



# Anglo-Celtic Roots

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*We Shall Remember Them*

*Minutes of the 2017*

*Annual General Meeting*



## *Anglo-Celtic Roots*

This journal is published quarterly in March, June, September and December by the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa and sent free to members.

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## Cover Illustration:

*Young Aggie at the cottage*

*Source: author's photo*

## *From the Editor:*

The life of Ann Burns' maternal grandmother, Agnes McGrath Sunderland, was a mixture of joy, hard work and tragic losses. As she tells Aggie's story, Ann uses both family lore and personal memories to reveal her beloved Nanny's personal history.

Our vignettes of 1930s life, taken from Charles Morton's vivid memoirs, continue with his description of the Manchester homes where his family lived, along with their daily routines and the lives of their various neighbours.

The latest installment in our WW I biography series outlines the story of Private Oscar Franklin Thorsteinson, who was known as "Buster" to his Winnipeg Falcons teammates and fans. When almost the whole team went to war, he was one of only two who failed to return.

And in preparation for the BIFHSGO 2018 Annual General Meeting please read the official minutes of last year's AGM.



Jean Kitchen

## From the President



Yesterday 225 people gathered at Ben Franklin Place for BIFHSGO's 2nd Ulster Historical Foundation Day with foundation employees Fintan Mullan

and Gillian Hunt. Based on what I saw and heard, it was wonderfully successful. People came from as far away as Quebec City, Hamilton, Sudbury and Owen Sound. Those closer to Ottawa got up "at the crack of dawn" to get to the venue for the early start. The books that Fintan and Gillian brought sold so quickly even they were surprised. Participants were attentive through five hours of lectures and left happy, if a little overwhelmed. Even the food was good!

Clearly people were keen to learn as much as they could; but more than that, they wanted to do so in person, together with others with similar interests.

Many societies hold webinars or post recordings of their meetings. These are hugely popular. Perhaps internet education is the way of the future; it is certainly a way to involve members who can't get to meetings. But I suspect that most people still want the personal

contact with fellow researchers, the chance to talk directly to educators and fellow-students alike.

Why else do we get 150 members out monthly for our regular meetings and 230 people to a one-day workshop? Meetings of that size, I suspect, are rare. So what makes BIFHSGO different?

For me BIFHSGO feels like a community. I may not know all of my "neighbours," but there are always people to answer my question or tell an interesting, inspiring story of their discoveries. Our members are committed to good research, excellent talks and well-documented articles for our journal. And they are willing to help when we need it, allowing us to host events like yesterday's and our fall conference year after year.

I realize that my experience might be slightly exceptional to the average member, and the experience of distant members must be different merely by the miles between us. And yet, the numbers are there to be explained. So, what makes BIFHSGO special to you?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara J. Tose". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara J. Tose

## Family History Research

### Aggie's Life



BY ANN BURNS

*Ann started researching her family history in 2003 and joined BIFHSGO in 2006. A trip to Ireland in 2008, where a connection was made with living relatives, has been followed by nine more trips. During these sojourns Ann spends as much time as possible following paper trails and winding roads, tracking down clues about her Irish ancestors.*

**M**ary Agnes McGrath (Aggie) was my maternal grandmother and a constant and influential presence in my life until I was in my early twenties, when she passed away. She was the one who did everything possible to make us feel pride in our Irish roots, because she knew of her ancestors and treasured their memory. Yet it was her grandfather, not Aggie, who was the immigrant. Michael McGrath had left Ireland during the famine and settled in Ottawa. His influence must have been both pervasive and persuasive. Aggie grew up in his home, as I grew up in hers. She is the one ancestor I would now most enjoy spending time with, to ask the questions that never occurred to me when she was still around and that could have eliminated a few brick walls. This is her story.

#### **The Great Fire of 1900**

The nightmare was over. Aggie and her family stood in the front yard in

disbelief. Their wooden home was still standing, undamaged. Yet just a few hundred feet away were the ruins of their neighbours' homes on Booth Street. To 8-year-old Aggie it must have appeared that the end of the world was just beyond her back yard. To her parents, relief at seeing the house intact was tempered by what could have been. The Great Fire of 1900 had come close to destroying their lives.

A small fire had started the morning of 26 April in the chimney of a home in Hull, Quebec. By the time the fire brigade finally arrived, it had spread to the home next door and beyond. Soon, whipped by uncommonly high winds, it had consumed much of that city. Just after noon, the ash and cinders were blown across the Ottawa River. There the blaze found renewed energy and fuel when it reached the open lumber yards. Soon a large swath of Ottawa was engulfed in flames.

By 8 p.m., when the wind abated, the fire had been extinguished, but the ruins smouldered for days.

Help had been summoned from as far away as Montreal, and pumper trucks arrived by train in just over two hours. Firemen and ordinary citizens successfully battled the blaze. However, the repercussions of the fire were to influence Ottawa life for a long time to come.

With 14,000 people homeless, bereft from the loss of all they owned save the few items they were able to carry if they'd had enough warning, a tent city sprang up in the Sandy Hill neighbourhood. Seven people died as a direct result of the fire and more lost their lives in the succeeding days from illness due to the

severe weather and lack of appropriate shelter. A young child, Aggie realized none of this, as life at 146 Lebreton Street returned to normal.

With the danger passed, Aggie wandered through the nearby burned-out streets. Was it simply curiosity that drove her? Was it a brief escape from home? What she found on her walk would survive to this day.

Something was sticking out of the remnants of a ruined home—a small cast iron frying pan. Nearby was another find, a cast iron pan for making Yorkshire puddings. She pulled both from the ashes and returned home, elated with the spoils of her walk. Those pans were put to immediate use and were well used by her mother, later by Aggie



**Figure 1: Ottawa–Hull fire of 1900**

Source: Library and Archives Canada, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/search/images,MIKAN4453981>

herself, and through succeeding generations for years to come.

### **The McGrath Family**

Aggie was the middle child of Edward Patrick (E.P. or Ned) and Mary Ann (Minnie) McGrath, nee Morgan. She was baptized Mary Agnes in St. Patrick's Church on Kent Street, Ottawa, on 23 August 1891 at the age of 15 days.

Agnes had been the name of Ned and Minnie's first child, who had lived for only 3 months; she was born on 15 April 1886 and passed away on 15 July. Aggie did the second-hand name proud all her life.

