

Autobiographical and biographical notes for any interested members of our  
family



ROBERT JAMES GIBB

I came to  
Canada to settle  
in 1906 and Mary  
Joan Lamont came  
out in 1910 when  
we were married  
the day following  
her arrival in



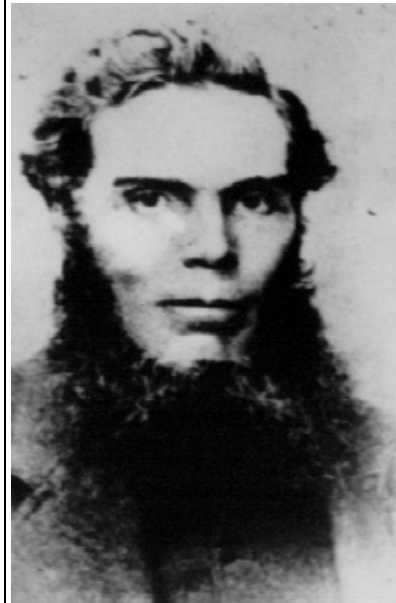
Mary Joan Lamont

Winnipeg on October 6, 1910. During the decade 1910-1920 our family of four likewise appeared on these shores, and all members, we are glad to say, are still alive and healthy; we have eight grandchildren as of 1954. It has occurred to me that some members of the family or of families still to come might want to know something of their origins. I know that we both feel the lack of a better knowledge even of our more immediate progenitors, and this inclines me to discard any remaining reticence about our lives, even although they can only be described in the most modest terms. Anyhow, I am nearly 76

years of age and it is high noon and time to set down any facts we can think of. I have had this in mind for some years now but never seem to have gotten around to it until this winter (1953-54). I imagine way to get started is to set down a few facts and observations about ourselves and let things develop from there.

I was born on a farm called Borland in the Parish of Cleish in the county of Kinross, Scotland on May 1, 1879. I lived at Borland until 1885 and started to go to school at Cleish, although that was only for a short time, and recollections of my earliest school days are hazy indeed. My father's name was Henry and he died about 1882, so I have practically no recollection of him. I notice that I have been plagued with a poor memory throughout my life. My father was, of course, a farmer, and I am told died one Sunday while walking around some of the fields (age 51). It is presumed to have been a case of heart failure. He seemed to have been quite well up till that time and his death was very sudden and

**Henry Gibb**



**Agnes Clark**



must have been a great shock to my mother who survived him for many years. John was one of two who set out to look for him. Cause of his collapse is not known, although my sister Annie seems to think that he had consulted a doctor some time before his death, who possibly warned him of a heart condition. Otherwise, there is no history of heart trouble in the family. I have no knowledge of anything that would bring on a fatal heart attack at the comparatively early age of 51. The family has a fairly satisfactory record of longevity. My mother lived until she was 75, my sister Annie just passed away after her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday and my brother (John) in Scotland is about 86. He was the youngest member of the family until I arrived about 11 years later. I might expect to equal their good age but I suffered an attack of typhoid fever in 1908 at Clover Bar Bridge near Edmonton when I was an Inspecting Engineer for the G.T.P Railway (now C.N.R.). A relapse came immediately on top of the first attack and left a weakness which is noticeable to myself up to the time of my marriage and which I presume must still exist. The relapse was caused by faulty treatment in at Edmonton hospital. I had two other brothers who died at comparatively young ages, due no doubt to the effects of malaria fever which they both experienced while working in Sierra Leone. They both died in Scotland. Two or three children died in infancy.

My oldest sister, Agnes, married Tom Fleming who was uncle to Mary Lamont. She died at the age of 76. I believe she overworked herself on the farm where she had seven of

a family who are all still alive except Tom who was killed near the end of World War I. Another son, Robert Gibb Fleming, served in this war and is still alive. He has been named after me. John was the eldest of the family and his son John is now settled west of Nanton, Alberta.

My mother had 10 children and this gives a good illustration of the continuous reduction in the size of the family. Her daughter Agnes had seven. I, who was about 20 years younger than Agnes, had a family of four, while our children seem to be settling for families of three or two. My sister Agnes's marriage to Tom Fleming turned out to be perhaps the most important event for me in our family, as will be explained later.

This old world is getting so it cannot accommodate many more large families. In Canada, however, the French Canadians (mostly Catholics) still rear large families. Large families are the rule in Quebec and the day probably may not be far distant when the French population will exceed the Anglo Saxons in Canada.

Well, my mother carried on on the farm after my father's death, presumably with the aid of the oldest son, William, until 1885 when she and the family moved to the Edinburgh. Not long afterwards my oldest sister Agnes married Tom Fleming, and her wedding (when I was six), is still one of the first things I really remember at all clearly. I remember that it took

place in a house on Grove St., Edinburgh, and that I was very much excited about all the "goodies" that were produced for the occasion. I was 6 ½ years old at the time. Mr. Fleming was settled on a farm, Craigton, not far from Borland. Presumably that is how he became acquainted with my sister Agnes. As mother and her family continued to live in Edinburgh, it was only natural that I should begin to frequent Craigton during my school holidays. Indeed Craigton soon became a focal point for me and I became well acquainted with the Fleming family as they grew up - not so much younger than myself. Craigton was also a focal point for the Lamont family as Mrs. Lamont was a sister of Mr. Fleming. There were two boys and a girl in the Lamont family. It was there that I first met Mary Lamont. It was natural when I later moved from Edinburgh to Glasgow to earn a living that I made the Lamonts' home another focal point, and my acquaintance with Mary Lamont ripened until we were married in 1910, and I think that I may say that it has continued to ripen ever since!

Before proceeding with an account of my own doings I will trace our family connections back as far as I can, which is not very far. My father, I believe, was born in Dunfermline, in Fifeshire. He was married once before he married my mother but there was no family and I have no knowledge of how his first wife came to die at such an early age. His mother's name was Anne Heron, and the Herons can be traced back a long way, according to a cousin of mine who made some searches. I still have a copy of her genealogy. Someone by the name of Heron was

mentioned formally by Robert Burns. This ancestor (?) was of liberal persuasion in politics, which would appeal to Burns. My sister Annie had Heron for her middle name. She must have adopted the name of Heron - as it does not appear on her birth certificate. There is a record of someone by the name of Heron who settled near Dumfermline and it is reasonable to believe that my grandfather married one of his daughters, the name not being too common. My cousin, who had someone make the search, found that someone of the name of Heron came over to England at the time of the Norman Conquest (1066). My mother was born in



the county town Kinross. Her maiden name was Agnes Clark. Her mother's maiden name was Dow, and according to a small photo which we have of Mr. And Mrs. Clark, she was born in 1793, married in 1814, and died in 1866.<sup>1</sup>

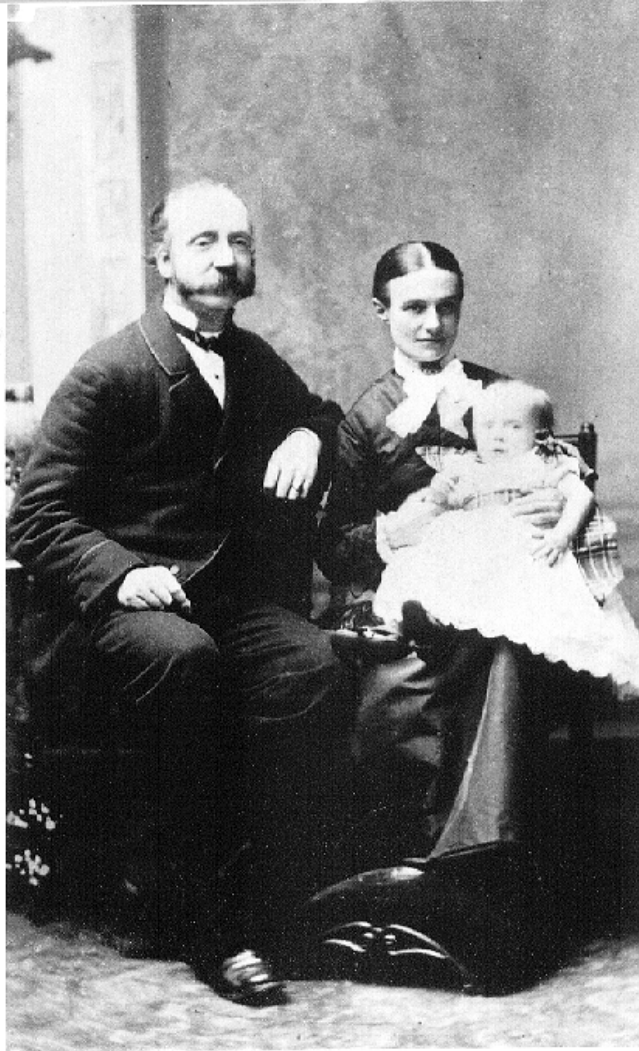
I had intended to follow up this clue through the Registrar's Office in Edinburgh but have not done so (May 1955). (My mother's

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Clark, son of John Clark and Amelia Laurie, was born in Kinross in 1791. He married Agnes Dow in Edinburgh on March 21, 1814. She was born in Kinross in October 1793, daughter of Robert Dow and Janet Whyte. SMG - December 2001

maiden name was Agnes Clark and Harry Fleming, of Old Montrose, married an Agnes Clark).

As regards my brothers and sisters, I have already spoken of Agnes, my oldest sister (born 1859, married 1876, and died ). Next to her was my oldest brother, William. As already remarked, he was in Sierra Leone, West Africa, for some time and that may have undermined his health. After he came back from Africa, he settled down as a livestock auctioneer and married Agnes Clarke in Castle Douglas, Scotland. They had one son, Sydney, before William took a stroke and died in hospital. Sydney married and has a dry goods business in Newton Stuart (Scotland). They have no family. My mother had at least three babies that died in infancy, but there was a boy Tom, who my mother has told me died when he was 14. My sister Annie, (registered as Anne) was born in 1864. She never married and lived with us until her death in 1955 (February 26<sup>th</sup>). A brother Henry followed. He had two bouts of malaria which no doubt undermined his health. He married Elizabeth Wilson in Glasgow in the early 1890's. They had a son and a daughter who are both still alive. The boy, Harry, is in South Africa and the girl, Lilly, still in Glasgow. Then my youngest brother John, who must have been born about 1868, married Mary Currie in Edinburgh. His wife died some years ago without issue and John still lives a retired life in Edinburgh. His age in 1957 is 91.



Now as regards Mary Lamont's family. Her father, Alexander Lamont, was a teacher and for many years a school principal in Glasgow. When I knew him he was still working and was of a very nervous disposition. Latterly he took a stroke, and was bedridden for four years. He married Margaret Fleming (a sister of Tom Fleming) at Craigton, Kinross, Scotland, on October 26, 1877.

