard worker, but no risk-taker. Her fellow volunteers thought the idea of foreign films coming here (to Yorkton) was a little crazy – hadn’t everyone already seen the NFB documentaries already seen by the Yorkton audience? Moreover, the international aspect of the festival was prestigious and innovative.

Nettie, who became secretary-treasurer in 1948, took on much of the administrative load. The first festival was scheduled for 1950, giving the council two years for the complex organization involved. The members devised rules and regulations, set categories for film entries and established the dates of the festival (October 11 and 12). Nettie was there for every meeting, taking notes, ensuring a meticulous correctness.

It fell to Nettie Kryski to write the embassies in Ottawa. Her first task was to explain what a film festival was because, of course, such a venture was almost unknown at the time. The second was to invite the submission of films. Just think about the receipt of that letter. Quite likely, the third undersecretary of the Netherlands or the clerk from the New Zealand High Commission would shake his head and then go off to consult an atlas of Canada to determine the location of the place called Yorkton.

Following receipt of the letters, phone calls came in from the embassies, but not from Nettie of course. She was the very careful guardian of the almost non-existent festival funds and long distance was
In Ottawa, film producers and distributors marveled at the enterprise, if not audacity of the prairie city that dared to organize a traditionally European event. Until the entry of Yorkton, all international Film Festivals had been held in London, Edinburgh, Brussels, Paris, Locarno or Venice.

Quite a coup for a fledgling organization with no particular expertise in film making! The excitement of their first success propelled the council members to plan the second Yorkton International Film Festival two years hence.

In the interval between the first and second festivals, Nettie Krysik received numerous requests for information about the Yorkton competition from film societies and producers worldwide and from cities in Canada hoping to mount a similar venture. In his history of the Yorkton Film Festival, James Lysyshyn reported: "The success of Yorkton's first festival unleashed a torrent of film festivals across Canada and in many parts of the world. The festival craze spread like wildfire."

The second festival was even more successful than the first. The event, originally two days, was now extended to three, October 15 – October 17, 1952. Once again, Yorkton people jammed the screening venues to see the films. The success continued through the Fifties. In 1954, Maritana Heinrichs from the Ottawa Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany was the visiting dignitary. Nettie met her at the airport, the abandoned Commonwealth Air Training Base just outside of Yorkton. The fourth Yorkton International Film Festival (1956) welcomed a two-man delegation from the embassy of the USSR. The arrival of P. F. Strouminiov and S. D. Romanovtsev caused great excitement in town – particularly when it became obvious that their footsteps were dogged by two plainclothes members of the RCMP. It was, after all, the period of the Cold War and the dreaded Red Menace.

In 1957, the Association of Motion Picture Producers and Laboratories of Canada presented the YFC with a Certificate of Merit. The citation read: The Yorkton Film Council in its International Film festival offers for public viewing a selection of films of high quality from many countries and recognizes and encourages high standard of film production. This special Award is given to the Yorkton Film Council in recognition of its outstanding International Film festival which demonstrates the contribution of the film council movement in Canada.

Sadly, notification of the awards ceremony held in Toronto was sent to Avalon Studios and the letter was misplaced in all the confusion associated with the fire. Nettie was disappointed.

Through the 1960s, the YFC persevered despite severe setbacks. With the advent of television, interest in documentary film plummeted. Canadians including Yorktonites simply considered The Ed Sullivan Show and Hockey Night in Canada to be more interesting than an evening of documentary film. Membership declined in the Yorkton Film Council. The 1962 festival ran a deficit of $201.54. Nettie must have been appalled. Attendance at screenings dropped from 4000 in 1956 to 1000 in 1964. Nothing summed up the decline more clearly than an editorial in the local newspaper, The Yorkton Enterprise, on October 28, 1964:

On congratulating ourselves on the importance of this event and its continued success, we, like the festival’s founders and many local supporters, may have been guilty of overlooking matters that vitally affect the nature of this film competition.

Not so Grant McLean, ex-Yorktonite and one of the three adjudicators during the three-day event. Eminently qualified to assess the quality and progress of the festival, Mr. McLean, a highly placed officer with Canada’s National Film Board in Montreal, had some rather sharp comments to make as guest speaker at the festival banquet last Wednesday evening.

He stated the Yorkton festival is now at the crossroads and must either grow and develop or wither and die. A fundamental decision must be made by the whole community, he suggested, to support the pioneers and workers who have made this event possible.

Facilities such as better screening condition, better seating and better projection must be provided to put the festival on a professional level required to attract the size and kind of audience that should be receptive to such a festival.

The council decided to postpone the scheduled 1966 festival for one year. They hoped the excitement of Centennial Year (1967) would bring more support from the local community, but the move failed. Attendance at screenings that year dropped to an all-time low of 750. Faced with such a sharp decline in support, the Yorkton Film Council decided to call a meeting to disband the Yorkton Film Council.

A disappointed Nettie Krysiki, for twenty years YFC secretary, made an appointment with Mayor Allan Bailey. She wanted to leave the valued guest book with the City: the book containing the signatures of the visiting dignitaries from foreign embassies and the world of film. She wanted to emphasize to Yorkton’s most influential citizen that the festival was about to close — forever.

Bailey went home that evening to talk over the situation with his wife, Colleen, a dynamo in the local arts community and a future woman of influence on the Saskatchewan and Canadian arts scene. They went to the meeting called for the sole purpose of disbanding the film festival, but Colleen and Allan Bailey would not see the festival die. From that meeting was formed the Yorkton International Film Festival Society. The determination and commitment of this group would see the festival through to a new beginning.

When asked if Nettie had planned the meeting with Mayor Bailey, Ruth Shaw, long-time board member, grinned and said, "She was nobody’s fool, that Nettie Kryski!" In other words, the YFC secretary had planned well. She knew Allan and Colleen Bailey were the best hope of preserving her beloved festival.

**TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE**

Between 1969 and 1980, the people of the festival launched a transformation so fundamental it would ensure the continuation of the festival for the next 35 years. There were efforts aimed at securing more involvement from the local population, increasing film entries, and attracting Canadian filmmakers to the festival by offering workshops and conferences. In 1969, Colleen Bailey, then the board chair, came up with the idea of after-theatre socials to attract a local audience to the screenings and, to the delight of the parties. People in Yorkton still talk about the fun. One night it was a beer garden complete with accordion player, schnapps, and a midnight supper of weiner schnitzel and bierocks (meat-filled pastries). The next
was an exotic evening with the Chidori Kai Choir from Winnipeg, platters of Japanese delicacies and the presence of Tomohiko Hayashi, the Japanese consul at Winnipeg. In the early Seventies, the after-theatre parties continued to celebrate Canadian diversity - Ukrainian, Chinese, Hungarian. The combination of film, food and fun brought the local people back to the festival.

In addition, the board emphasized the need to bring in adjudicators of national and international stature. The decade saw the arrival of:

- Frank Morriss, arts editor, Winnipeg Free Press (1971)
- Micheline Lanctot, actor, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravetz (1975)
- George Anthony, editor and film critic, Toronto Sun (1977)
- Barry Morse, actor and star of the television series, The Fugitive (1979)
- Raymond Cloutier, actor, CBC’s Louis Riel (1980)

These very credible adjudicators said to the film makers – “We’re here. Why aren’t you?” The strategy worked. In 1974, the festival tripled its entries from an average of 100 to a whopping 304. Two years later, the number increased again to 325. Prodded by the increasing status of the festival, the board decided to move from a biennial to an annual format.

In the 1970s, the efforts of the festival board moved from the education of the public about film to an education about making film. In 1971, 32 local students attended a workshop given by Lee Coxama of Moose Jaw, and Roger Paradise and Jim Hill of Regina. Four years later, independent filmmakers came to Yorkton to discuss the future of film in Canada. The panel of experts, chaired by Fil Fraser Communications in Edmonton, included Larry Hetzog (Why Shoot the Teacher), Canadian film genius, Alan King (Who has seen the wind?), independent film maker Ken Black, and Ted Rouse of the Canadian Film Development Corporation. The workshop/conference initiative was to become a mainstay of festival events over the next 35 years.

And where was Nettie Kryski in all this frantic activity? She was simply there – handling the correspondence, typing the newsletters, tracking the expenses, setting up the new office over the local bowling arena. Chery, smiling, enthusiastic. Sheila Harris, executive secretary of the festival from 1979-1985, remembered that signing cheques meant tea at Nettie’s house and an explanation for the expense involved. Ever careful, ever the treasurer on guard over a slim bank account, Nettie Kryski did her due diligence with a smile and the question – “One sugar or two?” As noted in the 1981 festival program:

When asked by a Vancouver film critic in 1969, ‘why Yorkton?’, Nettie Kryski answered, ‘We wanted a film festival so we just went ahead and organized one. There isn’t any reason why ordinary people who aren’t glamorous or well-known can’t enjoy the same things they enjoy in the big capitals of the world.’ That reply sums up Nettie Kryski’s down-to-earth philosophy of hard work. If you want something, go after it with energy and enthusiasm, and you’ll succeed.

Nettie Kryski was an unsung hero of Saskatchewan culture, a woman of dedication and an extraordinary volunteer. Thanks to Nettie’s determination and hard work, the Yorkton festival will celebrate its 65th anniversary in 2012. Sixty-five years - a long time for an organization deemed as only temporary in a 1947 edition of The Yorkton Enterprise.

Kathy Morrell is a Saskatoon-based freelance writer primarily interested in the history of Western Canada. Her work has been published in Prairies North, Saskatchewan Folklife and right here in Saskatchewan History. Kathy operates a business writing legacy histories for families and businesses.
The amazing adventures of Christina and Nan:


In August 1919, two young women took a vacation from their jobs at the University of Saskatchewan and embarked on a wagon, canoe and train journey that started and ended in Prince Albert, taking them along a large section of the historic ‘voyageur highway’ from Stanley Mission in Saskatchewan to Le Pas, Manitoba – a canoe route traveled by fur traders from both Montreal and Hudson Bay since the 1700s.