After the death of her first child, and possibly other infants, Minnie bore children in quick succession starting three years after this loss. Mary Beatrice (Bea) came into the world on 31 May 1889; then came Edward James (Eddie) on 2 September 1890; 11 months later, Mary Agnes (Aggie) was born on 8 August 1891. The youngest sister, Mary Elena (Lena), was born on 22 April 1894. Francis William (Frank) came along on 31 May 1897, and on 2 May 1899, Allan Joseph (Allan) completed the McGrath family. They were a very close-knit group.

By the time of the fire the McGrath family thus included six children under 10 years of age. They had moved at least once a year since the 1889 arrival of their first child to survive infancy. In 1899, not long



**Figure 2: E.P. McGrath**

Source, all following images: the author

before the great fire, they moved into 146 Lebreton Street, the home of Ned's father, Michael.

The family practised thrift in all things and seemed to do quite well. As Grandfather Michael owned the home, he likely contributed at least a little to household expenses.

Minnie's to-do list was never-ending. Three babies in less than 27 months kept her hands constantly in hot water doing the laundry, cooking and cleaning. She didn't get much respite over the following years either, but the older children pitched in however they could to help with the younger ones. In later

years they all helped each other.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Aggie's father Ned was a carpenter working for Davidson and Thackray Planing Mills. Ned was a popular man in Ottawa, well known in sports circles, especially baseball. He was a noted Liberal in politics and served on Ottawa City Council for several terms as alderman in Dalhousie Ward. He was among the most popular of aldermen for his devotion to his constituents.

### **School Days**

Aggie's school, St. Patrick's on Nepean Street, had also been spared the flames in the fire of 1900, so there was no holiday from learning. This large brick building opened in 1877 and one of the buildings still stands in 2017. Aggie was an average student; as was the norm for that era, she completed 8th grade.

There was no option of higher education for the McGrath girls. They learned home-making skills from helping their mother and in the home economics classes taught in the wooden annex to the school.

### **On the Domestic Front**

Throughout their lives, Aggie was the most domestically inclined of the three sisters. Cooking, cleaning and sewing proved to be her salvation 25 years later. She learned to sew at a young age; although she later learned to use a sewing machine, most of her work was

done by hand. Among her practical creations were quilts; no scrap of fabric was ever thrown away.

Bea married Billie McEwan in March of 1907, when Aggie was 15, and was soon the mother of a growing family. Aggie was more suited to the chores of domestic life than Bea and spent a great deal of time helping her older sister with the children. She would walk to Bea's home in the morning and help out most of the day, as long as Minnie didn't need her at home. It was good preparation for raising her own family.

### **The "Camp"**

In 1909, Ned signed a 100-year lease for land on Nicoll's Island near the Long Island Locks on the Rideau River. Surrounded by family and friends, the entire McGrath clan headed for the property when the weather got warm; they spent the summers there, first in tents and later in cottages, and called it in the family "the island" or "the camp." Aggie loved summertime. She was always happiest at the family camp.

### **When Aggie Met Harry**

In the summer of 1909 a boat docked at the camp and out spilled a rather disgruntled group of musicians, all members of an orchestra from Britannia. They had set out on Harry Sunderland's motor launch in hopes for a day of fun visiting the McGraths. It hadn't been a smooth trip; two major interruptions had delayed the merry making.





**Figure 3: Aggie with group at Long Island**

Not long after the arrival of the orchestra lovely Aggie of the long red hair caught Harry's eye. He was ten years her senior; the age gap took some persuading to overcome and bothered Aggie for the rest of her days. However, Harry was gainfully employed, loved boating, was much in demand to play the piano for parties and was a fine-looking fellow. He fit in very well with the gregarious McGrath clan. Before long Aggie fell under his spell.

On 25 April 1910, a few months shy of her nineteenth birthday, Aggie married Harry in the vestry of St. Patrick's Church. As he was a Bap-

tist and she a Catholic, a dispensation had been required for them to marry. The priest was very clear that there would not be a mass, nor would the wedding take place in the church itself. The ceremony was witnessed by Aggie's good friends Tillie Edwards and George Powell, also non-Catholics, who incidentally also later married. No details were ever passed down of the wedding or whether there was a reception or a honeymoon. Still, I can't imagine the McGraths ignoring any occasion for a party.

### **A New Life**

The young couple set up house, and like Aggie's parents before them, seemed to move frequently—sometimes back into 146 Lebreton Street. To Harry's family they were known as 'arry and 'haggie. Harry had a good job in the federal government as a pressman and was well able to support his family. While Harry went off to work in Hull every morning, Aggie still had time during the day to help Bea for a couple of years.

On 6 May 1913, Aggie's first child, Francis Gilbert, was born. At this time they were living at 109 Division Street, now Booth Street. Gilbert was the light of their lives.

## Life Interrupted—World War I

The next year their peaceful little world changed; everyone's world changed when Britain declared war on Germany. Harry faced a dilemma. He had been born in England and felt compelled to serve the country of his birth. Besides, Canada was part of the British Empire and when Britain was at war, Canada was at war. Harry had done military service in the Boer War just over a decade earlier, serving with Damant's Horse Regiment in South Africa and had luckily survived unscathed. Should he sign up for service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, leaving Aggie and their baby?

Whether voluntarily or not we will never know, but Harry signed up early in 1917, unaccountably in Renfrew, and shortly thereafter sailed to England for training. By May of that year he was on the ground in France serving with the 7th Canadian Railway Troops. He was a sapper—a soldier responsible for tasks such as building and repairing roads and bridges, laying and clearing mines, etc.

Alone with young Gilbert while Harry was overseas, Aggie moved back to 146 Lebreton Street to be with her family and I suppose to save money. From time to time there would be a letter or postcard from Harry, and \$15 of his monthly pay was sent directly to Aggie.

Harry was lucky once more—

doubly lucky, in fact, despite an accident. In August 1918 he slipped while working a lever on the rail line and fractured his foot. He was shipped back to England for medical treatment. From Epsom Camp in England on November 6, 1918, Harry wrote a postcard addressed "Dear Wife," to say that he and the others pictured on the card were recovering from influenza; he thought they'd be leaving Epsom for the Front on November 11th. With the armistice occurring that day, he again survived a war and recovered from a potentially deadly illness.

## Home Again

Returning to Canada on the *Aquitania*, Harry arrived in Halifax on 25 January 1919; shortly thereafter he was honourably discharged. His job at the Printing Bureau was waiting for him and the family routine resumed.