Three children survived and I knew them all well as I used to visit frequently at the Lamont home in Glasgow. Indeed, the second son, Tom, and I were seldom apart whenever we could contrive to get together. The elder boy, Alexander (or Adgie as he was always called), was a twin but the other died. He followed his father's footsteps in the teaching profession. He took a degree of B.Sc. in Agriculture at Glasgow University and soon after emigrated to S. Africa as a teacher of agriculture in the Govt. school of the newly founded Union of S. Africa. He later Kimberley



for a long time and it was then he married. They had a boy and a girl, both surviving. Gavin, the son, took a B.Sc and Master's degree in Geology and is at present engaged in some geological work for the Government of Rhodesia. He married (his wife for the second time) and so far they have a boy. There is also a girl by his wife's first marriage. The daughter (Alec's daughter) Margaret, was engaged to a man who was killed while flying in the Second World War. She has not married. She teaches deaf and dumb pupils in Cape Town where her mother still resides, Alec having died in 1954. Incidentally, Gavin's wife lost her first husband in the War. Alec Lamont finally taught in Cape Town but retired some years ago.

The second son, Tom, (mother's brother), held a good position as secretary to the firm of McFarlane Lang Biscuit manufacturers. He married Adeline Hulley about 1908. The marriage turned out to be very unfortunate, for his wife was of an impossible disposition. In fact, we believe it was she who drove Tom to a refuge in drink and ultimately the family broke up, the mother and three daughters going their respective way. We have now very little knowledge of them at all, except that so far as we know they are all still alive. (The eldest, Margaret, is married to Ben Morris, Dean of Education

Mary, the youngest, was born in 1882, married in 1910, and happily is still in good health. She, like me, cannot trace her ancestry far back. She was, no doubt, descended directly from the Lamont clan, whose county lay to the south of Argyleshire.

Her father's father's name was Alexander Lamont. Scot's always put the accent on the first syllable, not on the second, as in Canada. I read once in THE SCOTTISH FIELD a story of how seven Lamonts had been hung from as many trees, with a common sign which no doubt described the fault for which they were hanged, but the enemy had the courtesy to describe them further as "seven gentlemen". Tom Lamont must have inherited the "gentlemanly" disposition in full measure. His father, too, could readily be described as a "fine gentleman", and the whole family could be so designated.

Fleming. The Fleming family came from (Lanarkshire??) Scotland. Following is a table of the Fleming ancestry. These tables were got from Bob Fleming, in Scotland, who must have got them from some agency in Scotland.

Following is a report on the ancestry of the Gibb branch of the family. This information was got from Bob Fleming, Scotland, who got it from

My father evidently came from Dunfermline (Scotland). His father's name was William, who described himself as a "carter" and again as a "wright". I understand that my niece (Mrs. Inglis) has a mangle made by William Gibb, Dunfermline. Wm. Gibb evidently married twice - and if only the link between one of his wives, Anne Herron, and the Herron who migrated from Kirkcudbrightshire to Dunfermline could be proven, it would

then be easy to trace that branch of our ancestry back to 1066, with "the Conqueror".<sup>2</sup>

I am sorry that something is not known about the character or disposition of these people, except for one slant that we have on the Lamonts. Having covered our combined ancestry as far as we have it, I will now turn to my own life, particularly as I remember it in Canada. As already stated, I was born on May 1, 1879. It was an easy date to remember - May Day - and I think this must account for all the family remembering me on my birthdays as they have rolled by. I was only 3 ½ when my father died, and I barely remember him. He died in 1882 and my mother tried to stay on the farm (Borland) with her eldest son, William helping out. Evidently the trial was not successful for the family moved to Edinburgh in 1886. My eldest sister, Agnes, who was 21 years older than me, was married in the fall of that year in Grove St. to Thos. Fleming, of Craigton - a farm near Borland. This was the first thing that really impressed itself on my mind - possibly because of all the fine eatables that were provided for the occasion. I have no recollection of the ceremony itself! This wedding was to have quite a bearing on my life, for Craigton became my headquarters for holidays. I would spend much of my summer's holidays there and the family as they

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<sup>2</sup> I think Aunt Annie was right here. It was the custom at the time for Scots to name their first-born son after the father's father, the second-born son after the mother's father; the first-born daughter after the mother's mother and the second-born daughter after the father's mother. "Our" Anne Heron was the eldest daughter of Alexander Heron who named his second daughter Euphemia and his first born son, James. The Herron who came from Kirkudbright was James. He married a Euphemia, which was an unusual name even then. SMG 1997

arrived were not so very much younger than myself, and I got to know the older members quite well, John, Henry, Cis, and Mary especially.

The Lamonts of Glasgow also spent much of their holiday time at Craigton, for Mrs. Lamont was Margaret Fleming before her marriage. She was a sister of Thomas Fleming, just as I was a brother of Agnes Fleming. I met Mary Lamont at Craigton, and later when I moved from Edinburgh to Glasgow to work there, I naturally made the Lamont's home my home away from home. And soon Mary and I had made it up to be married some day. This happy condition did not arrive without some hard moments for both of us, including the day when I sailed for Canada in August 1906!

Both our mothers were still alive. The decision to emigrate was brought on by the fact that I was out of work for some time. The depression was no doubt a sequel to the Boer War, although I did not realize it at the time.

And talking of war, I may say that I used to think how "interesting" it must have been to have lived at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Little did I think then that I would live through what, to date at least, may be considered the most "interesting" period in human history. This period included two wars which put the Napoleonic era in a complete shade, besides the arrival of mass production in industry, with the revolution wrought by the arrival and common use of the automobile. The

every day use of plastic may also herald a new age, more peaceable no doubt that this heralded by the atomic bomb. Of course, there is still lots of opportunity for a peaceable development of atomic fission. It is rather exceptional, no doubt, that the span of two generations should cover more than a century, and yet my mother was born in 1834 and remembered the stage coaches plying their way on "The Great North Road" in Scotland (and England). She remembered the first news the good burghers of Kinross had of Victory in the Crimean War, arrived by stage coach. No railway, no telegraph. She remembered the first steam railway to be opened up in that part of the country, and indeed I remember myself of the opening of the Firth Bridge, with the attendant railway link from the North Queensferry to Perth (passing through Kinross). My mother died in 1913 before the outbreak of World War I. However, she used to shake her head and tell me that "the rising generation would see something." She could have had no idea of how right she was going to be. Her lifetime practically covered the whole of the Victorian Era. Some stuffy Victorian ideas and fashions were dragged along by her family. Canada probably knocked most of them out of my head.

I may describe my life as running alongside the steam locomotive. These engines were flourishing in my lifetime and are passing out at the time of writing, giving way to Diesel Electric. Later on it may be a coal turbine locomotive. Radio has revolutionized things since 1920. (How about picture of Allan and Bob listening in!)



I have already mentioned "atomic fission" as having arrived within my lifetime. What a life that is leading all the bigger nations today. And even the poor weather we have had for the past two years has been attributed to experimental blasts in Nevada. We still have to feel (benefit I hope) the peaceful impacts on our way of life. So far, most of the development has been for a war which we may hope will never come.

Well, I arrived on a second class passage on an Allan Line boat, the Mongolian, sailing from Glasgow to Montreal. A word about the passage might be of interest. "The Mongolian" was, of

course, a steam vessel, but of ancient vintage. I took about 12 days to make the passage, July 7<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 1906. The seas must have been a bit rough for I think I remained in my cabin nearly all the way over to the Newfoundland banks, when I got up and got around and about. The cabin had four bunks and was close to the cook's galley. Kitchen smells were quite non-appetizing, especially as they were accompanied by cockroaches " " as we would call them then. When I got on deck I found we were in a fog. There was no radar nor radio then, and the ships officers must have been sailing by dead reckoning for some time. However, it was clear enough to see porpoises alongside, and an iceberg not far off. The ship was continually protected from icebergs by a continual reading of the sea temperature. Frequent soundings were taken and, of course, the ship's log or "speedometer" was always towed behind. I remember a partial break in the fog allowed two or three of the ship's officers to "shoot the sun". No doubt the average position would be very close. We approached land "dead slow" and suddenly there we were bathed in bright sunshine and right at the mouth of the straight of Belle Isle. The Captain could not have made a better.

From there to Montreal the voyage was calm and serene. We stopped for an hour or two at Quebec, where I suppose the first class passengers would disembark. On arrival at Montreal I stayed a night or so in a hotel, but soon found satisfactory lodging. I had arrived armed with an introduction to "Sir Hugh Allen" of the "Allin Line." The introduction came from Mr.

Dunlop, senior partner in the Allin Line in Glasgow and chairman of the Clyde Trust. I had worked for the Clyde Trust and was able to wangle the introduction through Mr. Alsop, the chief engineer of the Clyde Trust. The Clyde Trust was a body corporate looking after all the construction and general upkeep of the part of Glasgow, Scotland, and some of the smaller points on the Clyde. It had been suggested to me to try to get this introduction, and the advice was good, for Sir Hugh Allin put himself out for his partner to try to get me a job. He finally got two for me but not till after a few failures. One was with the C.P.R., which I took and the other was with the Grand Trunk Pacific Ry., then under construction from Fort William to Prince Rupert. I took the C.P.R. offer as I could get right to work the next day, July 25<sup>th</sup>. I sometimes wonder what might have happened if I had stayed on in Montreal. I was fortunate (though I did not realize it) to be situated practically at C.P.R. headquarters in Montreal.

(From here on see shorthand in diary in Mary's pocketbook).

Although I started work on July 25<sup>th</sup> my appointment was to date from August 1<sup>st</sup>. I presume I worked a few days "for free" just to get broken in. Anyway, I always remember this, my first monthly cheque, was for more than I had agreed to work for. I worked as an instrument man, that is, I was in charge of laying out the work outside. It seemed quite familiar as it was mostly railway work around the docks. The office was in Place Viger station, which was then the terminal of the line from Quebec. I



worked all around the docks and west as far as Smith's Falls, the first division point west of Montreal. The "Mile End" freight yards were just being constructed at that time, and I laid out some of the trackage there. I had a young French Canadian boy working with me as rodman. He and I got along famously. He would even jump the fences and steal apples for me!

In those days of course the C.P.R. was well established and ran to Toronto, as well as to Vancouver via Ottawa and the North Shore of Lake Superior. I found the August heat very trying in Montreal. I am sure I still wore woolen underwear and heavy tweeds! It was some years before I got wise to wearing light clothing.