Christina Henry and Annie ‘Nan’ McKay were experienced adventurers who had traveled together before; for example, they had taken hiking trips in the Rocky Mountains prior to this excursion. The two women traveled alone with a First Nations freighter and then with two aboriginal guides on the first leg of the trip from Prince Albert to La Ronge, where they were joined for the La Ronge to Le Pas segment of the journey by Nan's father, Angus McKay, his wife (Nan's stepmother) Margaret, and their children Marjorie and Wilfred.

As pointed out in historian Merle Massie’s 2010 University of Saskatchewan dissertation entitled At the Edge: The North Prince Albert Region of the Saskatchewan Forest Fringe to 1940, “The girls utilized personal connections with church leaders at Prince Albert and with merchants of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) to facilitate and organize their trip.” Nan came from an English Métis family which had connections in the community of HBC officers and employees, in the Anglican Church, and in political (especially Conservative Party) circles in the North-West and, later, in Saskatchewan. In Prince Albert, they stayed with the family of Anglican bishop Rt. Rev. J.A. Newnham, a connection at least partially established by Nan having attended a ladies’ college in Prince Albert which had been founded by Newnham. It seems likely that Nan’s father, as an HBC manager, would have had a hand in organizing the girls’ wagon-ride with a local freighter from Prince Albert to Montreal Lake, their stay at the Montreal Lake HBC post, their aboriginal guides from Montreal Lake to La Ronge, as well as the guides who transported the entire party from La Ronge to Le Pas.

Christina Evelyn Henry was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 1894. Her father, Elias Wetmore Henry, was a veterinarian who moved west with his wife, his children, and his brother, to break new land in Saskatchewan. In 1907, the family settled on a homestead at SE 22-29-12 W3 (near Mildem) Christina was about 13 years old. Although little information is available about the family’s early years in Saskatchewan or about Christina’s schooling, we do know that by the time she was in her mid-twenties, she was employed as an assistant to the Registrar at the University of Saskatchewan. In June of 1925, she married John V. Bateman, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Saskatchewan. The couple had two daughters who were raised in Saskatoon, where Christina and John lived until his retirement, when they moved to Victoria.

Annie Maude ‘Nan’ McKay was born on October 10, 1892, at Fort a la Corne, North-West Territories, where her father worked at a Hudson’s Bay Company trading post. Her mother was the former Annie Maud Mary Fortescue, whose father had settled on a homestead at SE 22-29-12 W3 (near Mildem); Christina was about 13 years old. Although little information is available about the family’s early years in Saskatchewan or about Christina’s schooling, we do know that by the time she was in her mid-twenties, she was employed as an assistant to the Registrar at the University of Saskatchewan. In June of 1925, she married John V. Bateman, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Saskatchewan. The couple had two daughters who were raised in Saskatoon, where Christina and John lived until his retirement, when they moved to Victoria.

Christina and Nan documented their northern Saskatchewan journey with photographs, and with words recorded by Christina in a daily journal. At least 20 years later, Christina typed the entries from her journal, and in 1979, she donated an album of photographs and the typescript to the Saskatchewan Archives Board. A number of these photographs and the content of the typescript have been reproduced here, along with annotations that provide historical and contextual information to expand on some of the details related to the journey.

Aug. 9, 1919

Nan McKay had asked me if I would like to go to Lac La Ronge for our holidays after summer school and visit her father who was Hudson’s Bay Factor at Lac La Ronge. I accepted with great glee. Nan’s holiday from University Library and mine from the Registrar’s office came after Summer School. So we were up this morning at 5:15 a.m. to be sure to catch the train to Prince Albert where the Newhams had asked us to stay with them until we set off for Lac la Ronge.
Bishop Newnham's family wave goodbye to Christina Henry and Nan McKay. Mrs. Letitia Newnham (second from left), with four of her daughters, August 10, 1919.

Nan and Christina were staying with the family of Bishop Jervois Newnham. Jervois Arthur Newnham was born October 15, 1852 in Somerset, England. He came to Montreal in 1873 where he received his B.A. (1878) and M.A. (1883) from McGill University. In 1880, with the support of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), Newnham began work at Moose Factory, Ontario, where he started learning the Cree language. Jervois Newnham was consecrated Bishop of Moosonee, in Ontario, serving from 1893 to 1903. In 1903 Newnham became Bishop of Saskatchewan, arriving in Prince Albert, the seat of the Diocese of Saskatchewan, in 1904. His residence was “Bishopthorpe” (2015 - 2nd Avenue West, Prince Albert) which he shared with his wife, Letitia and five daughters, Georgina, Hazel, May, Kathleen and Dorothea. Jervois Newnham served as Bishop of the Diocese of Saskatchewan, Anglican Church of Canada from 1903-1921. Newnham resigned as Bishop effective October 15, 1921 and moved to Clifton, Bedfordshire, England, to be Rector at All Saints’ Church. In 1925 he retired to Hamilton, Ontario, where he died January 11, 1941.

In the afternoon a friend drove us to W.S. McKay’s to arrange about borrowing a tent. We were very lucky to get a nice little silk (?) tent in a bag.

Aug. 10
We all went to church.

Although Christina does not specify which church they attended, it is most likely that since they were attending with the Bishop they would have gone to St. Albans Cathedral, which was built in Prince Albert in 1925.

Aug. 11
Willie Bear, a Cree Indian called for us at 1 p.m. in a big farm wagon – no seats, no springs.

Willie Bear, sometimes referred to as Billie Bear in other sources, was a member of the Little Red River Reserve north of Prince Albert. Little Red River Reserve was created as part of the 1897 Treaty 6 Adhesion, when the Montreal Lake band and the La Ronge band requested that some of their reserve be agricultural land located within the Saskatchewan River watershed, hundreds of miles south of their boreal home. In addition to running a successful freighting business between Prince Albert and the Montreal Lake / La Ronge area, Willie operated a farm which was located on the Little Red River Reserve. Nan and Christina’s first night on the road was spent at Willie’s farm.

Mrs. Newnham and her four daughters waved goodbye to us from their garden fence.

Not very far from Prince Albert we came upon miled and miles of burnt over woods – only blackened trunks left – a very sad sight – but the forested was springing up making a bright pink carpet for the black tree trunks.

Christina and Nan rode through an area which was devastated by The Great Fire of 1919. This enormous fire (which was likely part of a complex of many large fires burning simultaneously) started in May 1919 and burned in an area in excess of 2.5 million hectares stretching from Boyle, Alberta to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Although accounts differ, current research suggests that the fire started from natural causes, a combination of low snow levels the previous winter, spring drought, and high winds stirred by lightning.

The road was terrible rough – nothing but tree roots and rocks, bump bump bump.

Historian Merle Massie believes that Willie Bear took them to Montreal Lake on the old freighting trail from Prince Albert, through Little Red River Reserve and through a forest reserve. This trail was normally used in winter, and would only have been passable in a dry spring or summer, such as was experienced in 1919. It would have been a very rough ride, so Christina’s complaints were likely not exaggerations.

We went for miles and miles without seeing a house or building of any description. Every few miles we came upon bright little creeks winding in and out – not much like the muddy Saskatchewan River.

Camped at Sturgeon River for supper and then pushed on.

Arrived at Willie Bear’s farm at 11 p.m. and slept in our little tent which he set up for us.

Aug. 12

Got up at 3 a.m. and went into house and made breakfast for Willie Bear and his boy. Flies, flies, flies! It looked like rain so Willie Bear made a carpet of his wagon. We looked for all the world like gypsies. Started at 10 a.m. and stopped at noon at a dam on the Little Red River. The dam had been burnt as had all the surrounding country. Not far up the river there was a beaver dam but we did not have time to investigate. In the afternoon passed through more pretty country even though it had been burnt. The black trunks of the trees with the under-growth of fireweed looked beautiful and there were miles and miles of it. We stopped at Jacob’s Well. The water was very cold and covered with moss.

Research to discover the actual location of this place known as Jacob’s Well has been unsuccessful. However, the travelers appear to have stopped at an actual well named for the well described in the Bible, in John 4:3-12, where Jesus met the Samaritan woman, near a city of Samaria called Sychar. There is a historical site in modern day Sychar which is known as Jacob’s Well, and there are other such sites around the world (in Canada, England, New Zealand, and the U.S.A. for example) that are called Jacob’s Well.
Passed several Indians and families. They were very curious about us for we were wearing overalls and they probably had never seen a woman dressed in trousers.

This is the first of several comments by Christina about the reaction of people along their route to the two women wearing overalls during the journey. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Western society had observed strict rules requiring individuals to dress according to gender, and trousers were defined as men's clothing. In 1913, French designer Paul Poiret was the first to design pants for women: harem pants based on costumes worn for the popular opera Scheherazade by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1888). During the Great War (1914-1918), for practical reasons, women in factories wore pants and overalls to work, although female office workers were still required to wear skirts. The sight of women wearing pants was still shocking to the larger part of the population in western society through the 1920s and 1930s. It was only considered acceptable for women to don pants as casual wear by the late 1930s and 1940s. It was only considered acceptable to be completely acceptable by the 1970s.