On 25 October 1919, Harry and Aggie welcomed their second child, Mary Rita. Their family was complete. The first years of the 1920s were generally peaceful around the world and unremarkable in Aggie's life. She enjoyed her role as wife and mother.

## Tragedy for the McGraths

The summer of 1927 brought unimaginable loss to the McGraths, at the very place they loved so much—the summer camp. Aggie's brothers Frank and Allan and their friend Gordon Belot drowned while off in a

rowboat to look for firewood. The precise cause is still a mystery.

Newspaper coverage of the tragedy was extensive. Ned was a well-respected alderman in Ottawa, elected for a second time, which probably added to public interest. He was so well known among members of the Liberal party of Canada, that the Prime Minister himself visited the family at home to express his condolences.

The loss of all three men shattered the family. Ned and Minnie never really recovered from the events of 24 July 1927. Many years later Aggie would repeatedly warn her grandchildren to stay away from the

water, and she would relive the tragedy when anyone went out in a boat or went swimming.

The first few years after the drownings were relatively peaceful. Aggie and Harry prospered, but were certainly not wealthy. They bought a lovely brick home at 279 Bayswater Avenue, very close to the Experimental Farm and the Civic Hospital. Paying the mortgage, however, meant savings were small.

Gilbert by now was in high school and Rita attended St. Mary's Elementary School a few blocks away. St. Mary's Church, their home parish, was just up the street. The neighbourhood grew, everyone got along well and very few families moved away.

### **More Losses Take Their Toll**

Aggie would suffer several more severe blows in the next few years. Early in 1931 came terrible news: Harry was diagnosed with intestinal cancer. Once the poor prognosis was delivered, a pall fell over the family again.

Then, during the difficult summer of Harry's declining health, on 20 July 1931, Minnie McGrath succumbed suddenly to a fatal heart attack at Long Island. Harry passed away on 3 September 1931, just three days short of his 51st birthday. Aggie had not begun to recover from losing her mother; now her husband was gone.



**Figure 4: Frank & Allan McGrath**

On 12 May 1931, after his diagnosis, Harry had prepared his Last Will and Testament. It was a short handwritten document that left everything to Aggie. When the will went through surrogate court, the total value of his estate was \$3,950. Of that, \$2,400 was the equity in the house; \$1,000 was the value of his life insurance, and the balance of \$550 was the value of the furniture in the house. It didn't leave much for Aggie and the children to live on.

While living, Harry had earned a good salary and the family thrived. But in 1931 there was no widow's pension for a surviving spouse. Aggie's income stopped the day that Harry died. She had little education and seemingly no marketable skills; there were two school-age children to raise. By the end of that year Aggie's beautiful red locks had turned pure white. Although she was barely 40 years old, Aggie looked and felt much older.

### **Coping**

Aggie set to making ends meet the only way she could: 279 Bayswater became a boarding house. The house had three bedrooms, for Aggie, Rita and Gilbert. To make space for boarders, Rita gave up her room to share a bed with her mother and Gilbert moved downstairs to the living room, where a convertible



**Figure 5: Gil, Rita and Aggie with boarders**

chesterfield became his bed. Each of the two smaller bedrooms was equipped with twin beds, and the rent paid by the four male boarders kept the family afloat. Additionally, Aggie took in laundry and cooked for others.

There was always a full dinner on the table at noon for the family, the boarders, and sometimes other paying and non-paying guests. Nothing went to waste. Everything was made from scratch, even the bread. She always made sure to darn not only her children's socks but also the boarders', because she always said that when she saw a hole in a sock, it meant the owner of the sock had nobody to love them.

Aggie was just getting back on her feet when the next blow fell. Her adored father Ned became suddenly ill and passed away on 29 December 1932. In 17 months Aggie had lost both her parents and her husband.

In 1937 Rita graduated from Immaculata High School and took a one-year business course at the High School of Commerce. She learned typing and shorthand, two valuable skills for employment. After her graduation things got easier for the family; she got a job that paid \$60 a month and was able to contribute to the family income. Gilbert had been working for a few years, mostly as a theatre manager, and helped support his mother too. The boarders stayed on.

### **War Brings More Changes**

During WW II, both Gilbert and Rita's husband Bob Burns served in the armed forces. When Bob was posted to England, Rita moved back in with Aggie. The boarders still had their meals prepared, their laundry done and their socks darned. Some of them also went off to war. Others carried on as usual and Aggie never let them down.

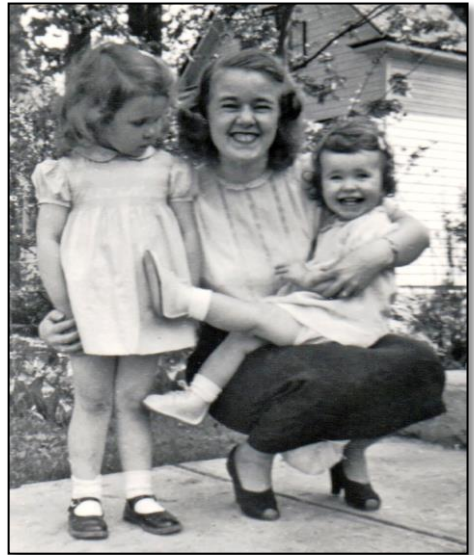
Once Bob returned from overseas in 1946, he and Rita continued to live with Aggie. His wartime coupons provided a sewing machine that saw active duty for 50 years. Their plan had never been to continue living with her mother, but they all got along well and so they stayed.

The arrival on 14 July 1947 of Rita and Bob's first child, baptized Mary Ann, was a great joy for Aggie. I am that child. Aggie was so thrilled to have a grandchild that she happily took over baby-minding duties

whenever possible. With my arrival, Aggie had acquired another name—Nanny. Before I was two there came a little sister, Rita Maureen, born on 15 January 1949. A beautiful baby, with dark curls and bright blue eyes, Maureen was another light in Aggie's life.

Life seemed perfect. The house was big enough for the growing family and Rita and Bob enjoyed the help that Nanny provided.

Another joy entered Aggie's life later in 1949 when Gilbert's wife Thelma (Ashfield) delivered a baby girl they named Sylvia Maude on 27th November; it seemed that fate had turned in the right direction at last. Nanny's granddaughters were her true delight. Gil and Thelma lived in



**Figure 6: Ann, Rita & Maureen  
Montreal, 1951**

Centretown, just a bus ride away.