I commenced rooming with a Mrs. Barry at 36 Cuthcart St. on July 26<sup>th</sup> and started "boarding" with a Mrs. Goff on July 25<sup>th</sup>. I remember that at the first meal (there must have been a dozen of us) I met a Mr. Best who worked for Mr. Uranhart as a stone mason back in Ardrossan, Scotland. Naturally, we shook hands enthusiastically, and we soon had fixed up to share the same room (on Beadry St. I think). Life was pretty raw in those days in the French sections of Montreal. The bedbugs made sport of us, but all I remember was that we would kill a few of them off on Sunday mornings. House flies were a pest at Mrs. Goff's too, and used to swarm around the table. I did not seem to think anything of these things except in retrospect. I would not have stood for it a little later on. At all the Engineer's camps

that I stayed at later on, the cooks always managed to keep out the main army of flies. We would sometimes set out for a walk up the Mount on Sunday. I must have made it once or twice, but usually felt so washed out that I just turned back and lay down on top of the bed.

Meanwhile, I had established touch by correspondence with a brother of Mr. Urquhart and he wanted me to go west on the Grand Trunk Pacific Ry. Which was under construction at that time. Through him I got in touch with Mr. Scott, resident engineer, on the Lake Superior Branch running between Superior Junction on the Transcontinental Ry. And Fort William, with post office connection at Sarnie, Ont, on the C.P.R. I finally took a job as "axeman" with Scott. This was the very lowest rung of the engineer's ladder. I left Montreal on September 22, 1906 and arrived at Savanne on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

This must have been a great change for me, although I do not recollect that it struck me particularly as such. I had been accustomed to a City life ever since I was 6 years old. Savanne was a station on the C.P.R. between Fort William and Winnipeg, but much nearer Fort William. There was nothing there but the small station, although it boasted a telegraph used almost entirely for the direction of train movements. The station was surrounded by many miles of "bush" with no clearings. There was a small frame store owned by the H.B.C. which catered to the few Indians who trapped in the surrounding country and made this their headquarters. The H.B.C.s agent also handled the

mail, and no doubt the construction of the new railway miles must have enlivened his duties, both as postmaster and storekeeper. There was no such thing as a display of goods.

I do not even remember who met me at the station but I fancy it was Bill Urquhart. He left some months later for the west. There was a path or trail through the bush to Mr. Scott's camp. This consisted of three tents. One for Scott, one for two or three helpers, and one for the cook, who I found, was an important cog in all these construction camps. Mr. Scott had charge of about seven miles of "grade." There was no power machinery in those days - not even horses or mules used in that kind of country. The grade was built by manual labour and it is amazing to look back and see how it was done. Usually a few Swedes or Finns would undertake to construct so many "stations" of 100 linear feet. They would build a log cabin in the middle of their work, buy some equipment from the main subcontractor, usually without money but no doubt with plenty of price chalked up against their first                      on the Railway Co. The equipment would consist mainly of shovels, wheelbarrows and planks. These Swedes were all paid by the "station" so they were entirely on their own and worked early and late, until they got hold of perhaps a few bottles of whisky, when they would declare their own holiday. If they happened to have a "kag" the holiday might become a bit extended. On the whole, however, they dug right in. The men did their own cooking and no doubt it was a hard life, but they could make a real "stake" after a while.

The ground (often musky) was dug out to form a ditch on each side of the right-of-way. The earth or clay was wheeled into the centre and brought up to the grade set by the engineer. There was plenty of help and these "station men" were spread out over miles of work at a time. As one section was completed the men moved west to the next unfinished work. Ahead of these station men were parties who specialized in clearing and "grabbing" the right-of-way. Before them was the "locating" engineer and before him, the "reconnaissance" engineer, whose duty it was to locate the proposed route, first roughly and later with more thought to detail. The resident engineer who followed each had about seven miles of the proposed line to bundle and they in turn were organized under a division engineer who might be in charge of 100 miles of railway, or perhaps more. Our "division" engineer reported to a "chief" in Fort William who had a head office there and directed all the work from Fort William to Superior Junction.



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 who  
 have  
 once a year or so over the whole distance, and it was always a

great event when he passed through, especially, of course, if he happened to stop for a meal or a bed. After the "grade" had been wheeled or blasted into place, a crew of trestle builders would come along and bridge the creeks. Some of the rivers had



to be bridged by more permanent structures in concrete and steel. When all that was done the steel laying machine would come along, and with the aid of much manual labour the rails would be spiked in place on ties which had been provided by tie makers, working again on piece work. A locomotive would push a few flat cars ahead with rails, and keep creeping along as the rails were laid.

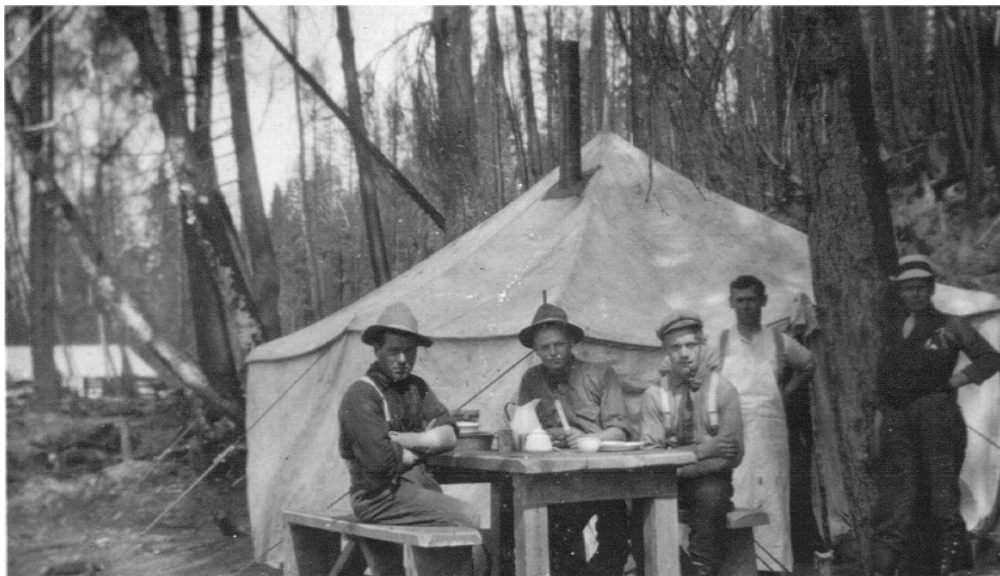
After that the balast trains would follow up and here was the beginning of power equipment. As the locomotive would pull a big plough or scrape the whole length of the ballast train, dumping the ballast on the side of the railway, when it was shoveled and packed in below the ties. The railway was beginning to take shape now, and only required the numerous

station buildings, water tanks, fences, cattle grounds, etc that go with a finished railway.

Some year later, after the grade the ballast was well consolidated, the rails that had been made during construction would be gradually replaced with heavier steel. As ties rotted they would be replaced with ties and the ballast would be increased, so they gradually the line could and did carry heavier rolling stock and gave faster service. The original steel was used up in sidings and in yards. Population along the adjacent lands would increase, grain elevators and factories would soon dot the countryside and become established. My experience, outside of some bridge construction, was entirely in bush country. First on the Superior Branch, then on construction west of Edmonton. The workers would dig in summer and cut timber in winter for ties, drainage culverts, telegraph poles, piles for trestles and so forth.

was in little evidence, except scrapers and "Fremos" all pulled by mules or horses. But even these were not used much in bush country, especially this was true on the Superior Branch which ran through fairly level country.

The tent which I occupied along with another employee was a wedge shaped affair which must have been on fire at one time as one gable end was missing. This had been replaced by inch boards and tarpaper. The heads of our beds were right below



this patchwork and during the winter it became coated with ice. The warmth of the tent never seemed to get the better of it. Our beds were made up of spruce boughs laid on top of saplings. Then we had sleeping bags sewn together as best we could out of grey blankets. Some men really swanked it in rabbitskin bed rolls. All this sounds a bit primitive and rough, but I don't remember really being put out by it. The winter of 1906-07 was a particularly hard one - probably the moat severe on record up to date. The winter started early and stayed late. There was a lot of snow and temperatures were generally low. All provisions for the camp had to be packed in on our backs. We used taught lines across our foreheads to support the load on our backs - Indian style. A little later in the year we got an assortment of mongrel dogs, and dog harness and a sleigh or toboggan. We would take this nobbly assortment into Savanne (not knowing a thing about it), would load up the toboggan and hitch up the dogs. We would then urge them forward with cries of "mush" "mush!" and finally we would often push the load or pull it

ourselves into camp. We also had snowshoes for getting around in, and we all became quite adept with them. We had to. I was promoted to instrument man on January 1, 1907. As I remember it, instrument men were paid \$75 a month and all found - not bad for those days. A resident engineer got \$125 a month.

(April 12, 1954)

I visited Dr. Robertson, the oculist today. He examined my eyes thoroughly and told me I have cataracts on both eyes. (I had previously been warned about it.) I have to go back in six months for further examination. He has told me there is no use giving me new glasses, so I must hurry with these notes, as my sight will no doubt get progressively worse. Already the writing is not in good focus nor is it clear.

To return to my days at Savanne I had a tent-mate by the name of Rayner with whom I got along very well. When I was promoted to instrument man I was invited to share the tent with the resident engineer - Mr. Scott - but I did not move over. Then Rayner was all set to go east to get married to a girl to whom he was engaged, but he finally got a letter from her advising him to wait a bit. Of course, this suited me all right and we both stayed on till I moved West and he went back East and was later married (to the same girl). Her name, I think was Sutter. Her father had either a string of elevators or one elevator. Anyhow she, being an only child, he fell heir to the business! Maybe he did better than I did in Engineering. My training in engineering evidently was something that few of the other