Aug. 13

Camped last night on the lower slope of a hill. Below was the road and beyond that deep grass and a valley. Willie Bear pitched our tent and made us very comfortable. We slept very well. Got quite an early start this morning. Had an old Indian (with whiskers) for breakfast. Quite a specimen. We gave him corn flakes. I felt he thought it was rausent. He had brought his breakfast with him – ham and some sort of meat (pemmican) that did not look nice and it was tied up in a dirty handkerchief! He told us it was a hard day's travel, and it was – 21 muskegs, rocks and tree stumps. Never had such a bumping in my life. 1919 had been a very dry summer. Picked enough blueberries for tea and lots left over. There were buckets of cranberries. Saw a bride and groom. Bride was very shy and only 18, and husband was 50. Picture of them in their bridal gown. He told us it was tied up in a dirty handkerchief! He told us it was 21 muskegs, rocks and tree stumps. Never had such a bumping in my life. 1919 had been a very dry summer. Picked enough blueberries for tea and lots left over. There were buckets of cranberries. Saw a bride and groom. Bride was very shy and only 18, and husband was 50. Picture of them in their bridal gown – just exactly like the farm wagon we were in.

Saw several Forest Rangers houses with notices pasted all over them. Passed two soup kitchens, or stopping houses, and also two lumber camps that had been closed. Walked quite a bit today. About three miles from Montreal Lake we passed through a grove of huge trees, very, very high, and not much more than a foot in diameter – it was so beautiful we felt we were in a cathedral. After passing Mr. English's store (a free trader), we went out to pitch our tent and we wrote to Mother and Mrs. Newn. He invited us to tea in his house and we had a very nice supper and had our own tent, but asked if we might write letters to send back with Willie Bear and we accepted. We went out to pitch our tent and we wrote to Mother and Mrs. Newn. He invited us to tea in his house and we had a very nice supper and had our own tent, but asked if we might write letters to send back with Willie Bear and we accepted.

About three miles from Montreal Lake we passed through a grove of huge trees, very, very high, and not much more than a foot in diameter – it was so beautiful we felt we were in a cathedral. After passing Mr. English's store (a free trader), we went out to pitch our tent and we wrote to Mother and Mrs. Newn. He invited us to tea in his house and we had a very nice supper and had our own tent, but asked if we might write letters to send back with Willie Bear and we accepted. We went out to pitch our tent and we wrote to Mother and Mrs. Newn. He invited us to tea in his house and we had a very nice supper and had our own tent, but asked if we might write letters to send back with Willie Bear and we accepted.

Aug. 14

Mr. Nunn had breakfast on the table for us – bacon, tea, condensed milk, ham and green plum jam. Mr. Dickenson had only been at the post for one week. Although no other biographical information for Mr. Dickenson can be located at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, the post journal for the Montreal Lake Hudson's Bay Company post does mentions that his first initial was "R." He arrived to work at the post on August 7, 1919, and was mentioned in the post journal on and off during the fall and winter of that year; it is unclear how long he remained.

He had lived in Ontario before he enlisted and was learning to farm there. After the war he had wanted to go North. When he arrived in Regina he thought he would join the R.N.W.M.P. but did not like to think of more drilling, and he asked for the first place in the bush and was told Prince Albert. Probably met Mr. Nunn there and came up to this post with him. Fixed out holding and made up our bed roll and had dinner with Mr. N. and Mr. D. Had potatoes, [snails] ham and tea, raspberries. Went for a walk in the woods with Mr. N and Mr. D. Couldn't take any pictures of the woods, too dark. Mr. Dickenson had been warned not to go into the woods without someone who knew the woods well. Mr. D. thought he wouldn't get lost and went alone and did get lost and had to be rescued.
After our walk Mr Nunn brought us some Indian candy and the Indian women came to give us a look over.

This may have been one of two different types of Indian candy. Recipes can still be found for Indian candy, which is nuggets of smoked, sweetened salmon. It is possible that in Saskatchewan, Indian candy was made from another type of fish found in northern Saskatchewan lakes, or from salmon brought to the area by Hudson’s Bay Company traders. Some modern-day Internet recipe websites also mention a recipe for old-fashioned “Indian candy” made from sugar, vinegar and butter, boiled to hard-ball candy stage, then pulled and cut similar to molasses candy. Historian Leah Dorion has also reported that First Nations people in the Cumberland House area used maple syrup and birch syrup to make treats.

We asked the men for supper; we thought the Indian girl only got their dinners. I cooked a corn scallop and a blueberry and raspberry pie and they thought our canoe men would be sick next morning. The sun was blistering. They shot three ducks. We had dinner. Met a family of Indians, and also a man who was hungry. Our Indians gave him some bannock and a duck. Also met a white man — the third white man we have seen since leaving Prince Albert.

There are numerous rapids and we have run them all. Our Indians have great fun. They talk (in Cree) all.

Adolphus Ross and William Bird (both Indians). They never spoke a word of English to us. I had never been in a canoe before and it was very exciting. At noon they put up a sail as shelter.

The sun was blistering. They shot three ducks. We met a family of Indians (1 canoe) who had a blanket up for a sail. Stopped and put up a sail of our own like this [drawing of a triangular sail in original].

Camped for dinner, lunch and tea. The Indians always made a fire to make tea and they had their own food, and we had ours. The lake, just at dark, was beautiful, as smooth as glass and all opalescent colours. We saw an island covered, as we thought, with pelicans. We camped in a beautiful spot — wonderful cranberries on the hill behind our tent. Men went in swimming. The rapids are not very swift, but it is a weird sensation to be stopped suddenly, when you think things are going smoothly, to avoid a rock straight ahead. The Indians enjoyed it.

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After supper Nan baked 4 cakes of bannock, while Mr. D. and I washed dishes. Nan’s father had”.

The Chestnut family started marketing canvas canoes in the late 1890s in Fredericton, New Brunswick. The early Chestnut canoes were modeled after a canoe built by B.N. Morris, and early Chestnuts show the Morris influence. Chestnut incorporated in 1907 as the Chestnut Canoe Company, Limited. The Chestnut factory burned down in December of 1921 and their canoe molds were all lost. After the fire, all of their canoe models were redesigned. As a consequence, the features of Chestnut canoe models built from 1904-1921 were different than post-1921 models.

Camped at the mouth of the Montreal River and had dinner. Met a family of Indians, and also a man who was hungry. Our Indians gave him some bannock and a duck. Also met a white man — the third white man we have seen since leaving Prince Albert.

There are numerous rapids and we have run them all. Our Indians have great fun. They talk in Cree and laugh all the time they are going through the rapids. Several times Adolphus got out in his bare morning. It barbed and barbed but was running all the time. The men shot three ducks. It is 11 a.m. and we are very near the mouth of the Montreal river, which, Mr. Nunn told us was very low, so we may have to get out and push our little canoe, which by the way, is a chestnut canoe made in Fredericton, N.B. and only holds 1200 lbs and two men.

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our little "22" gun!! We couldn’t find a sign of a path and we knew the Indians might have trouble as the water was very low. We walked about 1 1/2 miles and came to the river and hoped it was the right place. After 2 1/2 hours our Indians arrived. We began to wonder if they had started back to their homes. We were overjoyed to see them, after they had traveled 9 1/2 miles. We hadn’t seen a bear, nor a house, nor a person and had no food. We had visions of them taking our money, grab and clothes for we had nothing with us!! Our apologies to Petebals and Williams!! We had supper as soon as they landed and now we are out and looking for a place to camp. It is beautiful in the cool of the evening when the dark shadows of the trees decorate the water’s edge. Once not seen anybody today. Pushed on to the Mountain portage. We expected to camp here but there was a canoe and two men already there.

You have no idea what ideas the sound of an axe against wood brings to one’s mind, or the sight of smoke from a campfire to travelers in the woods and on the water. However after our men were given a chew of tobacco they decided to stay. Probably it was the mail man from Lac la Ronge. The Indians did an eightsome reel – men and individual danced just as enthusiastically. Then one danced until he was exhausted and then another individual danced just as enthusiastically. Then the Indians did the fancy steps and the women just shuffled along with them. The room was full with non-dancers standing or sitting against the walls, benches etc. could hardly distinguish the flame of the smoky kerosene lamp. Never, never will I ever see such a sight again. Thrilled.

Very, very heavy thunderstorms. We were glad to be sleeping in a bed tonight.

Aug.19 - Slept until 3 a.m. The children showed us the fenced garden attached to the McKay house. All kinds of vegetables, sunflowers at least 10 feet high, ripe tomatoes and lots of flowers.

Aug.20 - Wrote to Mother and sent it off with the mail man in whose honour the dance was held last night. We made the trip very quickly as it took the mail man much longer to come from Montreal Lake than four days. We started on Friday at 10:30 a.m. and got to Lac la Ronge on Monday at 8:30 p.m. Mr. McKay says there are 135 rapids on the Montreal River. We took our supper over to Sandy Beach. In the evening we looked at old pictures. Nan went in swimming. For supper we had devilled eggs, canned lobster, blueberry and raspberry preserves (delicious). We had a wonderful time together.

Aug.21 - Started painting some Indian paddles for Anson boys (?). Nice open fire tonight. The kids keep us busy reading stories to them and playing.

Aug.22 - Bishop Newnham is expected today at the Mission (Anglican). The 24th is Confirmation Sunday and we will go across the lake to service. Painted more bottles and paddles. Paddled. Went down to the Hudson’s Bay Store (three or four stores in a row). Am going to ask Mr. McKay about a moose hide coat with embroidery and fringe.

Aug.23 - Finished our paddles. Went swimming in pm. It rained.


It took us 2 hours to go over with Mr. McKay and Mr. Turner (his assistant in the store) paddling. There were several tents and houses on the islands. We saw an Indian paddling his own birch bark canoe to church. He was over 90 years old and had great, great grandchildren. I think his name was John Flett. He had a birch bark canoe to church – faced a head wind.

Nan McKay’s father, Angus, was manager of the Hudson’s Bay Post at La Ronge. He lived with his wife, Margaret, and their two children (Nan’s half-sister and half-brother) Maryjorie and Wilfred.

Mr. McKay asked if we would like to see the Indians dancing. They had assembled for Treaty money.