### **Another Setback—Another Recovery**

Between Christmas of 1949 and New Year's 1950 Maureen and I were struck with a flu-like illness. I recovered quickly. Maureen became gravely ill and was rushed to hospital with what was referred to as polio-encephalitis. She was transferred to the Montreal Neurological Institute and the family moved to Montreal for two years while she received therapy. Once she was well enough, Maureen was released from hospital and joined the rest of the family. She needed a lot of care but remained a smiling happy child. There was no shortage of devotion to her treatment and care.

The devotion to her therapy and the resulting hard work paid off and by the time she was 3, Maureen was standing and walking in braces, with the assistance of whomever would hold her hand. Nanny was always there, willing and able and tireless. When she was 6, Maureen learned to walk by herself, no longer needing the heavy metal braces. This was a miracle in Nanny's eyes. Her prayers, combined with all the therapy, had finally paid off.

The family moved back to 279 Bayswater Ave in 1951 and the next year Maureen started

school at the Crippled Children's Treatment Centre. The financial burden from her medical expenses made for great sacrifices by Aggie, Rita and Bob for years, but they never complained. The other major event of this year was the arrival of another granddaughter on 25th September—Diane Agnes Sunderland, Gilbert's child.

### **Heartbreak for Aggie**

The defining milestones in Aggie's life were tragedies and once again sadness returned with a vengeance. Early in 1953 Gilbert was diagnosed with cancer. He passed away on 7th March at age 39, leaving a widow with two young daughters. Nanny continued to help Rita care for Ann and Maureen, but it was with a very heavy heart. It took years to heal this wound. She kept it all inside and yet she continued to give and help everyone she knew.



**Figure 7: Aggie with Ann, Maureen & Sylvia**

## More Changes

Until the mid-1950s, 279 Bayswater was a comfortable home. On 10 September 1955, the house got a little crowded when Nanny was presented with her first grandson, Thomas Gerard. Before young Tommy was even walking, Donald Robert (Donnie) made his appearance on 7 December 1956. When the boys were 2 and 3 years old it was time to find a bigger home. The decision took quite a while and circumstances had to align to make it possible.

In the late 1950s the *Veterans' Land Act* provided for acquisition of the old McKellar golf course and it was subdivided into building lots. Aggie gave the Bayswater house to Rita and Bob and they sold it to finance the building of their dream home at 731 Manitou Drive.

Moving to the new address was more of a transition than expected, but after a while the household members settled in. Aggie now had a sunny front bedroom to herself and she got shiny new modern furniture to fill it. This was her private domain, to which she could retreat from the bustle created by the various activities of the kids.

Two years after the move, Aggie turned 70 and began to receive Old Age Security, her first independent income. It was not a fortune at \$75 a month, but gave her something to share. She bought me a better piano for my music lessons and the other

grandchildren all got a boost to their current incomes with a supplementary allowance paid from Nanny's new fortune.

Of all the roles she had in her life—daughter, wife, mother and grandmother—Aggie relished the role of Nanny the most. It was the role that brought her the most happiness. She was the embodiment of the perfect grandmother: white hair done up in a bun, cotton house dresses for daily wear, a nice suit or dress for special occasions, and the ever-present apron. Nanny would bake, make pickles, write letters and knit or mend. Her hands were never still.

A huge surprise was in store for the family in 1961. There was a new baby on the way. On my 14th birthday, 14 July 1961, Monica Janet Burns joined the crew. By now Aggie was 70 years old, but baby Janet was a breath of fresh air to her.

## Adventures on the East Coast

In 1962, Bob was still in the RCAF and had just been promoted to Squadron Leader. He was posted to Halifax and Nanny decided to come along. The Manitou Drive house was rented and we travelled east to live in a house with six bedrooms. At the end of Bob's posting, the family moved back to Ottawa and took possession of the house again.

## Sad News Again

Early in the spring of 1967, Nanny was diagnosed with colon cancer.

She had surgery to remove the tumour and ended up with a colostomy. There was no chemotherapy regime. Her personal care routine was turned upside down and remained a struggle for the rest of her life. She was afraid and felt doomed. She knew what was ahead of her, as she had lost her husband to the same disease. The progress of her cancer was somewhat slower, but no good outcome was predicted. Nor did she get one.

In early 1969, it was confirmed that Nanny's cancer had spread to her lungs. She carried on, uncomplaining, just as she always had. She even spent part of the summer at the cottage, supervising whichever of the grandchildren were there. However, by August it was obvious that Nanny was deathly ill. She had some medication but spent much of her

time in bed, often crying from the pain. For reasons I will never understand, she was denied opiate medication because it was addictive, and the pain was severe. Eventually she had to be hospitalized so that the pain could be better controlled.

Nanny passed away in the early hours of 18 September 1969. Her pain had ended but her legacy lives on. Mary Agnes (McGrath) Sunderland was laid to rest in Beechwood Cemetery, Ottawa, beside her late husband Harry Sunderland, on 20 September 1969.

### **The Cast Iron Pans**

Those pans were well used by Aggie's mother Minnie McGrath, and many years later by Aggie herself and later yet by her daughter Rita and granddaughters Ann and Janet. Both are still in perfect condition.

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## **Manchester Life in the 1930s—Part II**



BY CHARLES MORTON

*This is another extract from Charles Morton's memoirs, which describe his childhood in central Manchester during the Depression. Here he offers us a picture of his homes, family activities and neighbours.*

### **45 March Street**

There were 50 or so houses in March Street, our number 45 being a large house with several paved steps leading up to a glass panelled front door that had an enormous round black knob at its centre. The house

had a kitchen large enough to use as a daily living and dining area with a huge grate and attached oven, heated by a coal fire that burned almost every day, summer or winter, making the room remarkably cosy and cheerful when the day was cold. Suspended from the ceiling was a



drying, or airing, rack, a large wood and cast iron contraption, which was raised or lowered by a cord and pulley. This was usually full of laundry, being suspended from that part of the ceiling closest to the fire grate, the vapour giving the pleasant smell of freshly washed clothes.

The most remarkable feature of the kitchen, however, was a row of small brass bells, in testimony to the prosperity of the original occupants. Although the bells (suspended on strips of spring metal, fastened high on the wall with a numbered plate beneath each) were no longer connected to the rooms they used to serve, they were reminders of the days when the kitchen was probably the domain of two or three servants. Its cosiness no doubt was lost to the family who would probably spend their time in more formal, and less well heated, areas of the house.