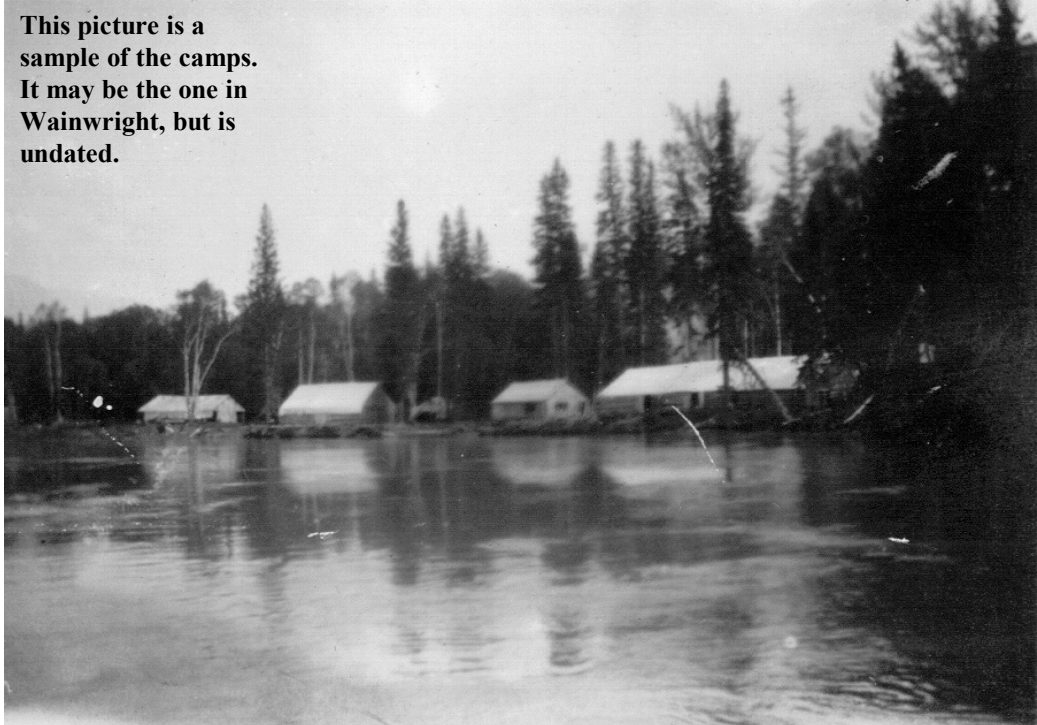


engineers had, and when a vacancy occurred for a good instrument man to help at Battle River Bridge near Wainwright, Alberta, I was chosen for



the job. I left Savanne in July, 1907, for Fort William. where I met Mr. Harris, who was to be my resident engineer for over a year. We travelled together from Fort William to Edmonton over the Canadian Northern Railway, which had recently been completed. I can remember my first fine impressions of the west when I got as far as North Battleford. It was a beautiful evening and the valley of the North Saskatchewan was bathed in ruddy gold. Edmonton was headquarters for the railway construction that was going on for two or three hundred miles east and west. Mr. Harris had to stay over a few days to gather his party and all their gear together. There were six or seven of us altogether and when we got out for the Battle River crossing about 100 miles to the east, we travelled over the C.P.R. which had reached Hardisty by then. We unloaded everything and stayed a night or two in the local hotel or

**This picture is a  
sample of the camps.  
It may be the one in  
Wainwright, but is  
undated.**



stopping- house. We picked up a teamster with a team and "democrat", loaded up most of our stuff and set off for about a thirty mile drive downstream.

Hardisty is also on the Battle River and the G.P.T.Rwy. lay quite a bit to the north. When we got to the bridge site we found an engineer's camp already established under Mr. Ewart, who was Resident Engineer in charge of about seven miles of the grade - east and west. Mr. Harris had a good grip of things, and first of all picked out a good campsite as we would be there for a year or so. He chose a knoll overlooking the crossing, which was about 1/2 mi. long. The knoll was well sheltered by the west bank of the river and by a poplar bluff to the south where our stable was established. I had nothing to say in all this preliminary establishment being utterly green.

Mr. Harris decided to put up semi-permanent buildings rather than tents. He ordered lumber in from Hardisty and had some logs cut locally. I think I was at work by then as time was pressing. The contractor for the concrete work - the substructure as it was called, was already getting his camp and bunkhouses ready. He was also busy hauling gravel in from a pit to the west, getting a good stockpile ready for winter. However, I did not take photos and notes as I should have done. However, Mr. Polet, who had been sent to join the party, attended to that pretty well. The first occasion on which I was alone with Mr. Polet, I spoke to him in French and he was immensely pleased. Indeed he has never forgotten my simple salutation!

I had never done such accurate instrument work as this bridge called for but I was quite able for it. We had the best of instruments, and our 100' steel tapes or "chains" as they were called, were all especially made at the factory, and we were supplied with spring handles for getting the correct strain on the chain; also a thermometer for reading the temperature at the moment of reading off the distances. Later, in camp, we would make the necessary corrections for temperature and strain and the following day would go out and finally locate the centre lines for a pair of concrete pedestals. The pegs or " " for this work were located off the bridge and protected as best we could. Reference pegs would be located well out of reach of any likely distortion during actual construction. The steel for the bridge was being ( )fabricated in Ontario to

similar standards, so that when it finally arrived on the site it went together like clockwork.

I was able to check the total length of the bridge by laying out a line to the south and on the east bank, where I could get a fairly level stretch. I was then able to check out the total length by simple trigonometrical observation.

We reached Battle River in August, 1907, and I stayed till August 25, 1908. I was promoted to "steel inspector" on Clover Bar Bridge, the substructure of which had been completed under a Mr. McGregor who, incidentally, I never met as he was already on his way around to Prince Rupert, where docks had to be constructed. The work of "steel inspector" comprised supervising the erection of the steelwork for the Railway Company. I was paid \$100 a month for a while, but later, as I came directly under the Bridge Engineer, Mr. Legrand at Winnipeg I was paid \$125 per month, and later on I had charge of bridge work in N.C. and got the munificent salary of \$175 per month. I remember Mr. Legrand telling me that he had to speak hard for me to get it.

But to return for a bit to Battle River bridge. On the whole the stay at Battle River was enjoyable. There were many incidents that might be mentioned but I will just let them go. It was a very busy spot for some months as the Contractor had a considerable number of men employed. Even temporary stopping places and restaurants sprang up.

Well, I reached Clover Bar Bridge on August 26, 1908. It was here that I began to act for myself! Hitherto I had always left the living arrangements to the Resident Engineer. The Clover Bar Crossing of the North Saskatchewan River is just a few miles east of Edmonton and takes its name from the adjoining village of Clover Bar, which is about a mile east of the crossing. The village in turn took its name from a man called Clover who, I understand, panned gold on a nearby sand-bar in the river. It was an easy introduction to running things on my own as I had no "party". I had to get a tent set up, with a decent floor, get instruments down and arranged to board at the Canadian Bridge Company's camp. Track had been laid from Edmonton east of the site, and all the steel shipped from Ontario to Edmonton. This bridge, I believe, was completed before the Battle River Bridge, the steel for which was shipped via Saskatoon. There had been a great deal of typhoid fever at the Clover Bar Camp during the concrete construction. This I believe, was caused by river contamination from Edmonton, which lay only a few miles upstream. The Superintendent of the Bridge Co.'s camp had been told about this and took the precaution of getting all water from a nearby spring. However, anytime there was a shortage of water in camp, the cook would use river water for washing the dishes after a meal. It is to this that I attribute the fact that I took typhoid, on or about December 23, 1908. I had gone up town for Christmas, and felt tough the day I arrived. I went to see Dr. Hislop, who was the railway doctor. He diagnosed my trouble right away, and told me to go

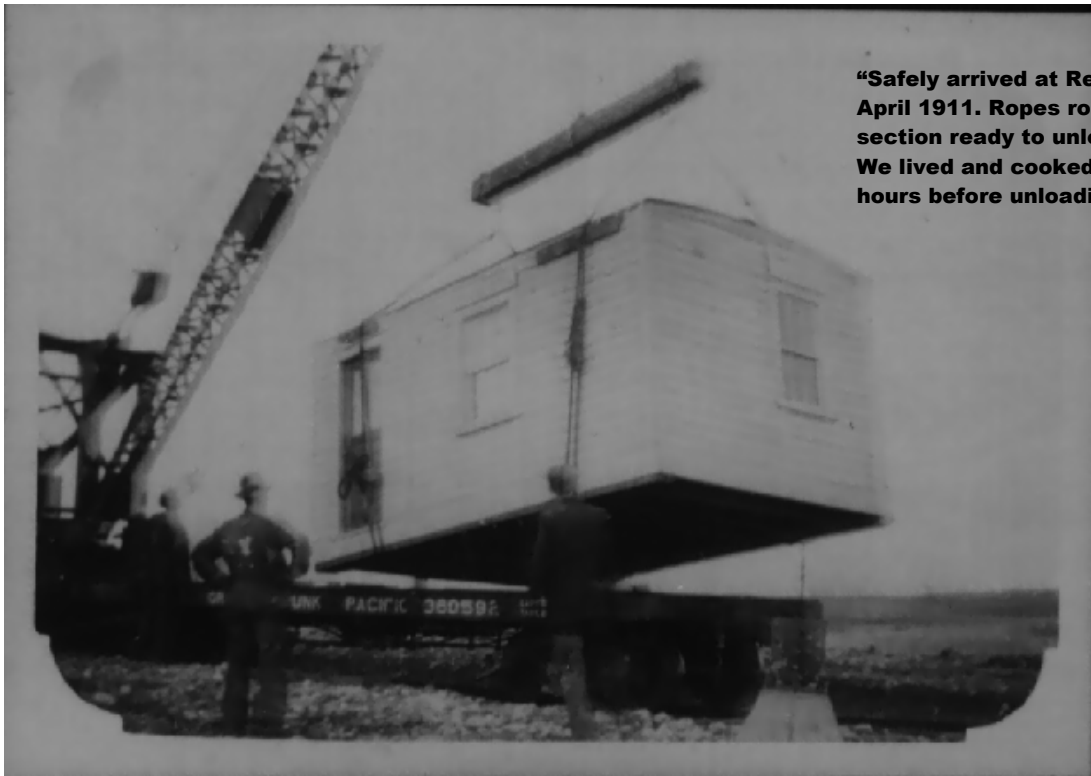
to the General Hospital right away. He also told me quite casually not to walk into a wall on the way there. He knew what he was talking about all right, for I barely remember checking into the hospital. However, I made a quick recovery and Dr. Hislop ordered a "light" diet for me. This, I understand, means soup and milk pudding. But I wee presented with nice halibut steak with toast. I was ravenous, of course, and tucked into it with great gusto. Inside half an hour I was on my back again and the relapse was much worse than the first attack, and I guess I nearly "cashed in." When I got out I was not very strong and I felt a bit paralyzed on my left side. Indeed, it was nearly three years before I felt quite well again. I took a holiday and left for Scotland on March 11, 1909.