Treaty annuity payments are paid annually on a national basis to registered Indians who are entitled to treaty annuities through membership to bands that have signed historic treaties with the Crown. Drawing on an existing set of traditions and ceremonies which governed relations in trade and alliances between Indians and with the European fur companies, the occasion of the annuity payment was often accompanied by several days of pipe-smoking, gift exchange, speeches of mutual reassurance, feasting and dancing.

Never will I forget it. This took place in a freight shed. The only light was a kerosene lamp with a very very small chimney which gave very little light; the room was filled with dust from the dancing of the Red River Jig. I couldn’t believe that the Indians moccasined feet ever touched the floor. He danced until he was exhausted and then another individual danced just as enthusiastically. Then the Indians did an eightsome reel – men and women. The men did the fancy steps and the women just shuffled along with them. The room was full with non-dancers standing or sitting against the walls, benches etc. could hardly distinguish the flame of the smoky kerosene lamp. Never, never will I ever see such a sight again. Thrilled.

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Aug. 31, Sunday
Head wind. Wonder when we will get started.
Sept. 1, Monday
Rain 2 wind. Indians backed out. Mr. McKay had to make a trip over to the Mission to hire more men. Could not start today, anyway, on account of the weather. Your men have promised to start tomorrow.

Sept. 2
Great preparations to get away today. Started at 11 am. Went over to the Mission to say goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Hives. It began to rain just as we started out. We took Mrs. McKay, the little Indian servant girl home. There are eight in the family and they live in two tents. The mother is consumptive.

McKay was a very common name in northern Saskatchewan, and it is easy to become confused. The woman described as being consumptive (suffering from tuberculosis) is the servant girl Ida McKay’s mother, not Nan’s stepmother, Margaret McKay.

The two Indians in our canoe are John Moran (16 yrs) who married a widow with two children, and Jeremiah McKenzie.

In the other canoe with Mr. and Mrs. Angus McKay, and their two young children – Marjorie about 6, and Wilfred (4) were Indians Colin Campbell (who didn’t understand much English) and Philip Morastie (the guide). 

Nan’s father, his wife (who was Nan’s step-mother), and their two children accompanied Nan and Christina on the La Ronge to Le Pas portion of the holiday. Descendants of Angus and Margaret McKay have speculated that this canoe holiday doubled as a way of getting Margaret close to a hospital as the due date of her baby drew close.

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John is the biggest fool in the post, and Philip the laziest. At our first camp (3 pm) Philip didn’t do one thing. We passed through a squall and John lost his hat and pillow. Camped at the Crossing [in Lac la Ronge] which the Indians would not attempt because it was too rough. Picked huge cranberries for supper. The wind did not go down so tents were pitched and we spent the night there. Had supper at 7 pm and sat around the fire till 9. Could not sleep for too many mice. One ran over my face. They seemed to be all over the place, inside and outside the tent.

Margaret McKay gave birth to her third child, Thomas Alexander, in Moose Jaw on November 12, 1919, less than three months after this diary entry was made. It is possible that Mrs. McKay was not feeling well because of her pregnancy.

Aug. 28, Thursday
Raining. Stayed in the house all day. At 3 p.m. we started for the Mission – a very rough crossing. The Indian said the canoe would sink – the roughest weather we have had. Supper at the Mission School with 70 Indian children. Bought some birch bark regans and moccasins.

According to the Dictionary of Canadianisms, a regan is a birch-bark bowl, cup or bucket used as a storage container, to collect tree sap, etc.

Aug. 29
Tents nearly all gone now. Breezy money was paid by Govt. officials.

Aug. 30
Packed. Rev Mr. and Mrs. Hives came over from Mission School to say goodbye. Mrs. McKay and Nan packed the grub box for our 2 week trip to The Pas.

Aug. 25, Monday
Woke at 8. Had supper under the trees. Went out canoeing (in a circle) and Nan steered.

A middy is woman’s or child’s loose blouse with a sailor collar, which hangs straight from the shoulders to the hips.

The Indian woman (Maria Roberts) who is to make my moose hide coat came to take my measurements and took them on a piece of string by tying knots.

Aug. 31, Sunday
Head wind. Wonder when it will start.

Aug. 31, Monday
Rain 2 wind. Indians backed out. Mr. McKay had to make a trip over to the Mission to hire more men. Could not start today, anyway, on account of the weather. Your men have promised to start tomorrow.

Aug. 26, Tuesday
Woke at 6:30 and went swimming. Very cool. I made a pie.

Aired our bedding. After dinner dressed up in our sailor middies and met Mr. English, Mr. Thomson and the Bishop and Mr. Fraser came over and met Mr. English, Mr. Thomson and the Bishop and Mr. Fraser came over and met Mr. English, Mr. Thomson and the Bishop and Mr. Fraser came over and met Mr. English, Mr. Thomson and the Bishop and Mr. Fraser came over.

Margaret McKay gave birth to her third child, Thomas Alexander, in Moose Jaw on November 12, 1919, less than three months after this diary entry was made. It is possible that Mrs. McKay was not feeling well because of her pregnancy.

Aug. 28, Thursday
Raining. Stayed in the house all day. At 3 p.m. we started for the Mission – a very rough crossing. The Indian said the canoe would sink – the roughest weather we have had. Supper at the Mission School with 70 Indian children. Bought some birch bark regans and moccasins.

According to the Dictionary of Canadianisms, a regan is a birch-bark bowl, cup or bucket used as a storage container, to collect tree sap, etc.

Aug. 29
Tents nearly all gone now. Breezy money was paid by Govt. officials.

Aug. 30
Packed. Rev Mr. and Mrs. Hives came over from Mission School to say goodbye. Mrs. McKay and Nan packed the grub box for our 2 week trip to The Pas.

Aug. 25, Monday
Woke at 8. Had supper under the trees. Went out canoeing (in a circle) and Nan steered.

A middy is woman’s or child’s loose blouse with a sailor collar, which hangs straight from the shoulders to the hips.

The Indian woman (Maria Roberts) who is to make my moose hide coat came to take my measurements and took them on a piece of string by tying knots.

Aug. 27, Wednesday
Got up at 6:30 and went swimming. Very cool. I let the canoe drift out and had to go after it. Mrs. McKay was not very well today. I made a pie. Mrs. McKay frowns her brow by holding it in the oven for 15 minutes.

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We sat by the fire and Mr. McKay told us stories of the Cree and Blackfoot Indians regarding one another and stealing each other's horses.

Sept. 3, Wednesday

Got up almost with the sun. Put on our overalls. Gave the men quite a shock. When I was getting breakfast the Indians were around the fire and John spoke to the men and I think they dared him to say “good morning” for he turned right around and said “good morning, Miss Henry, lovely morning.” I think we are going to have a fair wind. It seemed as if we made portages all day. The portages were very pretty — white birch trees and beautiful paths. Took a picture of the one — about 1/4 mile long. The second one Nan and I climbed a very steep hill and the view from the top was magnificent, about the same as from the C.P.R. Hotel at Banff.

Prior to this journey, Nan and Christina had done hiking holidays in the Rocky Mountains, so they would have been familiar with the sights around Banff. After this journey, they went on to attend the 1923 Alpine Club of Canada camp. In 1944, Nan was caught in a rock slide on a hiking trail in Banff National Park, and her back was seriously injured. She was on leave from work for 18 months while she recuperated, and afterwards she walked with the aid of two canes.

We did not take our cameras up and the moon were packed so could not go back to take a snap. After the second portage the scenery was lovely — lakes with pretty islands. After the lake we went into a stream about the width of the canoe — the water was very low so we had to get out and walk. I think this waterway led to the Churchill River. It was an Indian trail (one step directly ahead of the other foot). We could not see the trail because of the high grass and it was quite an adventure. I think this waterway led to the Churchill River. It was an Indian trail (one step directly ahead of the other foot). We could not see the trail because of the high grass and it was quite an adventure. I was carrying Wilfred (4 years) on my back. The path was narrow and deep.

And supper at the outlet of this stream.

Sept. 4, Thursday

7:30 start. Travelled a good bit before we portaged to Long Lake. It is on a par with the scenery yesterday - most beautiful. I do not think the Thousand Islands could surpass this lake. Made one portage this a.m. Met the first people and first white man since we left Lac la Ronge. At the end of this portage we came to the Churchill River which again is beautiful with islands and lakes — the river itself seems more like a series of lakes than a river. Then we arrived at Stanley and dinner at the Hudson’s Bay Post. Crowds of people looking at us with curiosity and amusement at our overalls. Right across the river is Stanley and its famous church.

Among the many missionaries contributing to the building of the mission and to the welfare of the Indians was Archdeacon McKay [sic] who built the present pews and pulpit.

Archdeacon John Alexander MacKay (1838-1923) was born the son of a Hudson’s Bay Company factor. He was ordained deacon at St. Paul’s Church (Red River Settlement) on May 29, 1861 and as a priest the following year at St. John’s Cathedral, Winnipeg. In 1884, he married Margaret, the daughter of William and Helen Drever, who had settled in Red River in 1821. MacKay was made Archdeacon of Saskatchewan in 1884, and became the Cree tutor and professor at Emmanuel College upon its establishment in 1879.

He also translated the Bible, Prayer Book and many hymns into Cree and started the Cree dictionary that was only completed in 1938. This missionary also cleared land and sewed wheat and oats, which he ground with a home-made mill, parts of which are still in evidence.

This tower was removed several years after because it was considered unsafe.

Made a short portage. Only traveled 8 miles from this portage and camped at Nitsitawuk Falls.

These last two passages suggest that Christina annotated her travel diary entries some years later, perhaps when she prepared a typescript of her travelogue. The references to the Cree dictionary and the tower on the church at Stanley Mission refer to events that occurred many years after her 1919 voyage.