When I was about four years old, my father removed one of these bells and mounted it on a red pedal car I had been given the previous Christmas, thereby converting it into a fire engine. This may have caused some annoyance to the neighbours, but it was a great hit with my friends.

From the front door, off the long hallway that led to the kitchen in the rear, there was a front room (the parlour) containing our best furniture and only used for special

company or at Christmas. Until visitors were expected, the fireplace in the parlour was not used, and the room seemed permanently chilled, even in summer. Between the parlour and the kitchen, a sitting room contained more modest but more comfortable furniture and was used as the main living room.

On Saturday or Sunday evenings, my parent's friends, and sometimes Nin and Aunty Kitty, would come for tea, which in most working class homes usually consisted of boiled ham or tinned "John West Middle Cut" salmon, with thinly cut buttered bread and salad, followed by cakes, jellies, fruit pies and canned fruit. After tea, the family and guests usually settled in for an evening of cards, sometimes moving over to the Blackstock Pub for a few drinks, an hour or so before dispersing to their various homes at the 10:00 p.m. Sunday closing time.

Upstairs, the house had three bedrooms on the first floor as well as two attic rooms in the eaves. Attics in England were regular finished rooms; what in Canada are sometimes referred to as "attics" would be known as "lofts." Our attic rooms must have been the quarters of the domestic help, one having a gabled window at the front while the other was lit only by a skylight in the roof. Having no servants ourselves, of course, we used the attic rooms mostly for storage; by standing on a

few piled tin trunks, a fine view of the neighbouring rooftops could be had by lifting the skylight and peering through the opening.

Of particular note, however, was the family bathroom at the top of the first flight of stairs, the door to which was panelled in coloured glass, fortunately only translucent, filtering light onto an otherwise dark staircase. Inside was a huge porcelain-lined bathtub, which required some effort for even grown-ups to climb in and out of and which must have made great demands on the hot water supply. Probably because of the size of this bathtub, I was generally bathed in a zinc tub before the kitchen fire. Hot water, incidentally, was provided by a boiler behind the kitchen fireplace; a fire had to be going, summer and winter, to ensure a supply.

The toilet was also massive, having a step up to it, giving substance to the name “throne” commonly used by the children. It was flushed by pulling a chain connected to an overhead tank several feet above. I could only reach the chain by standing on the toilet seat, leading to the occasional unfortunate accident.

Electricity had not yet reached March Street when we moved in; as in all the other houses on the street, gas provided light to our house and fuel to the cooking range.

The light fixtures, some overhead

but mostly wall fittings, were lit by pulling a small chain (releasing the gas) and applying a lighted match or taper to the gas mantle, a small mesh bag about two inches long, which cost a penny or so to replace when it was worn out or broken.

The mantle glowed and created light with a brilliance rather like the low wattage bulbs we used after electricity arrived. Spare mantles were kept on hand in the way electric light bulbs are today. When the gas was turned on at the outlet fitting and a lit match applied, the gas ignited with a slight popping sound.

Gaslight gave out a pale kind of yellowish light that was accompanied by the quiet hiss of the gas. Rooms that were not used were kept in darkness, and the convenience of lighting a room by merely flicking a switch was unknown to us. Candles in holders or hand-held oil lamps lit the way to bed and were treated with extreme care because of the fire hazard to flannel nightwear. There were many such accidents in pre-electric days. The fire risk from open candle flames and the sight of a person with large burn scars to the face was not uncommon.

Most, if not all, of Manchester’s streets were also illuminated by gaslight. Every day, newspapers contained a note of the official “lighting-up” time, when all vehicles, bicycles included, had to turn on

their lights. Failure to have a light on a cycle could result in a court summons and a five-shilling fine.

The streetlamps were turned on manually by a city employee (known to all as “the lamplighter”) at dusk, which in winter could be as early as mid-afternoon. Most street lamp posts were about 8 or 10 feet high with a rectangular glass lamp box on top, and the lamplighter used two long poles over his shoulder, one with a small hook to open the valve and the other containing a flame to ignite the gas mantle inside. Once lit, the lamp cast a circle of light, one such lamp on March Street and another on May Street becoming the gathering point for the neighbourhood children.

A couple of years after we moved in to March Street, electricity was installed for the full length of the street. Gas was still used for cooking and the penny-in-the-slot gas meters, which controlled its use, were supplemented by electric meters which only accepted shilling coins, twelve times as much as the gas meter.

When it is recalled that many families were existing on much less than two pounds a week (forty shillings) the combination of gas and electricity costs provided a great deal of hardship, and I can recall instances where families could only obtain a shilling by borrowing, waiting until

dole day or by patronizing the nearest pawn shop in the All Saints area. For many families on the dole, even bedding and clothing might be regularly pawned each week, to be redeemed after the dole payment had been received. Often, families might live in the dark for days until they could afford to feed the meter.

Our house, like every other in the area, had a large cellar that was reached by a stone stairway running from the hall, under and parallel to the stairs to the second storey. The cellar had a stone flagged floor and rough brick walls (which gave off a damp musty smell) and was divided into several sections. At the front, coal was deposited through a round grid in the short walkway to the front door.

Each week, the coalman in his dirty clothes arrived on his horse-drawn four-wheeled cart to deposit hundredweight (110 lb) sacks of coal through the grid opening. He carried the sacks on his back, which was protected by a heavy leather shield the size of a breastplate on a suit of armour, and dropped the contents into the grid opening by heaving the sack over his head. Open coal fires were the only source of heat. The coal deposited in the cellar was carried as needed from the cellar to the fireplace in a coal scuttle, a bucket-like container, and “fetching the coal” was an unpopular chore in the dank unlighted

cellar, particularly in the winter when it was most needed.

Immediately under the kitchen, the cellar contained a large “copper,” a deep copper bowl encased in brick with a fire grate underneath. The copper was filled by carrying buckets of cold water from the kitchen (there were no water taps in the cellar) and it was heated from the fire beneath. The week’s washing was done in the copper, usually every Monday, and many items were boiled in the process!