After I got back there I took some temporary work which took me outside, and I left Scotland again on August 27th following. I came directly through to Edmonton and followed up the "steel" which had now reached the Pembina River to the west of Edmonton. I reached Entwhistle, on the Pembina River on September 20, 1909. Everything went all right here and the C. Bridge Co. soon let the trains cross when "steel" was again laid as far as Wolf Creek. Then there were two steel bridges to be built, one over Wolf Creek and a larger one over the McLeod River about a quarter of a mile to the west. About this time I was writing to Mary Lamont trying to get her to come out to Canada. She was a bit hesitant as her father had died and she was living with her mother. However, her brother Tom and his wife arranged to look after old Mrs. Lamont and Mary took the

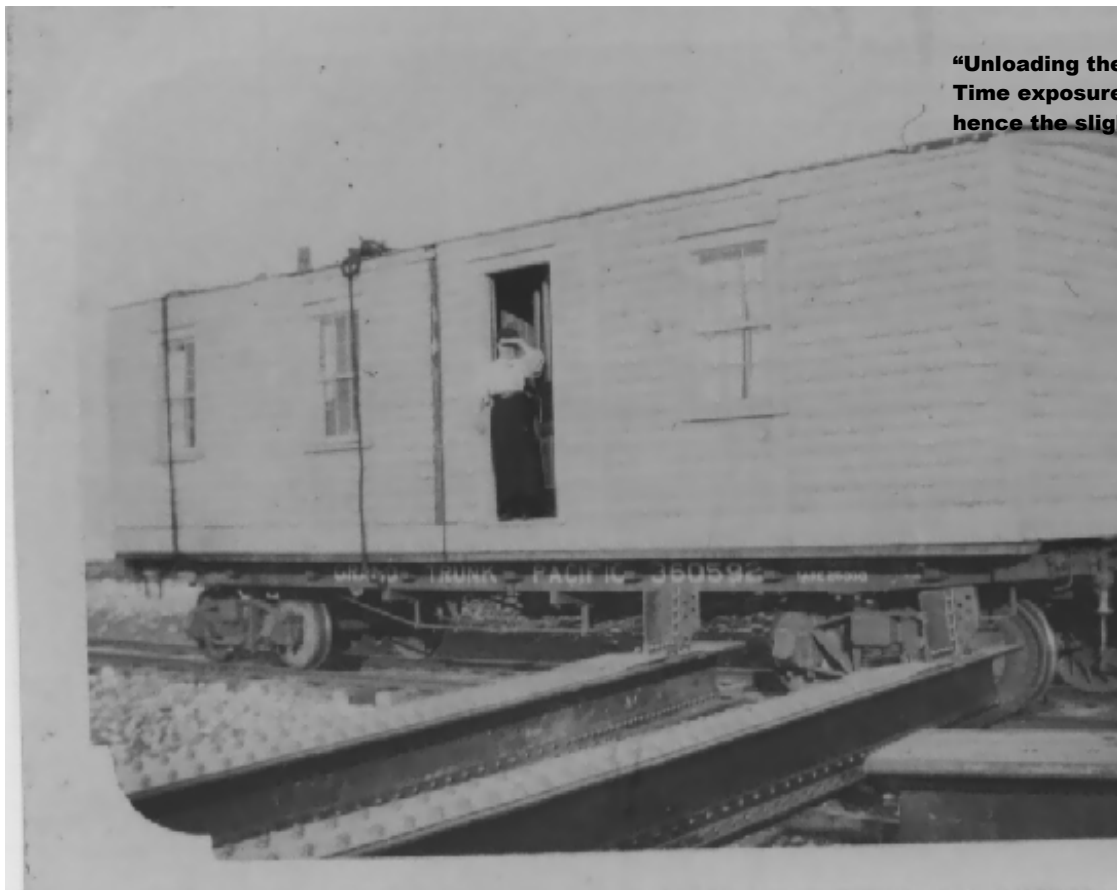
opportunity of coming out with friends who were going to Prince Albert, Sask. I arranged to meet them in Winnipeg. Tom Lamont was to cable me as soon as his sister sailed, so that I could make necessary steps to meet her at Winnipeg. His cable came to Edmonton all right, but it had to be phoned over temporary railway wires to Wolf Creek, and when I got it, it read "Mary failed!" I had a bad quarter of an hour till it struck me it might have got garbled over the phone and I was much relieved when finally got a corrected message reading "Mary sailed!" I got down to Winnipeg in good time and met Mary at the C.P.R. station. she had a room in the C.P.R. hotel that night and the following as, (October 6th) we were married by "Ralph Connor."

The following day we went through the index of Eaton's catalogue and bought everything we needed to set up house. Before leaving Edmonton for Winnipeg I had taken a sketch of a portable cabin that I had designed into one of the lumber yards and they undertook to have it ready on my return for something over \$600. The walls, floor and roof were built in sections which were easily assembled at the bridge site by bolting them together. The shack measured about 38' by 12' and was arranged on two sets of sills, and convenient wall and roof joints, so that it could be picked up by the bridge company's derrick by means of a heavy rope string, in two halves.

It was deposited directly onto a railway flatcar with all the furniture inside, and so moved to the next bridge site. The



**“Safely arrived at Red Deer Bridge  
April 1911. Ropes round the far  
section ready to unload.  
We lived and cooked in it for 24  
hours before unloading.”**



**“Unloading the last half of the sh  
Time exposure late in the evening  
hence the slight movement.”**



scheme seemed to work very well. The longest "move" was from Prairie Creek, about forty miles east of Jasper, to the Red Deer crossing in the Calgary Branch of the G.T.P.R., a few miles south of Alix in the Lacombe Branch of the C.P.R. On this occasion the shack was lost for a few days (3 weeks) in the yards at Tofield. Everything turned out all right and nothing was stolen or any the worse. Of course, we had to brace all the heavy furniture as a protection against jolting (of which there was plenty). Two days after our wedding I was packed off west with a visiting Bridge Engineer. Fortunately, we had bought everything, and Eatons attended to the shipping. We had to stay over a couple of days in Edmonton before there was a construction train going west. This gave me an opportunity to part "Mrs. Gibb" with a friend - Mrs. Law, who very kindly offered to put her up for a few days while I went west with Mr. Jacoby. Mrs. Law had been an English bride herself and knew the difficulties of an engineering way of life on the railway. Her husband, - who, of course, was then alive, was inspecting Engineer for the Dominion Government. I think the Dominion had guaranteed the bonds or something of the sort. Anyhow they had a vital interest in the road and it was Mr. Law's duty to see that money was not squandered. He and I met occasionally at the end of the steel and became very friendly. On returning to Edmonton I picked up the shack and the furnishings and made off with Mary for Wolf Creek, and McLeod River Crossings, both of which were nearing completion. Mary settled down to frontier life very well - at least I heard no complaints! There were two or three other ladies around. Mr. Mullin, one of the bridge

men, had his wife with him, also Rollie Gill (so-called because of his rotundity). Rollie was assistant superintendent for the Bridge Co. and got married down east about the same time that I did. Both Mrs. Gill and Mrs. Mullin were very friendly.

We got all our requirements by mail order from Eaton's at Winnipeg, and as I had privileges both on freight and express, we lived fairly well and at no great cost. It was while staying at Wolf Creek that a big windstorm got up one day. The Gill's shack was close to ours and Mrs. Gill signed through the window for Mary to go over. This she did, battling her way against the wind. She opened the door of the Gill's shack, when presto, the roof of the shack blew off with several lengths of stovepipe attached. Of course, both ladies were no doubt a bit scared, and took off for our own shack. Rollie was away from camp at the time, and when he got back he finally got things to right again. Mrs. Gill had a cake cooking in her oven, and when Rollie got it out some hours afterwards, it was done to a turn! A Church of England missionary shack was also blown away - he being west at the time. everything but his watch was scattered around, and one of the bridgemen, noticing the missionary's sermons being blown about, remarked that he had never known the gospel to be spread so well! Such were some of our visicitudes.

We had been married for only three months when I got instructions to make a general inspection of all the steel bridges on the system between Fort William and Edmonton. One morning in January we locked up the shack and walked to the

siding from which the construction train started - about half a mile distant. It was 50° below that morning but we did not find it a hardship, although it must have been pretty nippy. The train got away all right, but due to difficulty on the roadbed was a long time in getting to Edmonton. You were never quite sure when you would get there. West of Edmonton the trains ran on what was known as "snake" signals. There was no proper dispatching system and engineers kept a lookout for smoke in the sky which signal an approaching train. We never seemed to travel at night.

On my inspection tour east, we stopped at Saskatoon and Winnipeg. On the way from Saskatoon to Winnipeg we ran into a blizzard which finally stopped the train. Fortunately, it was held up just east of St. Lazarre in the Qu'Appelle valley. We were able to walk back to St. Lazarre without too much discomfort and stayed the night in a hotel, where they obviously were not in the habit of putting up ladies. We got the best room in the place which was partitioned off with plain boards about 7' high. Mary always remembers that they gave us lace frilled pillowslips. During the night, someone was supposed to be dying, and all being good Catholics, they kept repeating "pater-nosters" or whatever it was all night long. Being young and being more or less accustomed strange abberations by this time, we finally fell asleep, and when we inquired in the morning for the patient we were told she had recovered sufficiently for a cessation of prayers.

Mary went north from Saskatoon to Prince Albert to see Miss Arbuckle and Hugh Green - our bridesmaid And best man respectively, She stayed in and around Prince Albert for a few days, while I continued with my inspection work. I got as far as Fort William and later in January got back to the end of steel, which was at Prairie Creek by then. Our shack had been moved up in the interval but the trains stopped some miles short of Prairie Creek, and everybody had to get off. Mary was the only lady on the train, and we got off at a siding about five miles from the bridge site. Everyone on the siding had either moved or was getting ready to move. It was cold - still January. as Mary hesitated to go into the only tent and the only shelter that there was, she got a push from somebody who said she'd better get in there. Inside there was a rough table with equally rough benches. The restaurateur was brewing coffee in a big 5 gallon oilcan And dishing it out to heat those who were foregathered in the tent. What to do after! One of the engineers who happened to get off the train said he wee going to a nearby engineers camp and that he would send back a team for us. He was as good as his word and the team arrived in due time. Mary sat on a box in the sleigh while the team tracked its way back with one or two of us following up behind as best we could on foot. It was dark by this time, and no doubt we were glad to see the lights in the Engineer's tents, near the bank of the Athabasca River. The Resident engineer gave up his bed and we spent a comfortable night after all. We found all the engineers we met there and elsewhere to be uniformly kind and considerate. This was more than can be said for the crews

on the Construction trains. My experience with them was that many were a callous lot. Besides chucking us out in zero weather as just related, I will give one more instance of their callousness. In my work on the steelwork of the bridge I had got so I could walk and stand at great heights with very little footing. Once when I was crossing west over the Wolf Creek bridge after it was finished, I met an eastbound construction train with a string of empty gravel cars with their sides loose and flapping. I was in the habit of standing on the end of the bridge ties, to let the travelling derrick go back and forth, as all I could do was to stand as close to the edge as possible. I don't think I had an inch to spare. The locomotive got past all right, but when the empty flats came by I could not turn my head to see what was coming, nor could I look down to see if I could edge away any further. The train passed all right, and I should have broken out into a cold sweat! If I did not, it is just because that is the kind of being that I am. I have often wondered what the engineer on that freight would have thought if he had seen me hurtling over? I guess he might have reported the incident.