Sept. 5, Friday

Only woke when Mr. McKay called us. The rapids made such a noise we had to shout to each other.

Head wind today and very heavy sea. Made one portage to overcome very pretty rapids (Three Channel Portage) very short. Dinner at noon and stayed until 6:30. It has been a very long day and hope we soon get on the way. Had supper and started but it was very heavy traveling, and we stopped at 7:15 and camped on a sandy beach.

Sept. 6, Saturday

Woke we woke we were almost sliding out the tent door. Our bed had been built on a slope. An Indian came and spent the morning in camp. His name was Logaree Ballantyne. Stayed until 2 when we started against a heavy head wind and we covered ourselves up with the taros in the nearly all afternoon. It was misty and things got wet. Made a portage over some rocks. They were full of holes - like wells or basins. Very cold. Camped at 7 p.m. at Keg Lake Rapids and portage (short). Had a duck with potatoes.

Sept. 7, Sunday

Got up at 5:30. Had breakfast and broke camp at 7:30. Weather fairly good. Made one portage. Bare Hill Portage and Rapids. Saw a skunk on this portage and I took 2 pictures of it — close ups. The skunk behaved very well. Made a short portage. We are still on the Churchill River. Saw an eagle and just before dinner the men shot a saw-bill duck and a diver, which is not a duck but a grove. This diver has no tail and its feet are not
webbed. Very heavy wind today. Philip said he could not cross the lake, but John said he could, so we did. It was good fun riding the big waves. We only stopped when the wind got too strong. But the others got soaked especially Marjorie (6). Had to stop and get her dry and had supper.

Made Frog Portage and I guess it is named that because of the low ground (very short and grassy). The canoes were rolled over the logs. Now we have left the Churchill and on Frog (?) River, a little winding stream which opens out into the Lake. Camped at a very pretty place at the end of the portage over which the men took the canoes. Philip says we will make the boat at Sturgeon Landing which would take us to The Pas.

Sept. 8, Monday
Nearly frost last night. The grass around camp is soaking every morning either from heavy dew or frost and we are soaked every day and all day as we have no chance to dry our shoes and stockings sitting in a canoe all day. Got up at 5:15 and left at 7:15. A slight head wind. Philip shot a loon. We made a very short portage towards evening and just before we arrived at Pelican Narrows. Met Mr. Belcher who is in charge of H.B.Co. there. He has only been here about two weeks and is from Winnipeg. Made bannock in his kitchen.

Sept. 9, Tuesday
Took a few pictures of H.B.Co. store from the hill and the look-out tower, and one of a beached York boat. There is a Roman Catholic Church here as well as an Anglican. Majority of people here are Roman Catholics and Philip is one. Some of his brothers and sisters live here. John says he dreamt about Jacob’s Ladder last night.

Jacob’s Ladder is a biblical reference to a passage in Genesis 12:9, in which a sleeping Jacob has a vision of a ladder between heaven and earth, with the God of his family standing above the ladder. There are a wide variety of interpretations regarding the symbolic meaning of this vision.

Got up at 5:30 and had breakfast in the tent. Nan and I went to the top of the hill. Made two portages yesterday. Had supper on one and met Sedley Clark, one of Nan’s cousins.

Nan’s cousin, Sedley, was born at Fort Carlton on January 27, 1879, the son of Chief Factor Laurence Clark and his second wife, the sister of Thomas and John McKay of Prince Albert. He entered the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1897, and was serving at Ile a la Crosse when the Great War broke out in 1914. He enlisted in 1915 and served as a private in the 53rd Battalion during the Great War. In 1919, he resumed employment with the Hudson’s Bay Company for a few more years.
We were just ready to start off when Wilfred fell into the lake. He was trying to get a cup of water. Great excitement. Mr. McKay jumped in. The rock was steep and Wilfred went under but Mr. McKay got him and then Jeremiah jumped in to assist Mr. McKay. The Indians built a roaring fire and I dried Wilfred while Nan dressed Mr. McKay, finger which he had cut quite badly on a rock. So, of course, we had to camp for the night. Before we had things dried a thunder storm came up.

Sept. 10, Wednesday

Got up at 5:30. Saw a canoe with white men in it – surveyors [sic] probably, also 3 other canoes going our way upstream before we started and saw 2 other canoes going our way which passed us. One was Davis Morastie, Philip’s brother, who is taking his wife to the doctor for TB. TB is a common abbreviation for tuberculosis, also known as consumption. (See diary entry for September 2.)

Made Birch portage where there was a great many tepee frames and camped for dinner.

Two portages in quick succession. Just wish we had things dried a thunder storm came up.

Saw two canoes going our way which passed us. One was Davis Morastie, Philip’s brother, who is taking his wife to the doctor for TB.

The Indians were making bannock! Too bad but very roughly last night. We had to fix it. It rained all night long and leaked in on our bedding and pillows.

Sept. 11, Thursday

Do not think we will make the boat at Sturgeon Landing. Have heard all sorts of rumours as to its time of leaving. Went down this winding river to a short portage. Two canoes caught up to us. We started first. We were about 2 miles down the river when John discovered he had forgotten his gun. After going back for it we were away behind the others and could not see them when we got to Beaver Lake.

Beaver Lake now appears on maps as Amisk Lake; “amisk” is the Cree word for beaver.

We caught up to them before we got to the island for dinner. The shore is limestone and is being mined on the other side of the lake. Dusty windy, crossing the lake (very large), and then we reached Sturgeon River winding like Montreal River but wide and very shallow.

Sturgeon River now appears on maps as the Sturgeon–Weir River.

We ran on some rocks. About half way down the river saw a canoe with three white men just as we landed. Had our tent facing the fire and polished our boots for the boat tomorrow. Other Indians camped near.

Sept. 12, Friday

Woke up about 5. Rasples very shallow – one of the other canoes went ahead. We sank on rocks and our canoe leaked, but we hailed it out with a cloth. Met several canoes coming down this river. They have to pole up. Met one white man who touched his cap and two others on shore. One man in white trousers (!) and black coat called us from the shore asking direction. Walked two portages.

Beaver Landing consists of a few houses at the entrance of the Sturgeon River into the lake. These are vacant because the mining company has gone across the lake. It was about 11 o’clock when we got to Sturgeon Landing – a few houses and a store or two. A white woman keeps one store. Saw quantities of the ore at the Landing. This is shipped to B.C. for smelting. We had dinner on the shore and started at 7:30 and have been on Sturgeon Lake ever since.

Sturgeon Lake now appears on maps as Nameiw Lake; “nameiw” is the Cree word for sturgeon.

It is a huge lake and we seemed to be traveling almost in the middle of it. Very calm when we started but now good sailing wind blowing. We missed the steamer at Sturgeon Landing by one day. It left yesterday at noon. We are going to miss seeing the Prince of Wales and the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire in The Pas on Saturday.

The Prince of Wales (who would become Edward VIII) visited Canada in 1919, a trip which included this hunting excursion at The Pas with the eleventh Governor General of Canada and his wife, the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire.

Victor Christian William Cavendish was the ninth Duke of Devonshire. He displayed a great interest in land development, farming and housing. His wife, the Duchess, was Lady Evelyn Emily Mary Fitzmaurice, eldest daughter of Lord Lansdowne (Canada’s fifth Governor General). Since both her father and husband served as Governor General of Canada, she spent a great deal of time living in Canada and was known as a popular hostess. The mother of seven children, she lived to the age of 90. She was known as Queen Mary’s most intimate friend, and in fact was her Mistress of Robes. Both women were described as capable and frowning on extravangant living, preferring quiet, simple lifestyles. While she did not approve of parties, she was indeed a devout hunter.

She was not, however, sympathetic to the suffragette cause. Montreal Gazette reported in 1912 that the feisty Duchess helped to eject a suffragette who was asking questions about enfranchisement; she literally grabbed the hand of the nearest “interrupter” and led her to the door.

We hope to be in The Pas on Sunday. Same two canoes are traveling with us today. Traveling on Sturgeon Lake all afternoon. Took our time – shot two ducks. We did not overtake the others until they had camped for the night at 8 p.m. on a point which was not good for a camp. The two other canoes stopped nearby. Men put up our tent very roughly last night. We had to fix it. It rained all night long and leaked in on our bedding and pillows.

Sept. 13, Saturday

Paining, so did not get up until 8:30 and got off at 11 a.m. with a beautiful fair wind. We traveled very fast and got to Bute Point at 1:30. Had a very rough time going from Sturgeon Lake into Cameron Lake. The sail did not work properly when they tried to change it once in a very dangerous place and after we had passed John said we nearly went under. Had dinner at Bute Point – very muddy. I never want to see it again. Could not buy bannock or bread to have hard tack and soda biscuits. Left the point at 4 p.m. Saw Cameronland from Bute’s Point but did not go up the lake and branched off into Tearing River. Went over 5 rapids. From that we came into the Saskatchewan River which is much the same as at Saskatoon. Travelled until 12 p.m. and camped for something to eat. Men were the only ones who ate. They had worked hard and the four canoes had saved most of the way till 12. It was a beautiful moonlight night. The scenery was a study in gold and black. The water and trees were black and the golden sky blue.

Guides Philip Morastie and Colin Campbell, on shore with canoe, August 1919.

SAP S. 032, Christina Bateman fonds.
The only sound was the dip of the paddles. I think I must have gone to sleep because I did not know we were going to camp. Got stuck in the mud up to my ankles. Had to climb a very steep muddy bank and pitched our tent on top.

Sept. 14, Sunday
Did not get up till 9 a.m. Got started at 11. Hope to reach The Pas this afternoon. The four canoes are still paddling together. Had dinner on the banks of the Sask. River.