However, many families found it cheaper and easier to take their weekly wash, usually bundled in a sheet and pushed in a baby pram, to one of the wash houses operated by the city, where hot water abounded and facilities such as soap, scrubbing boards and dollies (a three-legged stool-like contraption with a long stem that was used to manually agitate the wet clothes) were available for use at a minimum cost.

A few years later, some of these cellars and the stairs leading to them were put to a use never dreamed of by their builders and were to prove wartime lifesavers for the tenants.

The back door of the house opened from the kitchen onto a small paved yard containing an outhouse that had probably been an outside toilet prior to the invention of water-flushed plumbing in the previous century but was now used to store

bicycles, for those lucky enough to own one, or for other outdoor items.

A brick wall enclosed the bottom of the yard, with a bolted door that opened onto the back entry or alley (what would be called a back lane in Canada) that ran behind the houses. Weekly, dustbins (garbage cans) were collected and emptied by corporation (city) employees who had a special hooked tool that unbolted the yard door, after which the cans were returned to their place in the yard and the door re-bolted.

On the other side of the entry at the bottom of March Street, a brick wall enclosed a residence for nurses working at the Royal Infirmary; while I and all my friends could be considered expert wall climbers, this wall was left strictly alone because the top was covered in pieces of broken bottles set in cement with jagged edges upright. Today, in Canada at least, this might be considered a danger to the public, leaving the owner liable to a lawsuit, despite the fact that to receive an injury an eight-foot wall had first to be scaled.

### **Our Daily Life**

In many families, the main meal was served after the man of the house came home from work in the early evening but was still called tea, while the midday meal, even a sandwich, was called dinner. In our circles, the term “lunch” referred

only to a sandwich or similar food wrapped in wax paper (usually a loaf wrapper) to be carried as a snack or a midday meal by a worker. Supper referred only to a late night snack or meal before bedtime, and was often applied to the fish and chips bought on the way home from the cinema or the pub.

In my house, both parents had jobs at various times. For some time, my father worked at "the Mac," the Charles Macintosh rubber factory, from which the generic name of "Mac" for raincoats originated. He was also employed at one time by Dunlop, and his occupation is shown on some documentation as "rubber vulcanizer," a job that Dunlop eliminated as pneumatic tyres started to replace the solid rubber tyres on which he was employed. The rubber industry was then considered to be a very unhealthy environment, as witnessed by the yellow hue of the faces of long-term employees, and despite the prospect of harder times, it was a mixed blessing when my father lost his job.

My mother was a machinist (a machinist, in Manchester at least, was what is here called a sewing machine operator, a machinist in Canada being the equivalent of what in England would have then been called an engineer). It was hard work, but she was good at her trade and there was always at least one income in the house. Although there

was little that she could not make with a piece of material and a sewing machine, her real expertise was in shirt-making. In those days, store-bought shirts in Britain did not open down the entire front but were pulled over the head and buttoned from the waist up. (Shirts that buttoned from top to bottom with attached collars were known in the trade as "coat" or "American" shirts and were generally shorter than the normal British type, which had shirt tails that extended almost to the knees).

The average British-style shirt also came with a neck band only, to which a separate collar could be attached by use of front and back collar studs, a most awkward and uncomfortable arrangement. The benefit of this fashion was that the wearer only had to change the collar (a shirt was usually sold with two matching collars) to appear fresh, particularly in the polluted Manchester air, which left a black ring around the edge of the collar by day's end. This practice eliminated the need to change the shirt itself too frequently. Cardboard, or sometime celluloid, collars and cuffs were available at low cost and were often worn by low-paid office or other workers whose job required the wearing of a tie and jacket.

Among the labouring classes, however, the collar only appeared at weekends, the usual attire of the

working man being a collarless shirt with a scarf, known as a “muffler,” around his throat, summer and winter. Thanks to my mother’s skills as a shirt-maker, my father and I each possessed an extensive “American” shirt wardrobe!

With two parents working, my family's main meal on weekdays (still called “tea”) was always eaten at night and was prepared after my mother returned from work. This was not my favourite eating schedule; I enjoyed the times when I had a cooked meal at noon and a light one for tea.

At school, some of the children whose fathers were unemployed received free meals at another school in Longsight (my school, St. Chrysostom’s, having no such program) and had to rush there and back to eat within the allotted lunch period.

Although I was too young to know about such things, these meals, referred to by all as “school dinners” were considered by those partaking in the programme to be something of a social stigma. Being somewhat envious of my schoolmates who were treated to a free hot meal every day while I received only a sandwich, I clearly recall the time when I was about five years old telling my father that I wished he were dead so that I could qualify! I think that this amused him at the time, but the day came when I regretted my words.

When I too became entitled to free meals because my father had been killed by a bomb, I never once availed myself of them.

### **Children’s Habits**

There were two factions in the area, the old and the new residents, both of which were well represented on March Street. Many of the less prosperous new arrivals were of a later generation and had young children in their families; those already established were generally older folks whose children were grown or in many cases had left home. (However, it was quite common for grown children to remain at home until marriage or careers prompted their departure.)

My sisters and I did not lack for friends, and gangs of boys and girls, largely based on age similarities, were common. These would not fit the present definition of street gangs, their sole purpose being a gathering that was always available for group games or perhaps just company. At any given time, games could be joined just by walking onto the street, where other children were almost sure to be already out, one particular lamppost being the accepted rendezvous spot. A type of yodel, each gang having its own particular variation, would usually bring out other members of the gang when loudly called.

Boys in those days all dressed in the same manner: short trousers, knee

socks (which were seldom pulled up), laced ankle boots and a jersey. The jersey was a woollen garment with a narrow collar and sometimes a short inch-wide tie of the same material. More often than not, the front and elbows would have large holes caused by climbing walls, and exposed elbows and knees had perpetual scabs and scars from the same habit. As one sore knee or elbow healed, another would be created.

Parents didn't normally tolerate their children hanging about inside the house, and would order them to "go out and play," summer or winter. It was not uncommon to see boys and girls on the street eating a thick "butty" (sandwich), usually jam, which would be their tea. (A word on meal times here for Canadian benefit: in working class circles, meals generally consisted of breakfast, dinner at midday, and tea, at about 5:00 to 6:00 p.m.)

In the absence of much motorized traffic, children could play in the middle of the street with little fear of being run down, and would only appear home for meals. Some streets were in fact officially designated as "play streets" and marked as such with signs at the end of the street. Play streets were closed to motor traffic.