The following morning we drove to the Bridge site. I remember it was getting on when we arrived, and I went into the "village" to hunt for bread, and paid 50¢ for a loaf. We could get our first glimpse of the mountains from Prairie Creek. There was little of life there that was remarkable and we carried on until April, 1911, when we picked up again for

our longest move, namely to "Lignite" at the Red Deer River Crossing some miles south of Alix.

We travelled in our own shack on the train as far as Edson, then got onto a passenger train for Edmonton. Next day we went as far east as Tofield, where we made contact with a "special" that was going as far south as Mirror. It was carrying a group of prospective purchasers for real estate lots at the town that was to be Mirror - a division point, no less, on the Calgary Branch of the G.T.P. RY. The train had free sleeping and eating accommodation on it, and we horned in on the "eats", - cold chicken, bread and butter and beer, if I remember rightly. Everyone was being "up" for the auction sale to be held next day. The lots went much too high, of course, which was the plan of the Grand Trunk Pacific Development Co. Today Mirror is not much better than a whistle stop. At least, it was the last time I saw it, a few ago. Fortunately, I had no loose cash to "invest" and we took a democrat to Alix on the C.P R. track. We put up at a private home as we had to stay several days awaiting our shack. I finally had to go back to Tofield to look for it. There it was, standing in the Yards, none the worse. I got it shipped out on the next construction train that was going to the bridge site, and we got settled down again. I was rather pleasant at Lignite, for it was summer. We used to go out and pick wild raspberries and strawberries, which were growing in abundance. Mary and Mrs. Mullen used to go out quite often.

Later in the year, one hot day a democrat arrived with some ladies and men from Alix, bent on having a picnic. They were strolling around when a "twister" was seen approaching from the south. The clouds were just like a black c . The crew came in off the bridge work and the picnickers all trooped in to our shack, The extra weight may have been all that saved it from blowing away, although the worst of the storm passed about half a mile to the west. Later, when we were walking around to see the damage, we found one shack that had been moved bodily several feet without being lifted into the air. It had pushed a galvanized wash tub full of water in front of it without spilling! We also found that one of the bridge men who was inside one of the steel' members for the purpose of "bucking-up" hot rivets had been left behind in the rush. After the twister had passed he came off the bridge none the worse. There was really no great damage done around the bridge and the camp. As I say the main force spent it self a little distance to the west.

At Lignite (now defunct) I shot my first duck - without license and possibly out of season. There seemed to be no regulations - not that we knew of anyway. It was there I saw a man shooting ducks for the market, which was evidently allowed then. Needless to say, he seemed to make every shell count.

Later on I got one or two more ducks and hung them up in the shack while we moved back to the McLeod River Crossing in the Alberta Coal Branch. This was a few miles southwest of Edson and the time was September, 1911. By the

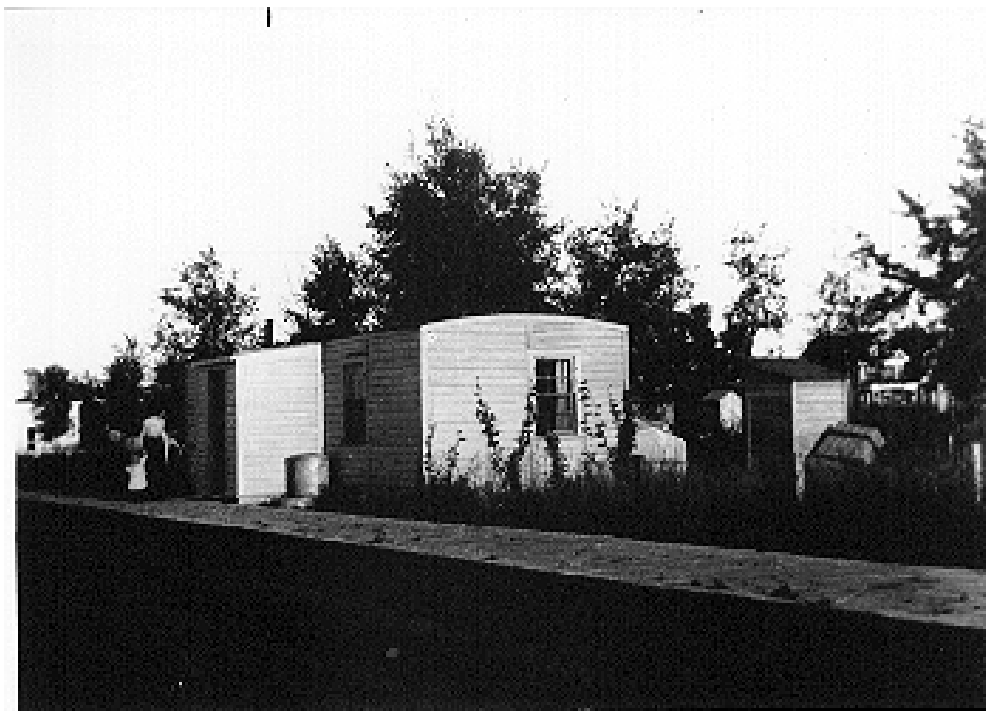
time the shack got to the bridge side the ducks were fly-blown. However, the women folks said nothing about it and we enjoyed the ducks, which, of course, were extra tender. It was a small bridge and we were only there two or three weeks. It was then I got my promotion to the rank of Assistant Engineer. As I remember it, the salary was \$175 per month, which was quite something in those days.

We had our shack moved on to a lot in "Cromdale", Edmonton. We got it all banked up for the winter and left it in December, 1911, after renting it furnished to a bank clerk. We headed for some work on the substructure of two bridges that I was to take care of. These were near old Battleford on what was known as the Curknife Branch of the G.T.P. It was another cold winter, and while working in Battleford I got word of a successful real estate sale. I had bought an acre of land in west Edmonton for \$1100 and had it subdivided into lots in the approved manner. These I sold for \$4000 - half cash - and with the First World War intervening, I collected only \$3000, which was not bad at that. On the strength of the \$2000 cash which I received, we took a trip home. I got a short holiday. We left Battleford on April 5, 1912 and arrived in Scotland on April 26th.

While staying with our folks, we got word that a strike was likely to come off affecting the Allen Line of Steamships, so we packed up hurriedly and left for Montreal 8th. We duly arrived at Winnipeg, which was my headquarters, and I was asked to go and examine the concrete work on the Battle River bridge



(where I had worked in 1907). The alkali in the swamp land was attacking the concrete. I sent in a report on the condition of the work.



Don was on the way all this time and in looking back I can see how foolish and inexperienced we were to be gallivanting about at such a time. Mary even accompanied me on an old fashioned buck-board from Wainwright to the Bridge. It was a very bumpy drive, too!

After dealing with Battle River, I left Mary in a boarding house in Edmonton but had arranged for Margaret Alexander to come and stay with her till after Don arrived. We got to be

very friendly with Margaret and she was always Aunt Macknie to the children. She is now Mrs. Simpson and lost her husband over a year ago, and lives in England. She probably will pay a visit to her step-daughter in Australia and may later revisit Canada. Her parents had a homestead some miles west of Red Deer. Mr. Alexander was a dyer from Yorkshire England, and knew nothing about farming. His venture was not a success. Mary, in spite of her condition, was evidently game for anything, and paid a visit to the Alexanders.

My last assignment on the G.T.P. Rwy was to take charge of a drilling outfit to explore the foundation of the four steel bridges which were to cross the Fraser River in British Columbia. I got to Jasper, which was then called Fitzburgh and the end of passenger train service, as well as headquarters for all the engineering service west of that point. I stayed around until the drilling outfit arrived from Pennsylvania, with an old-country Swede in charge, as the Railway Co. was only renting the machine. It was interesting work. I had to get a large scow built at (now Red Pass Junction) and gathered a crew together. There were seven of us - the aforementioned Swede, a German, an American-born Swede, a French Canadian (who was supposed to know something of the first rapids we were to go through, an Irish cook, an American (who got drunk as often as he could but which, fortunately, was not very often) myself, a Scot.

The party got along famously and I have since heard that a motley crowd of different nationalities usually does get on well. We loaded the drilling rig on the Scow, together with the steam boiler to work it, and two or three tons of canned food for the Railway Camp at Fort George, which was reported to be in short supply. There was room for some tents also on the scow. Of course we slept on the scow and soon we simply had to use the mosquito netting with which we were, fortunately, provided. The first day out we ran the Great Rapids (which the French Canadian guide was supposed to know about). All went well until we saw the water boiling over a submerged rock.



The scow was controlled by two long scoops (oars really), one at each end. The French Canadian began to give orders to those manning the two , but it began to look as though we would not clear the obstruction. Then the German got excited and began to call for contrary sweeping. Finally, I decided



that I better take charge, which I did, and we went right over the rock! I remember well clutching the end of the boiler (!) expecting a smash-up and a drowning, for I really don't think we would have had much chance.

Well, of course we cleared that rock, probably with an inch or two to spare. The next rapids was the Grand Canyon. Here the current was very fast and it looked for a moment as though the scow would be dashed against one of the cliffs, but a sharp eddy took it off in the right direction. I may say that we had hired



a small crew of about four men, who knew the Canyon and took scows through, These men did nothing else but take boats and scows through the Canyon. I remember they charged plenty. They managed all right and even got the scow out of a whirlpool at the foot of the rapids which had us going around in circles for a while. I paid off the crew and proceeded. Thinking back, I must have carried a good many hundred dollars with me. The scow alone cost around \$600 I think. We stopped at each of the river crossings and set up the drill under the supervision of the Swede and drilled to determine what kind of material we had for a foundation. As it turned out, all four bridges showed nothing but sand, and later a contract was let to a Chicago firm for piling the foundations by water-jet. I wasn't on this work, but I believe it was quite successful and probably saved the Railway Co. many thousands of dollars besides having the work done the way it should have been done.