Changed into our dresses. After dinner we started up a little river to take a short cut to The Pas, but the water was too low and had to go back to the Saskatchewan River. It is very muddy, both water and shores. Did not get moving till 4. Reached The Pas at 8. Passed the Mission – Archdeacon McKay’s school for Indians. This is the same Archdeacon MacKay who built Stanley Mission. (See diary entry for September 4.)

This is the same Archdeacon MacKay who built Stanley Mission. (See diary entry for September 4.)
Pitched our tent near the river. Banks crowded with boats, tugs and steamers. Nan and I went at once to station to telegraph but office was closed. Town was decorated in honour of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. They had gone shooting ducks.

Nearly froze in our tents which were pitched on a very windy hill and had to go to bed hungry as the shops were all closed.

Sept. 15, Monday
After breakfast Nan and I went to the station, purchased our train tickets and telegraphed to University. Did up our bedding and boxes for train. Went to the boat to see Duke and Duchess of Devonshire land after hunting. Duchess shot about 15 ducks on the wing.

John and Philip are seeing the town. Colin and Jeromeah did not seem to think much of it.

Luggage collected at 1:30.

Shook hands with Colin and Jeromeah and said goodbye to Philip across the street and did not see John. He appeared at the station to say goodbye. Mr. and Mrs. McKay are staying over until Wednesday because there is no train tomorrow. It only runs three times a week. We have to wait three hours in Hudson Bay Junction.

Christina and Nan took a train on the Canadian National Railway (CNR) branch line from Le Pas to Hudson Bay Junction, where they disembarked, slept for a few hours in a local hotel, and then caught a CNR train to Prince Albert in the early hours of the next morning.

A friend of Mr. McKay came at 9 p.m. when we arrived at the Junction and took us to supper and then took our suit cases to the hotel and we took a room until 3:30 a.m. Slept soundly till 3:30.

Sept. 16, Tuesday
Caught train.

Country is muskeg and not pretty. Surprise to me to see so many big towns along the line. Got into Prince Albert at 10:30.

Thus ended the most interesting, most unusual, and most beautiful holiday I ever had.
My Mother’s Hands – A glimpse of my mother’s life

By Sylvia Davies

My mother’s hands took great pride in everything they did, and cared for all those who depended on them. Yet even with all that work, my mother’s hands (and my mother) always found moments to appreciate the small pleasures and joys of life.

For my mother, Anne Davies, the kitchen was a major focal point in the home I grew up on Birch Hill Farm. It was a beehive of activity where opinions were debated, problems were solved and ideas were fashioned. Friendships were valued and family was nurtured. There was always plenty of delicious, home-cooked nourishing food. Each day concluded with a cup of coffee and lunch while reflecting on the day’s activities. Breakfasts and evening coffee were habitually accompanied by bread, muffins and jams. Those homemade jams were often the result of berries picked along the coulee. Saskatoon, chokecherry, pin cherry – whatever was available.

The coulees and valley provided our family with food, flowers (Dad always picked a bouquet of the first crocuses of the year and brought them to Mom), entertainment – tobogganing and hiking, and beauty – nature at its best – just past the edge of our garden.

Some of the most memorable stories my mother told me of her childhood revolve around the kitchen. As a young girl growing up on a farm near Gillespie, Saskatchewan in the summers of the dry years in the 1930s, Mom’s hands set the table with the plates and glasses turned upside down because they would be covered in dust by the tune the men came in from the fields to eat. “The wind blew right through the walls in those dust bowl years,” she’d say.

There was the story of the woman who came to their door in the 1930s. She had jumped out of the coal car of a train near Gillespie, walked across the fields to my grandparents’ house and knocked on the door to ask for food. Mom said she had never seen anyone so dirty, before or since. When Mom looked at the woman she could only see the whites of her eyes and a tiny strip of red hair at the nape of her neck through the layer of coal dust. I have often thought that Mom remembered this incident so well because it was a woman who came to the door. During the Depression, it was mostly men who jumped from the freight trains and came seeking a meal as they crossed the country seeking work during the Depression of the 1930s.

Mom talked of walking the five miles to the village of Abernethy for piano lessons. After completing grade 8 at the local one room schoolhouse in Gillespie she left for Regina where she worked for her board so she could attend high school in the city.

Throughout her life my mother struggled with health issues yet her focus was always on what she could do rather than what she could not do. However, there is no question that Mom’s health was a mitigating factor in how she lived her life. When she was eight months old her father took her to the doctor in Indian Head, which was over 30 miles away, because his young daughter was so ill with chest-related symptoms.

Asthma affected my mother throughout her life. When she was 12 she spent a year in bed because of her poor health. During that year she completed two years of school, which led her to finish high school early and enter university at 17. It was rare for boys raised on farms to attend university in the 1940s, and even rarer for girls to continue their education.

Mom began attending the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon in 1944, the final year of World War II. While there she studied biology and music. In her first year there were only 1,000 students. That number grew to 10,000 the fall the soldiers returned from war. Suddenly classes and labs were held on evenings and weekends as the University attempted to accommodate all its new students.

That same year, at the age of 18, a spot was found on Mom’s lung, which, at that time, was a sure sign of tuberculosis. She was told she had five years to live. So for the next five years she attended university, traveled to Europe, worked as an instructor at the Youth Centre in Regina and as a teacher at Doverley, a one-room schoolhouse. Then, in 1950, once those five years had passed and Mom threw the prognosis out the window – something she would do many times in her life – my mother, Anne Gibbons, married my father, Frank Davies, and moved to Birch Hill Farm, located on the edge of the beautiful Qu’Appelle Valley.

She was told she wouldn’t have any children. I am her fourth child. After having four children she stopped. We always joked that this was because she had proven her point. Even in giving life to her children Mom got the job done with efficiency. As her sister, Bonny Lynne said, “I don’t think Anne was in the hospital for more than eight minutes before you were born.”

The road to Birch Hill Farm was a long walk down a muddy path in spring, a dusty ride in the summer, and a hard packed snow path in winter. Regardless of the season the road led to a house that was always welcoming. Whenever people visited Birch Hill Farm there was food in abundance, prepared by Mom. Her hands never stopped. If she wasn’t preparing food for her family and friends she was sewing or baking cakes, cookies and muffins to be stored in her well-organized freezer.

There were many lean years in my childhood. The 1960s arrived with a drought that would force my parents to sell most of their cattle to keep their small farm and family going. Mom had always been resourceful but these years with four small children and a non-existent safety net tested her skills. Like many of the women of her generation little was wasted. Take the apples that were grown in the farm’s orchard, as an example. The skins and cores were used for juice. The pulp used for apple pies and apple crisps. The juice was stained off. The remaining pulp was used for apple sauce, and only then was an apple disposed of.

Mom spent hours tearing apart old clothes so that new quilts could appear. Not only for our beds but for family, friends and neighbours. Mom’s quilts were an essential part of watching children play baseball on cool spring evenings.

My Mother’s Hands - A glimpse of my mother’s life

Anne with her brother, George, on the family farm near Gillespie, SK. 1933

Anne graduates from the University of Saskatchewan. 1948

Anne and I - Qu’Appelle Valley.
It was during the 1970s when her children were becoming adults and beginning to leave home that Mom turned her hands to writing. She became a regular columnist for the local newspaper, The Fort Qu’Appelle Times, with a weekly column called “Anne’s Kitchen.” The column always contained a tried and true recipe along with snippets about her life with Frank on the farm. She continued to write this column for over 30 years and, during that time, wrote her first cookbook, also called Anne’s Kitchen.

Mom had an exceptional ability to maintain grace and courage in the face of adversity, nothing overt so you would notice but in a steadfast way to make it appear to be a regular day and a normal happening. In 2001, when my brother, John, was murdered and my father died from a stroke a mere 10 weeks later I don’t know how Mom kept going but she did. Such a sad and lonely time, yet she continued for herself and for the rest of us because that is what she had always done. Like so many women of her generation she possessed the unwavering, stoic disposition that came with hard work and living through the many spare years of prairie farming.

It was during these years that Anne became a regular on SCN’s (Saskatchewan Communications Network) popular program, Life Without Borders. “Anne’s Kitchen” was a segment enjoyed by many with its recipes, helpful kitchen tips and stories of life on the farm.

Five years after the men in her family died, Mom published her second cookbook, Fifty-Five Years in Anne’s Kitchen. In it she wrote:

The lives of our family were all drastically changed on this day {August 11, 2001}. Our son John went out on a SaskTel service call and was murdered.

Frank neither ate nor slept properly from that day on. He had a stroke eight weeks later on October 5th. He passed away on October 25th. The last thing he said to us was, “Look after each other.”

Mom continued to look after us for as long as her health allowed. And in the end, for a brief period of time, we looked after her. We cooked her favourite foods and ate them with her, and drank many cups of coffee. In those last few weeks of Mom’s life we took her for the drives she loved so she could enjoy the warmth of the sun, the austere beauty of the Qu’Appelle Valley and the sounds of nature. During every drive, she commented on how wonderful the valley was and how fortunate we are to be able to enjoy it.

Mom died in the early hours on the morning of May 25, 2009. After 82 years her hands sat still. It took a lifetime of hard work to get to that moment. In the minutes following Mom’s death the birds began welcoming the day with their song and the sun started to rise. As Mom chose to live she chose to die – surrounded by the splendor nature provides reminding us to take a moment to enjoy and appreciate it.

Sylvia Davies continues to miss the beauty of the Qu’Appelle Valley. She is a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan who currently lives in Peterborough, Ontario. Sylvia is a consultant for not-for-profit agencies. She has followed in her mother’s footsteps and has recently written a cookbook called Feeding Carl.