In the early thirties, life was perhaps a little more relaxed than today. Petty crime, like breaking in-

to houses to rob pennies from gas meters, was not uncommon, but the streets were generally considered safe and supervision of children was very casual, although we took care to avoid obviously dangerous situations after dark; molestations and bag-snatching were not unknown. Front doors were usually kept locked, although a front door key was often hung by a string at the back of the door and could be fished through the letter slot to allow all the family to come and go using the same key.

It was not uncommon for youths who were caught breaking into homes to be sentenced to a number of strokes of the birch, made of seasoned birch twigs rather like a witch's broom. The strokes were, I believe, administered to the culprit's bare backside and were said to be a most painful experience.

Although this was meant as a deterrent, it sometimes became a badge of honour among the tougher street youths of the time, and in the only two cases that I knew of, the boys in question were regarded with awe by their peers. All in all, however, local crime generally lacked the vicious aspects that later became prevalent.

### **Friends and Neighbours**

Our neighbours on March Street were a varied lot. We had a family across the street named Gregory, whose grandmother, living with the

family, originally came from Cornwall. It is perhaps worth noting that among the working class at least, elderly relatives such as widowed grandmothers or grandfathers often lived with the families of their sons or daughters. It was common to see an old lady or gentleman sitting beside the fireplace in many homes; retirement residences of the type used today were unknown. When the weather was good, old lady Gregory would sit on the front doorstep puffing on the clay pipe that was seldom out of her mouth, faded blue tattoos visible on her forearms.

Clay pipes could be obtained from any tobacconist, half penny for the small and a penny for the large; they were favoured mostly by the Irish navvies who did most of the construction labouring in England, and by children for blowing bubbles. As a child, I found it fascinating to see the street navvies smoking their pipes with the bowls upside down in wet weather; the burning tobacco never seemed to fall out. Many pipes of the wooden variety, however, had little metal perforated lids over the bowl for the same purpose.

The Gittins family further up the street arrived, I think, from Shropshire, where the father had been a farm labourer. Their four girls and two boys were completely rural types and had a hard time adjusting to life in a city where the houses

were side by side, row on row. One boy was called Alan, known as Sonny to family and friends, and quite tall in relation to most of the city-bred boys of the district. Having only five days difference in our ages, we became firm friends, and he and his sisters were readily accepted into the games and activities of the other children.

Shortly after the family's arrival, however, Sonny's father suddenly died, leaving the family in a state of poverty that was severe even by the standard of the times. The funeral took place from his house, the custom at that time being for the body to be laid out in the front parlour with all the blinds and curtains in the home closed.

Poor Sonny had other, although less serious, misfortunes. When my father's sister Agnes brought a plum-coloured velvet suit with a lace collar and knee britches for me to wear, something she must have found in her attic, my father was furious.

After he had thrown the suit into the dustbin, one of the Gittins girls salvaged it and took it home. Next Sunday, Sonny appeared on the street looking like an Elizabethan nobleman in one of the swashbuckler films that were so popular then; the suit earned him the lasting name "Lord Fauntleroy."



Next door at number 47, Mrs. Hercules lived with her son Leslie. She was a white lady, the widow of a black merchant seaman who had died and was buried, I believe, in Saint John, New Brunswick.

Leslie was also black, but I don't think that his colour was ever noticed by his friends and he was extremely popular among his street companions. Leslie turned out to be a brilliant all-rounder; he excelled athletically and academically. At an entrance examination that he entered, he finished up at the top of several hundred candidates.

Next door on the other side, at 43, lived Mr. Driscoll, a postman, and his wife. The Driscolls were a quiet couple who won my lasting regard by buying me a tin clockwork post-office van one Christmas, something that today would be worth many times its original value as a collector's item.

At the time, there was a general anti-Irish sentiment about, mostly among ex-servicemen who regarded the Easter Uprising in Dublin in 1916 as a stab in the back to the men serving in France and to whom the words Irish (Ulstermen excepted) and treachery were synonymous. The Driscolls were aware of this. I remember Mrs. Driscoll saying one day that her real name was O'Driscoll, but that the "O" was not used because its Irish-ness tended to upset people.

At number 37 lived the Jervis family; the husband was a young man who went to work each day in overalls, leaving his wife and two young children at home. Mrs. Jervis was a Roman Catholic who had married a Protestant and sent her son Brian and his sister to the local Protestant school.

Once a week, a young priest from St. Augustine's church would call in and tell Mrs. Jervis that she was living "in sin," her children were illegitimate and that her soul and those of her children were in peril. On one visit, he was so forceful that Mrs. Jervis became distraught and her husband found her crying when he came home from work. The following week, Mr. Jervis stayed home from work, a hard decision when days not worked were unpaid, and when the priest knocked on the front door, he hid behind it to listen to what was said.

Local lore had it that before the priest had even finished speaking; Mr. Jervis stepped from behind the door. The priest was said to have turned several shades paler and beat a hasty retreat with Mr. Jervis at his heels. It was his last visit, and Mr. Jervis became something of a local hero, even among some of the few Catholics in the neighbourhood.

At the beginning of the war, Mr. Jervis had a very unusual and nasty experience. His wife and children

had been evacuated to the country and Mr. Jervis was in his home, which was somewhat different to most of the other houses because it was at the end of a row where a passageway formed an entrance to the back entry. Possibly, this made the house colder than most, due to its having an outside wall exposed to the weather rather than being shared with a neighbour.

That first winter of the war was particularly severe, the coldest for many years, and there was no heating in houses apart from a few open fireplaces, which were allowed to go out during the night. Behind the living room fireplace was a boiler for the supply of hot water for the house, the water being heated by the fire when lit.

Getting up one morning in the cold house, Mr. Jervis lit the fire, where, unbeknownst to him, the feed pipe to the boiler had frozen, creating a pressure that caused the boiler to explode. The explosion blew a four-foot hole in the wall and blew hundreds of coal chips into Mr. Jervis' face. His visiting sister, on her way down from the bedroom, was blown back up to the top of the stairs, and Mr. Jervis, bleeding profusely, covered his face with a dishtowel and ran all the way to Manchester Royal Infirmary in a state of complete shock. For the rest of his life, one side of his face was covered in embedded splinters of coal.

In about 1935, our family moved to a slightly smaller house at 8 Livingstone Street, just a short walk down our back entry, across the end of April Street and into number 8.