There were numerous "sweeps" along both banks of the river, but particularly where the current cut into the river bank. These "sweep" were well named, for it we had been careless enough to

let the current carry the scow under any one of them, it would have swept everything off the deck. There were usually trees that were toppled over on their sides by the current gouging out the bank. We nearly always kept in mid-stream. At another point, between the third and fourth crossings, the contractors (Foley, Welch, & Stewart) were having trouble trying to drive a tunnel through some soft ground, and Mr. George, our district engineer, persuaded me to come ashore and set up the drilling rig. We discovered bad ground ahead and I think Mr. George ordered the work abandoned for a more circuitous route. we would have done more drilling but I was anxious to get ahead for the river was beginning to get low. We still had to negotiate the Gitscome(?) Rapids, which were reported to be shallow, and I did not want to discharge any of our canned goods to lighten the scow. As I have already said, the engineers at Fort George were reported to be short of food. As it turned out, we scraped bottom in one or two places on the rapids, but we got through all right, no doubt to the delight of Mr. Gill (Resident Engineer at Fort George) as it was then called). We tied up on the southeast bank of the river as most of our drilling could best be supervised from there. Fort George was situated on the West bank, Just below where the Nechako River enters the Fraser. I might say that we were in wooded country all the way from Tete Jeanne to Soda Creek below Fort George. The railway right of way was invisible from the scow except at the crossings, when, of course, we could see it approaching the river on both sides. The drilling at Fort George was a major operation and at times we had to charter the

Chilcootan to take us into mid-stream and then ran guy ropes ashore so that we would stay put against the current. We found about 100 ft. depth of sand, when we struck rock (or perhaps a ) in one of our holes. I did not go so deep with the other holes as the bridges obviously have to be built on piled foundations. In the fine fall evenings we used to cross to the west side in the boat which we always carried with us, and I usually played cribbage with Mr. Gill who, incidentally, was a martyr to rheumatism. Crib seemed to take his mind off the pain for a while. When visiting at Gill's camp I found two town-planning experts there from New York - surely among the earliest of the breed' They were engaged surveying and laying out the new townsite, which, no doubt, was duly "boosted" by the Development Co., and I have no doubt a very fine train, complete with cold chicken and beer would arrive one fine day from the East, and the buyers would put much money on the line again That was the first time I had heard the word "bully" used. I well remember one of the partners would say to the other, "I think that's a bully idea." When we had finished drilling I had to arrange with the ship owners to load all our equipment into the "Chilcootan" for shipment to Soda Creek - where it was picked up by the B.C. Express Co. and freighted by team south to Ashcroft on the C.P. Ry. Thence, some of it back to Edmonton and some to Pennsylvania. The Chilcootan made money for its owners by transporting passengers and freight between Fort George and Soda Creek, which seemed to be the end of the trail (quite a good road, as a matter of fact) leading south to Ashcroft. Soda Creek was only a few miles south from Quesnel,

which was a sizable bush town, with Police Headquarters there. I guess it was connected to Small Creek by a road of some kind but I do not know how they got out and in. The boat (which was a ste wheeler) pushed its bow up on the sand at Soda Creek and all the cargo was unloaded there. (There did not seem to be any towel. I forget how long we took to go down the river, but I do not remember spending a night in the boat, so I suppose that we left early for we arrived at Soda Creek in the afternoon. It was an interesting trip as we negotiated one or two canyon on the way down. Our only stop was at Quesnel. At Soda Creek the Express Co. had mules and waggons waiting to carry the freight through to Ashcroft, while seven of us and the two town planners were piled into a couple of cars, a new form of transportation for me. A month or two before we had gone by team from Wainwright to Battle River. From now on I would gradually get used to travel by car. This was the first car I had seen put to use in public transportation. They were open affairs, but the weather was fine and the road good.

A telephone line ran from Ashcroft to Soda Creek and was made use of by the Express Co. It connected to an old fashioned instrument at each farm, of which there was a sprinkling along the way. The country was still bushy but was a little more open. The drivers knew all the good places to eat and also a good place to sleep for the night. The regular charge for meals or a bed was 50 cents, which we no doubt thought was high enough in those days. Our first supper was something to remember.



The farm must have been notified ahead that our party was arriving, for they had everything ready. I do not remember all we had, but there was sure plenty of it, with fried partridge as the main dish they were all done to a golden brown and we must have had about one bird apiece. There were fruit pies and preserves of different kinds. Everything - partridge, vegetables, fruit, and cream - was grown on the place, cooked to a turn, and served by the lady of the house and her two daughters. I suppose our eyes were ready to pop out anyway, but it was truly a magnificent meal. The fellows from New York said you would have paid \$10.00 for it there. We drove on after supper in the moonlight to the next stopping place, where we slept the sleep of repletion. Next day we arrived at Ashcroft and entrained for Calgary and other points East. After reaching Edmonton I had to go back to Jasper with some things and get squared away. While there I got a telegram that Don had arrived and I went back to Edmonton to see that Mary was all right. If everything had not gone all right I don't suppose I would have forgiven myself for being absent at the time. I don't think I ever went back to Jasper (or Fitzburgh as it was then called), for I decided I had better quit railroading and take up residence in town if we were going to have a family. I resigned on October 5th with the intention of camping on the doorstep of the City Engineer's Dept. till spring, when I figured I might get work. This was exactly how it worked out. We lived in our little shack on 114th Ave., which we still owned. It was situated just west of 79th St. (old Agnes St.), but is now

gone. I got work as Resident Engineer on March 24th, 1913, under Mr. Begg, who was in charge of the sewer and water construction, of which a great deal was going on in the City at that time. The large trunk sewers were being built at that time, but I was engaged on lateral work.

When war broke out in 1914 all this work came to a sudden halt as no money was available. I remember the city employees who were kept on were assembled in the Council Chambers and addressed by Mayor Henry, who explained to us the need of reducing salaries. For a while I worked for less than \$100.00 a month. My sister Annie proposed to pay us a visit in the spring of 1914 and we rented a new stucco house at 11311 - 79 St.



**Annie Gibb with Don and Margaret**

(During the deep depression of war days, I had this fine house rented for \$15 a month). It contained seven rooms, full basement, an unfinished attic, and bathroom, and was steam heated. After my sister arrived, war broke out and she could not get back to Scotland at least it was too risky. Except for a couple of visits home, she is still with us!

I joined the home guard - a volunteer body that drilled on the streets in the evening, and work running out I quit the Engineer's Dept on Feb 12, 1916. Don had a sister by that time and I did not relish going overseas and leaving Mary and the small family behind.

About 10 days later I was back with the Engineer's Dept. again as the office engineer - a single man - had joined up and there was, consequently, a vacancy. The City Engineer, himself, Mr. Latornell?, had joined up and Mr. Haddow took his place temporarily. We got word that he had been killed by shell fire and, of course, Mr. Haddow carried on. He remained as City Engineer until 1950. I was promoted to Assistant Engineer on June 1, 1918. No doubt I could do with a little extra money as we now had three of a family. I kept hens and turkeys and grew potatoes on a lot opposite the house, all to help out.

I worked hard in those days - different from now! When gas came to Edmonton in 1921 I was loaned to the Gas Co. to design and superintend the construction of all the gas mains within the City limits. Of course, this was new work for me, but I knew

the city well by then and worked under the general direction of Mr. Hill the Company's Superintending Engineer. He was in charge of everything from the drilling of wells to the meters. It proved to be most interesting work - so much had to be done in so short time. I had a big staff of draftsmen, instrument men and inspectors working under me and gas was turned on, I think, in November of the same year. On January 1st, 1924, I returned to the City as Assistant City Engineer.

Early in 1920 the house on 79th St. was sold. I got the offer of it for \$3000.00 but recognized I could not buy so we had to move into rented quarters. Men were returning from overseas, and as little building had been going on during the war there was a great scarcity of accommodation. Rents went up, and we could hardly get a place without leasing for at least a year. That was the situation I was thrown into. We succeeded in renting a small house nearby for a month so, but I found a place on the South Side I could buy for \$4000 if only I had \$500 to put up as the initial payment. I did not have that kind of money but Mr. Polet very kindly let me have it, interest free, for some time. I paid him off as quickly as possible, and I gradually whittled away at the balance of the payments (at 8% interest, which was the going rate then). I finally got the whole thing paid up about 1940, and that was a great financial relief to us. The house was 9837 - 93 Ave., which we occupied until August 51, 1951. That was the place where we may say our family was raised and went to school. Robert was born just about time moved into our new place.

The rest is quickly told. Mr. Turner, Superintendent of Waterworks, having retired, I was appointed Superintendent in his place in May, 1932. In November, 1935, I was appointed City Commissioner, to superintend all the utilities, with Mr. David Mitchell remaining on as Commissioner in general charge,



particularly in the realm of finance. I never felt too secure in my position as City Commissioner until I gained the confidence of John Fry after he had been elected Mayor. He was a man who never carried a grudge, and a man with the best of judgment in any matter that would come up. I retired on March

31, 1946. I was of retiring age and was getting less able to stand the strains which seemed to attach themselves to the position. Possibly I was not sufficiently strong for the position, for the worst strains arose through one or two of the superintendents, a condition with which I should have been able to cope. Instead, I let time work. Mr. Mitchell, himself, was a great believer in the healing hand of time.

The biggest thing, to my mind, to happen during my term of office, and for which I was mainly responsible, was the conversion of the public transportation system from the old noisy electric street cars, running on steel rails, to electric trolley buses, running on rubber. Since that time, the "propane"

driven bus is coming into its own. Of course, it also runs on rubber. The old street trolley tracks used to give a great deal of trouble with the paved surface. Frequently, the tracks were left in a "skeleton" condition, the ties simply packed with gravel. Downtown the noise was very objectionable.

After a few weeks rest, Mr. Haddow, City Engineer, who saw the great need for extension and improvement to the City Sewer System, got me to come back on a part time basis to the Engineering Department, where I was given a free hand to investigate conditions and carry out certain improvements.

I gradually built up a staff and spent a good deal of money, As it turned out, all my schemes proved too small, after the discovery of oil at Leduc and the subsequent extentions to the City, which soon passed all the wildest dreams of us old timers. The situation was one that called for younger and more resilient minds. Both Mr. Haddow and I retired about the same time in September, 1950, when I was over 71 years of age. A little later I bought a lot in the Parkallen subdivision and started to build a small house that was more in line with the needs of our absent family, and with the reduced physical capabilities of the womenfolk. The building took up all my spare time. Even though it was being built by Mr. Wm. Easton, it was being built on a "cost" basis, which made the design more flexible, and changes in detail were constantly being made. We moved in on August 31st, 1951. We all regretted leaving the old place, where we had passed the most active part of our lives. While the new house is more in keeping with our needs, we will always regret leaving the old place, particularly its better situation.