Poem by Sylvia Davies in honour of her mother, Anne Davies (nee Gibbons), who was born on May 12, 1927. Sylvia read it during her mother’s memorial service, on June 13, 2009.
For patriotic reasons: The I.O.D.E. and post-war art in Saskatchewan schools

By Lloyd Bennett

The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, in their national organ Echoes, reprinted the above resolution after their monumental initiative to distribute one thousand lithographic, reproduction sets of art from the Great War to Canadian schools. These images were to be called the "I.O.D.E. Proofs" and represented the largest mass distribution of government art ever reproduced. The original works came from the London war memorials scheme of Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook), eventually including commissions on home front subjects in Canada. The Canadian War Records Office (CWRO) would collect over a thousand works of art of all mediums that would create an enormous and comprehensive record of the Canadians in the First World War.

The circumstances of having the entrepreneur Aitken in London at the outbreak of the war, and this man's insatiable appetite for the promotion of Canada in the Empire, proved to be the driving force for the collection of war art. When the I.O.D.E. heard of the London scheme they became eager to include images in their campaign to promote the values of the Order across the Dominion. These war art reproductions became the first commissioned images to reveal to schoolchildren the effort of Canadian soldiers in the war supporting the British Empire. What remained revealing was the fact that the I.O.D.E. remained in a position of such power and influence as to call on the federal government to take action to provide a home for the war memorials collection, copies of which they were using for a national education mission. By the date of the resolution the "daughters" had hundreds of orders across Canada and reigned as the leading charity and promoter of Empire values within the Dominion. Saskatchewan would receive its share of these war images in an attempt to foster patriotism in the public educational system for years come. What was unique to the Saskatchewan experience was that the "proofs" would be introduced at a provincial meeting of school trustees and the Department of Education and, with this institutional support, would avoid charges of militarism that would accompany the images as they were introduced at other western provinces.

HISTORICAL PICTURES DONATED TO SCHOOLS

The I.O.D.E. interest in supporting Canada's military overseas began in 1900 when its founder Margaret Polson Murray, of Montreal, took the initiative to contact the guild of Loyal Women of South Africa to look after deceased Canadian soldiers in "the name of Empire." The organization followed up by raising money for a twenty-foot high granite monument to be erected at Bloemfontein in memory of Canada's dead in the Boer War. This began the legacy of fund-raising for which the Order would become identified as it sought "to promote higher ideals of patriotism amongst the men and women of this country." It was from these reproductions of historical subjects that the Order expanded to include further images from the First World War that the CWRO in London had collected since 1917.

THE WAR MEMORIAL

On 10 September 1919 Secretary Smith reported that an I.O.D.E. committee, working with war art advisor P.G. Konody, had identified twenty pictures for reproduction and that one thousand copies of each would be ordered from the London Fine Arts Publishing Company. The selected works would include the three aforementioned "historical" pictures, and with the additional 17, would depict the Canadian experience in the First World War and form a unified collection of works. Provincial allotment for the sets was to be based on the number of schools and children in each school. The committee's instructions were to be called the "I.O.D.E. Proofs" and appeared with the embossed crest and the inscription: "WHEREAS the recent showing of the magnificent War Memorial pictures at the Art Gallery of Toronto directed attention to the fact that the finest pictorial record of the Great War possessed by any country of the world is owned by Canada, and WHEREAS the assembling and creation of this huge historical art display and largely due to the initiative of the War Records Office, London, and WHEREAS the country at large evidently is ignorant of this invaluable collection, and WHEREAS the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire has embodied in its War Memorial scheme the distribution of reproductions of some of these paintings (500 sets—18 in each set) for distribution in schools of the Dominion, and WHEREAS the Order feels that this splendid memorial to Canadian valour should be housed in a suitable gallery in the capital, which has been their abode for the last six years, BE IT RESOLVED that the National Executive Committee, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, in session assembled, do memorialise the Government that without further delay arrangements should be made for the adequate housing and permanent display of this pictorial record of the valour of Canada's sons and daughters, and thus save this country the charge of neglecting to recognise, in a manner befitting the situation, the value and example to future generations of the sacrifices made by the soldier sons of the Dominion."

Resolution Passed by the I.O.D.E. National Executive Committee, Nov. 3rd, 1926

On 16 February 1920 that the city chapter of the CWRO in London had collected since 1917.
The reproduction of war images was to be a part of a larger mission called the “War Memorial” that focused on educational work to promote the values of the Order in post-war Canada. The January 1918 minutes of the National Executive identified the broad objectives of the Education Secretary:

To endowed a chair or lectureship in one of the Canadian universities for the teaching of History of the Empire and to promote a centre of research into the political and economic problems of the life of the Empire, the chair to be known as the Daughters of the Empire Memorial Chair.

To place in schools selected by the Departments of Education of every Province, some of the reproductions of the series of Canadian War Memorials Pictures, painted for the Dominion Government, by leading artists of the Empire, to commemorate Canada’s part in the War, so that, in every community, the children of Canada may be constantly reminded of the heroic deeds of the men and women, whose sacrifices saved the Empire and its cherished institutions.

To promote sources of illustrated lectures, free to the children of Canada, on the history and geography of the Empire.

To place, within the next five years, in every school in Canada, where there are children of foreign-born parents in attendance, a Daughters of the Empire historical library.

This list was sent out across the Dominion causing some rethinking of financial planning in I.O.D.E. projects. The Saskatchewan Provincial Chapter was forced to set aside, for a time, their “Provincial Education Scholarship Scheme” to give wholehearted support to the national Educational War Memorial Scheme.9 At Yorkton the Louvain Chapter held a ladies bridge party in the Parish Hall to raise money for the fund10 and at Prince Albert the scheme was praised for its vision for the nation. The War Memorial is the finest piece of constructive statesmanship the order has ever sponsored. The only adequate way of commemorating the men who died for the sake of ideals is to perpetuate, as best we can, those ideals in the life of the nation. This must be done through the medium of education.11 The memorial was conceived from the start as a “Living or Active War Memorial” that went beyond looking at a statue or a building but would help the living, those dependants of the deceased who might receive educational monies. The Saskatchewan Herald, Battleford, reported in the summer of 1925 that $382,800 had been raised for the national fund with thousands of dollars raised for scholarships and bursaries.12 The visual part of the memorial, the thousand sets of war art reproductions would remind school children of the war effort and Canada’s contribution as a member of the British Empire. For producing these pictures, $40,000 would be set aside from the one half million dollar goal of the entire War Memorial project.13 The financial commitment would occupy the I.O.D.E. for most of the 1920s and test the ability of the Order to keep the flames of patriotism burning.

TO DEFEAT THE MENACE: ONE SCHOOL, ONE LANGUAGE, ONE FLAG

Support for the war effort had been strong on the prairies initiated by Britain’s call for assistance from the Dominions. This has been traced to a number of factors including unemployment and the fact that a large number of early volunteers for military service were British expatriates who responded to the call from the mother country. Historians like John Herb Thompson cite the end of the “Laurier boom” and the depressed grain prices in 1914 as factors in the downturn of the prairie economy. “Moose Jaw, dependent on the railway economy: ‘Moose Jaw, dependent on the railway shops, reported 2,500 men out of work in the spring of 1914.’ Men out of work with little prospects for employment could find a solution at the recruitment station by satisfying themselves that they were performing their duty to support the Empire. It was to this ideal of fighting for democracy “that captured the imagination of the west and rallied it behind the war effort.”

An important consideration in this support for Britain after the war was applied to education, when the government determined that they be asked that if possible they try to arrange schools of the same, to further Canadianization such as at present are being carried on by the Chapters in Ford and Kitchener for this purpose.
As the meeting progressed the Chapter called for "the reading of the Bible in the schools," and proceeded to adopt the Manitoba Provincial Chapter resolution that sought government action against "the dissemination of Bolshevistic and seditious propaganda, by various means including teaching same in certain schools." The fear against foreigners was not limited to schools as local newspapers reported federal parliamentarians speaking against Asian immigration: the Prince Albert Daily Herald ran the headline in early March 1923 "Keeping Canada A White Man’s Country" where British Columbia members sought "legislation to effectually ban the Chinese and Japanese from Canada" claiming "that the white and yellow races do not assimilate." The article concluded by identifying the Great War as having established "the Canadian race" as one which possesses "courage, intelligence, resourcefulness and moral stamina under trying conditions" and consequently these qualities "are worth preserving and no multiplication of the population in a short period could compensate for their loss." From this point of view the war had defined excellence in Canada with its roots in British democracy and no deviation from this model would benefit the Dominion. This belief formedally entered conservative organizations such as the Prince Albert Orange Lodge, which sent questionnaires to local candidates in the 1917 federal election with the slogan "One School, One Language, One Flag," with tough political questions to determine if the candidate was willing to support further entrenchment of the British model in Canada became all-encompassing from school inspector to the schools that would "do the most good for patriotic reasons." There was no explanation as to what would constitute a patriotic school, but the emphasis of the convention indicated that support for Britain was paramount in these leaders of education. Eighteen images were listed for display in the church on Athabasca Street:

1. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales [author unable to identify artist]
2. Canada’s Grand Armada Leaving the Gaspé Bay by F. S. Challener
3. Landing of the First Canadian Division at St. Nazaire by Edgar Bundy
4. The Night Patrol by Julius Olsson
5. War in the Air by C. R. W. Nevinson
6. Canadian Foresters in Windsor Park by Gerald Moira
7. The Cloth Hall by J. Kerr-Lawson
8. Over the Top by A. Bastien
9. A Mobil Veterinary Unit in France by Algernon Talmage
10. Canadian Artillery in Action by Kenneth Forbes
11. The Defence of the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry at Sanctuary Wood by Kenneth Forbes
12. Dressing Station in the Fields, Arras by A. Bastien
13. Canadian Cavalry and Tanks by A. Bastien
14. The Surrender of the German Fleet by Percy Spence
15. Canadian in Paris After the Armistice by A. Bastien
16. Canadian Arriving on the Rhine by Inglis Sheldon-Williams
17. Joseph Brant by George Romney
18. The Death of Montcalm engraved by G. Chevillet (original attributed to Louis Joseph Watteau).

Interestingly, the I.O.D.E gift was largely reported as an award to schools with little discussion as to the merits of the works, their representation of the war, the appropriateness of displaying war art in a church, or a subsequent plan of distribution of the images to Saskatchewan schools. This was not always the case in other western provinces as the Order found resistance in Burnaby when the works were offered to local schools. The Vancouver Sun ran the headline, "Disapprove of War Pictures for School Decoration" and reported on a heated debate at a March P.T.A. meeting where one lady "raised a storm of protest" against hanging the pictures in the schools as they "glorified war" and "would imbue the children with a martial spirit." In fact a Sun reporter described the entire meeting as "one scene of fireworks," and it was only after a heated debate that the association voted to hang the pictures in the Burnaby schools. When the Central High School of Calgary received a set of proofs in October 1926, one member of the school board objected that the "pictures glorified war and the heroism of war." The newspaper seeing this as yet another clash between the ideals of the I.O.D.E. who foster the spirit of the heroic and patriotic in the youth of the country, and the progressive party who vision an age when war will belong to barbaric days" consigned an "interested onlooker" to review the pictures who concluded the images not heroic and of limited artistic value and likely would have "no effect" on the students.

This last observation might be better understood as the response of an adult critic, who might view the pictures on a single occasion against the students who would have grown up amongst such images fostering a view of a successful war at the same time they viewed the I.O.D.E. flag charts and Mercator map projections coloured pink with Commonwealth countries—all images of a British heritage.

The lack of discussion of war art at the Moose Jaw convention appears to have been controlled by the provincial I.O.D.E. who was able to attach the unveiling of the "proofs" to provincial education issues, the premier and the church. By displaying
The comments were made to link the Order with the education agency that fused hard work with patriotism—principles that might attain the widest support at a provincial convention. For those schools that proved devoid of pictures, especially the rural schools, here was an opportunity to decorate halls, at the same time the students might learn their history and literature from libraries also provided by the I.O.D.E. Stories and poems of sacrifice and noble deeds as supplied by Tennyson (Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington) and Browning (The Patriot) fitted easily with the pictures that would now hang on public school walls from Moose Jaw to Prince Albert.

**Marvellous Deeds of Heroism**

Indeed the “proofs” were selected to not only show the breadth of the Canadian experience in battle, but especially heroic action amongst the modern machines of war. C. R. W. Nevinson was identified as the painter of the “Billy” Bishop picture. War in the Air (1918), but there was no comment in the local newspaper as to why he was significant as a Canadian pilot. Another heroic picture, Kenneth Forbes’ Canadian Artillery in Action, c. 1918, showed the operation of a massive six-inch Howitzer tirelessly firing on the enemy. In Forbes’ picture one is able to feel the anxiety of the situation where the Canadian Expeditionary Force faced the effects of a heavy barrage during the July 1916 capture of Thiepval—although suffering many casualties, the men “remained at their posts and kept the guns in action.” Yet, no reporter chose to comment on the significance of the battle or the merits of the painting as to its accuracy or compositional merits for the local readership.

One might have expected the list to include a picture of Canada’s soldiers at Vimy Ridge, and indeed Richard Jack was given this subject as his second commission, but had not completed the work until just before the 1919 London opening. Perhaps this accounts for its omission from the set, but there would be another battle picture to celebrate the now-legendary Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry victory at Ypres that would make the list of I.O.D.E. reproductions. The oil painting by Kenneth Forbes would be a cousin to Jack’s Ypres picture in that it was again a “last stand” image of the courageous “pats” as they held off the enemy assault. In February of 1915 the Germans had set off mines in the wood and, in June of 1916, it was again bombarded and became part of the Battle of Mount Sorrel so that the landscape was reduced to trunks of blasted trees and upturned soil. Forbes’ picture depicted what was left of the devastated ground following the Canadians’ fierce defence of the wood. Painted in 1918, the work reflected the new interest of recording the effect the war had on landscape.

**What the Ruins Revealed**

The British War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House, London, had appointed the graphic artist and printmaker Muirhead Bone as their first official artist in the summer of 1916. Bone had been selected for his ability to depict ruins of which he would have ample material at the Western Front. The idea was to have the artist visit those sites like Ypres and Arras that had been devastated by German shelling and record the noble ruins to be used as propaganda material to rally the home front and those neutral countries to the barbarous action of the enemy. The Canadian War Memorials Fund included many pictures of ruins in their commissions; perhaps the most definitive canvas came from the brush of James Kerr-Lawson and his monumental masterpiece of the Cloth Hall at Ypres from c. 1919, which hangs today in the Canadian Senate. Such destruction of buildings like the Ypres Cloth Hall became strong emotional examples of the loss of civilization and the government propaganda men were anxious to show this evil side of the enemy in commissioned pictures. No doubt this was a factor in selecting Kerr-Lawson’s work for the I.O.D.E. Proofs—his painting showed, as Constance Laing wrote, Germany’s “ruthless destruction” of Europe. The I.O.D.E. also included a painting titled Canadian Arriving on the Rhine (1918-19) by Regina-based war artist, Inglis Sheldon-Williams—their choice as a well-known local artist may have stimulated interest in the Moose Jaw church.

The selected images easily fitted the I.O.D.E. mission of relating Canada’s link to Britain in history and contemporary events, the memorials of which would dominate the Order’s work in the post-war years. There were no pictures dramatizing the human waste of war with piled up corpses or works of avant-garde persuasion that might detract...
from the message of the noble aims of artist and patron. Canadian war historian Jonathan Vance commented on this mainstream quality of the I.O.D.E. reproductions as works that would not challenge tradition: They [original paintings] depicted, not a war of stalemate or random slaughter, but a war in which each individual action made sense. The progress of engagement could be easily followed in the battle scenes; each soldier played a vital and identifiable role; and both the outcome and consequences of an engagement were clear.44 In fact the selection focused on those images of clear action and realist detail to gather attention to the war effort underscoring the merits of Empire tradition. Like the “Canadian Readers” that presented British stories and poems to schoolchildren across the Dominion, the “proofs” reaffirmed the country’s roots with pictures of heroic soldiers that underscored patriotic values. In this mission, the I.O.D.E. followed the dominant mandate of the war memorial pictures fund as Laura Brandon, Curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum, has indicated: “their goal was a painted record of the conflict to which Canada, despite a high casualty rate, was clearly seen to have been a major contributor to the war’s successful outcome.”45 Canada’s success in the war could be linked to Britain and assist the I.O.D.E. in promoting the mother country as a model for continued development in the Dominion. Indeed, historian Gerald Friesen has presented a narrative where western leaders saw the Empire as a route to international success: Calculations of prairie greatness and celebrations of imperial power inevitably ran together; the west would have a population of 100 million; it would be the breadbasket of the world; it would become the centre of gravity around which the world would revolve. The result of this was to reduce the ambition of the I.O.D.E. to cover Canada with their war images: the construction of a central cenotaph might elicit newspaper articles, but the citizen support for the war memorial pictures remained of limited interest, perhaps because it came from an eastern-based national scheme promoting patriotic ideals that had dissipated as the decade wore on. An analogy might be made to the photograph of the Prince of Wales in one of the “readers” found in the Moose Jaw school archives where one may assume a bored pupil tending to decorate the military riding trousers of the prince. Britain and its monarchy would have been a long way away from the project of the war memorial pictures that I.O.D.E. reproductions as works that would not have survived at all. When I approached Moose Jaw library technician Marlis Duff, she could find no trace of the pictures that Denise Luciuk’s father (Bob McLean) recalled hanging in the city schools from the 1960s.46 An archive from Regina remembered seeing the “proofs” in the local Legion, and a Joseph Brant print was found recently in a Moose Jaw pawnshop. Possibly the pictures were only reproductions, they were not valued and saved, or perhaps they became old-fashioned to new school administrations that caused the images to be abandoned. This is why men like P. C. Claxton, who founded the Grenfell Museum, are owed a debt of gratitude for having the foresight to save the images that came his way and thereby preserve an aspect of the province’s cultural history. Looking back as a Moose Jaw “baby boomer” who can remember a time before there was a Canadian flag, my school experience was dominated by British culture with playground games of soccer and something called “British bulldog,” pink classroom maps of the British Empire, the memorization of lengthy poems by Wordsworth and a vague recollection of some war pictures—pictures that I would revisit long after my school days. It is hard to know how much the “proofs” shaped the minds of school children in places like Moose Jaw, but the cumulative effect of British culture helped to steer western Canada in a direction that would distinguish it from the American experience. We have parliamentary governments, socialized medicine and a sense of attachment to an overseas history that we would rather maintain than sever. This allegiance is part of the heritage of Saskatchewan that sees a record of its commitment to the Great War reflected in the efforts of the I.O.D.E. and the war memorials pictures that promoted a proud social record of Canada’s involvement in the war. As for the I.O.D.E. women of Saskatchewan, it would be easy to identify them as a force that impeded diversity for their fervent identification with the culture of the mother country. It is also readily understandable to see the dominant group wanting to continue their heritage in church, education and social order for the benefit of their growing communities in a country that had recognized its role in the British Commonwealth. Further, it would have been unworkable to have too many different languages and ethnic groups determine the direction of a new province. There had to be a focus for a belief system that could marshal support and get things done—help build a hospital in Moose Jaw, win a world war and educate children along the lines of a respected civilization. For those of us who would come to admire British institutions, the I.O.D.E. in post-war Saskatchewan is on a level with parliamentary governments, community churches and public school systems as exemplars for the public good, and deserves recognition from those who would write the social history of the province.

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