The first world war, 1914-18, upset many plans. The Grand Trunk Pacific Ry. was finished about 1912 and the Canadian Northern Ry. was pushed through from Edmonton to Vancouver shortly afterwards. Mackenzie and Mann, who built the Canadian Northern, must have realized the possibilities of the - Edmonton-Vancouver connection over the Edmonton to Prince Rupert line of the Grand Trunk Pacific. They also awaited the construction of the G.T.P. to facilitate their construction

work. I would think that the C.N.R. did not cost one half of what the G.T.P. did. Mackenzie and Mann made money out of the actual construction work, and they evidently were able to secure their franchise from the Ottawa Government under Sir Wilfred Laurier. There was absolutely no need for duplicate lines from Edmonton to Red Pass Junction in B.C. After the war broke out there was a great need for military railways in France and a decision was made at Ottawa to combine the two roads and lift one set of rails and ship them over to France. This was done, and some of the young engineers who had helped to lay the steel in Canada, laid it again in France. It was a wise decision for besides supplying the armies with rails in time of great scarcity, it also made possible an economic operation of the railway west of Edmonton, as one road could easily handle the traffic. The C.N.R. division towns of Tollerton, near Edson, and Lacorn, beyond Jasper, were sacrificed, and I believe some of the owners of buildings received some compensation, but it would not be much. In later years when automobiles were in more general use, some of them made use of the old railway grade and were able to reach Jasper. I remember of mother and I making the trip in a borrowed car. We crossed some of the trestle on the ties, and at a few spots a kind of road had been graded to get us past bridges that had been dismembered. It was a rough and ready trip and took two days, but we made it easily. Of course, we were trespassing on Railway lands, and I remember the bondholder trying to get something out of the Provincial Government. I don't know if they ever did, although the



present road follows the old railway grade in many places - even yet, 40 years later. It is easy to tell when you are on old railway grade by the easy gradients and the smooth, sweeping curves. The stream crossings have all been taken care of and much been built in new locations. The old grade can still be followed by car, from Jasper west as far as old Lucerne, which seems to be coming back as a fishing resort. The road from Edmonton to Jasper is not yet completely paved but should be finished by 1955. The portion of road which was built by the Dominion Government (pardon me, by the Canadian Government!) is built almost entirely on the old railway grade. It was mostly the C.N.R. track that was lifted, but the new railway seesawed back and forth a bit. Both roads were combined into what is now the Canadian National Railway, which also took over the eastern section of the transcontinental, as well as the old Grand Trunk lines in Ontario and Quebec. I notice the C.N.R. advertises - or they did until recently that they have the longest railway system in the world. Another old railway that has now been abandoned, and one that is of great interest to Edmonton, was the Edmonton Yukon and Pacific Railway, which started from what was Strathcona, crossed the C.P.R. by means of a diamond crossing, the signals for which were controlled from a nearby signal box located south of the C.P.R. yards and on the west side of that railway. I remember that during the great depression in the early '30's, the position of signalman was done away with and the C.N.R. which operated only one train per day in each direction, had their train crew operate the necessary signals. The railway followed

the Mill Creek to the Low Level Bridge, and while there used to be a terminal located on the river flats near 103rd Street, that was before my day. By the time I got to Edmonton the railway had been pushed up the river bank above the Municipal Links and via the Groat Ravine, it connected with the then existing Canadian Northern Railway and wound up at the old C.N.R. Depot located just west of 101st St.

It was a short railway for such a grandiose conception as pushing on to the Yukon. They evidently built a bit of the grade west at least as far as Stony Plain but rails were never laid. We used to "trespass" on that road to pick berries. I understand the railway did a fair amount of business between the C.P.R. and Edmonton before the High level Bridge was opened in 1912. The bridge now known as the Low Level Bridge , in contra-distinction to the C.P.R. High Level Bridge, had quite a history. The concrete piers had no sooner been completed than the river ran in flood over the top of them. The piers were heightened by a few feet, the steelwork put in place and the bridge opened in October, 1902. The first train crossed on October 20th. Three trains carried freight and passengers?) from the C.P.R. at Strathcona to the north side. It would, therefore, serve a very useful purpose for 10 years, before the High Level Bridge was opened for traffic. There was a great flood in the river valley in 1915 - the worst on record to date. The water rose up to an inch or two above the bottom of the steel spans, and the bridge got many knocks from all the floating debris that the river brought down, particularly from a barn that had been brought down in the flood. I was sitting,

with many others, on the McDougall Hill steps below the MacDonald Hotel, and we were all prepared to see that span of steelwork go out, but the old bridge stood the test and the barn crumpled up and passed underneath. On that occasion the water rose a bit above the ground level along the south wall of what was then the Hudson Bay Company stables on 102nd Street but which is now a Navel Station (H.M.S. Nonsuch). The water piled up on the south west side of the north approach, but just failed to get over it. The same applied on the south side, but there was a good sized lumber mill located on the south bank just below the bridge - I think the Arrow Lumber Co. was the name. Well, the flood water undermined much of the south bank and got underneath the big smoke stack and toppled it into the river. Big pieces of concrete can still be seen lying at low water. At that time there were a few lumber mills situated on the river. John Walters Hill, located at the foot of 101st Street, suffered pretty much the same fate as the Arrow Lumber plant, and all the log booms that used to be a feature of the river were carried out, together with all the logs. It was a heavy loss for the lumber companies, and I think the D. R. Fraser Lumber Co. was the only survivor although they, too, gave up milling a little later. I have heard that the timber berths upstream were worked out.

Coming back to the bridge - the Edmonton Radial Railway, as the street electric railway system was called - crossed the Low Level Bridge and the track was carried up the Strathcona Road. It was quite a journey from 101st Street and Jasper Avenue,

west on Jasper to 109th Street, south to 97th Avenue, east to 100th Street, and north to the bridge. After crossing the bridge, passengers paid an extra fare and were carried south on Strathcona Hill and what is now 99th Street, to Whyte Avenue, thence west to 109th Street. I think the whole trip would take anywhere from one hour to an hour and a half.

About the middle of the century traffic was built alongside the old bridge. This was not done without much discussion in the press about the best way to handle the situation, but the City Engineer, Mr. Haddow finally got his plan adopted. The centre of the old bridge was raised about 3 ft. and the ends left as they were. This will give a little added protection against flood. Now, in 1954, the old railway track is being lifted and the bridge will serve for roadway traffic only - and (let's not forget) the humble pedestrian. Our old home on 93rd Avenue was built on top of the west bank of Mill Creek and we used to hear the daily train puffing up the heavy gradient. In winter the train would sometimes stop to build up sufficient steam pressure to carry on. It is strange for me to think that the steam locomotive will soon be a thing of the past giving up to the Diesel Engine and possibly later to the gas turbine or some form of drive by atomic energy. I have heard my mother remark that she remembered the news of the victorious outcome of the Crimean War being brought to Kinross by stagecoach. These operated in her time on the Great North Road from London to Scotland. The Crimean War ended in 1856 when my mother was 18 years old. So, there we have known, in two generations, the stage coach, the steam railway, the first

airplanes, then Jet propelled airplanes, then the diesel railway. When I come to think of it, I may note that had I lived all my life here, I too might have known the days of the stagecoach (between Calgary and Edmonton), for the railway did not reach Strathcona until 1891, when I would have been 12 years old.

These remarks on transportation arose, naturally, out of the story of the Edmonton, Yukon, and Pacific Rwy., but many other things have happened in my lifetime. Those changes constitute one of the most exciting periods in human history. I remember when I was at school I used to think how fine it would have been to have lived at the beginning of the 19th century during the time of the Napoleonic Wars and particularly to have received news of the victory at Waterloo. Well, we have had our fill of wars - much bigger wars - since then.

Then we have so many things which we had not when I was young. The main recreation we had of an evening was reading. And there was a point to be noted, for it resulted in most people having a fuller knowledge of our wonderful heritage - English literature - a far fuller appreciation of past history, than the younger generations do - at least so it seems to me. If you lived in one of the larger cities, you could take in a lecture or a play, but these were rather rare events, and reading, to me any way, was the main relaxation. Then came the silent movies, then the "talkies" then radio, then television, and much more that still lies ahead.

Then there have been tremendous social changes which probably is the most important movement of all; from master and servant days to times of more universal freedom. All these things constitute a change far beyond the power of my pen, but it has been described in many books and articles, one of which appealed to me is probably because I am more or less familiar with all the changes which he describes.



Robert J. Gibb.



Molly Lamont.

Alexander Gibb's letter is a bit of a puzzle. Our records do not indicate a brother or half-brother by that name. However, the story goes that Henry wrote him back indicating he would or could not help again and Alexander was never heard from again. Perhaps he struck it rich in the Goldrush!

Brother Sharp was the husband of their sister, J.Gibb is probably his step mother Johanna Love, which might suggest Alexander is in fact Henry's full brother. Henry's mother Anne Herron is the one whose heritage can very likely be traced back to 1066. As best as I can make out the letter states:

San Francisco  
October 7, 1861

Dear Brother:

I have nothing of any importanc to (Communicate?) only I feel interested regarding my tow last letters dated fifth and leventh of last month. Mails are so very unsertan on to the troubel of present affairs in the east. I stated intentions and ful particulars I received tow letters and the Bill of Exchange for thirty tow pounds sterling but I cant get it cashed till I (paid?) the second Bill of Exchange regarding my busness. I am getting along very well considering my small capital. A few days ago I was oblige to purchase a horse and wagon that cost over three hundred dollars. I could not get along without it. Henry if you feel inclind to let me have this money for three months it will help me along considerabel. I have not yet got my feet properly. Please rite me early and state your intentions. I feel sorry regarding the money laying in the hands of others. If you cant properly spare it out of your busness just rite me to that effect and I will return this first Bill without delay.

My (kind?) respects to Mrs. Gibb, Brother Sharp, Sisters, and J. Gibb. Excuse this I ought to paid respects to the old man first but it is a mystake which I hop will be looked over. I will rite him before this month expires if I liev I. Bigabe(?) thairs excuses for my nogelanc.

IRYDB(I remain your dear brother)

Alexander Gibb

San Francisco  
California  
October 7 1841

Dear Brother

I have nothing of any importance to communicate  
to you at present regarding my two last letters dated 15th  
and 20th of last month with an account of my arrival on the  
the board of Business Affairs in the city of Santa Ana. I have  
in a few particulars of Revenue for 1841 & Bill of exchange to  
bring ten pounds sterling but I can get it for a better price  
the second Bill of exchange regarding my Business for getting  
within four weeks considering Mr. Smith's paper of 25th day  
I was obliged to purchase a horse & wagon that cost over three  
hundred dollars I could not get along without it - I am  
not inclined to let Mr. Smith have the money for three months it will  
be all Mr. Smith's consideration I have not yet got my first letter by  
which Mr. Smith's early and late year. I have not yet got my first  
regarding the money laying in the hands of others if you find  
it proper to spare it out of your Business just this time to that  
effect and I will return this first Bill - without delay.

My kind regards to Mrs. & Brother Sharp & family with - I am this  
morning to send you words to the old man but it is a mistake  
which I hope will be corrected as I will write him before his  
month expires if I have time - the same as for the regular

J. A. G. D. R. Hernandez



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BE BRIEF.

From Glasgow 9/24  
 To R J Gibbs

1900 Filed At

M

Mary failed

Note This Cabbigram  
 was transmitted to me at Wolf  
 Creek, Alta. (end of steel) by  
 telephone. It should read  
 "Mary failed!" R J  
 I had a bad quart d'heure.