Although only a two- or three-minute walk from 45 March Street, it was like moving to another world. If anything, Livingstone Street was somewhat more upscale, as though the original inhabitants were conducting an orderly retreat street by street in the face of the advancing newcomers.

### **8 Livingstone Street**

The move was made in the evening, using a handcart (a large two-wheeled pushcart) borrowed for the occasion and the efforts of a couple of uncles and my father's friends.

Normally, a move of this kind would have all the hallmarks of a "moonlight flit," a commonly used method of moving dwellings without the landlord or rent collector's knowledge when the rent became too far in arrears. A moonlight flit, however, would have necessitated a move to a more distant location than the one we made, and the use of the handcart was a money-saving measure, while the after-dark operation was necessary because the family and friends helping were at work during the day.

From the outset, possibly because they thought our move was a suspicious one, the Andersons at

10 Livingstone made it clear that our arrival was not welcomed. The Andersons were an elderly couple whose daughter Peggy lived with them. They were part of the original group, Mr. Anderson being a retired white-collar worker while my dad was blue-collared. In the five years that we lived at number 8, I don't think that more than the occasional "good morning" passed between the two families.

From the new house, I was able to walk to school each day without being accompanied by an adult. Other children from neighbouring streets went to the same school and gradually funnelled onto Upper Brook Street, where a policeman waited to take them across from the corner of June Street to Blackstock Street between the newly introduced Belisha beacons.

These were black and white painted metal poles surmounted by a large bright lit yellow ball, one on either side of the street, between which the street was painted in broad white stripes. When pedestrians crossed the street between the beacons, all vehicles were obliged to stop.

Although we hadn't moved far, my circle of friends expanded to include not only children from April Street, but also particularly those from May Street, who formed a totally different "gang" from those in March

Street. May Street had the largest number of children in the area, some of whom attended St. Joseph's Catholic Church and school in Longsight, a fair walk each day. All of us, however, found common ground in York Place.

Number 8 had a similar layout to our March Street house, including a cellar with a coal area and a laundry copper, but having only two bedrooms and bathroom on the first floor (the second floor in Canada). Like March Street, the back door looked out onto a high wall, beyond which there was a hospital-owned building that fronted onto York Place. A second flight of stairs led to two attic rooms, one of which was used as a bedroom for my sisters and the other for storing a variety of items, including a large chest full of books that my father had accumulated from his schooldays and beyond. I clearly recall trying to make sense out of *Pilgrim's Progress* and being fascinated by the lurid illustrations in a book about Christian martyrs.

Although the cooking area in the kitchen was much smaller than that in March Street, the adjoining sitting room was a cosy comfortable place and the upstairs bath much easier to negotiate.

We were to live at 8 Livingstone Street until the Manchester Blitz of 1940 turned our lives upside down.

# We Shall Remember Them<sup>©</sup>

**Private Oscar Franklin Thorsteinson**

**Regimental Number: 252283**

**10th Battalion, Canadian Infantry**

**(Alberta Regiment)**

**born: 14 November 1893**

**died: 14 March 1918**

BY LYNDA GIBSON AND SHEILA DOHOO FAURE

*Lynda, who joined the No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station biography project early last year, is also the BIFHSGO Director of Research and Projects. Sheila Dohoo Faure is the coordinator of the No. 1 CCCS research project.*

Oscar Franklin (Frank) Thorsteinson was born on 14 November 1893 in Selkirk, Manitoba, to Gudni Thorsteinson and Vilborg Arnadottir.<sup>1</sup> Both of Frank's parents were born in Iceland and immigrated to Canada in 1885.<sup>2</sup> Vilborg, a widow, was traveling with her daughter, Anna Jonsdottir (born on 18 July 1873 in Iceland). Vilborg had left behind two sons, whom she would not see again.<sup>3</sup>

Gudni was born on 25 November 1854 to Thorsteinn Feligsson and Helga Jonsdottir<sup>4</sup> and Vilborg was born on 20 January 1855.<sup>5</sup> Gudni and Vilborg met on board ship<sup>6</sup> and married a few years after arriving in Canada. They married in Gimli, Manitoba on 15 November 1888<sup>7</sup> and had four children:

- Lara, who was born on 9 December 1888 in Gimli<sup>8</sup> but died at the age of 14 on 21 October 1903 in Selkirk;<sup>9</sup>

- Fanny, who was born on 1 February 1891 in Gimli;<sup>10</sup>
- Oscar Franklin and
- Eddvin A., who was born on 30 August 1895 in Manitoba<sup>11</sup> and probably died at a young age.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1: Frank Thorsteinson**

Source: Jim Busby

During the same period, Gudni was having a relationship with another woman, with whom he had four more children:

- Wilbert Percival (known as Bill), who was born on 19 September 1893 in Gimli.<sup>13</sup> Wilbert was also a soldier of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (regimental number 294129), who signed up on 3 April 1916 in Winnipeg.<sup>14</sup> He returned from the Great War, and on 14 July 1922 married Holmfidur Freeman;<sup>15</sup>
- Sigridar Clara (known as Clara), who was born on 11 September 1898 in Manitoba;
- John Marino, who was born on 25 April 1901 and
- Gudrun Jakobina (known as Runy), who was born in 1903.<sup>16</sup>

In 1901, the family was living in Gimli, where Gudni was a general merchant.<sup>17</sup> Vilborg was the local midwife.<sup>18</sup> However, in 1902, Gudni and Vilborg separated.<sup>19</sup> The same year, Vilborg's daughter Anna married Johann Ingimundarson,<sup>20</sup> a butcher, who had immigrated from Iceland in 1886.<sup>21</sup> In 1906, Vilborg, Fanny and Frank were living in Selkirk.<sup>22</sup> No information was found as to the whereabouts of Wilbert, Eddvin or Sigridar; however, they may have been living with Anna and her husband. Anna and Johann had six children: Larus (known as Lawrence), who was born in 1905;

Johann Ingimar, who was born in 1907; Finny, born in 1909; Thidvik Alexander, born in 1911; Franklin Ingiberg, born in 1913;<sup>23</sup> and June Lillian, who was born in 1917.<sup>24</sup>

In 1906, Gudni was living in Selkirk with Kristen Ingjaldsson, 31 years his junior, and a son, Victor Hope, who was born in 1904.<sup>25</sup> Gudni and Kristen had at least three more children: Ethel, who was born on 31 October 1906; Violet May, who was born on 29 August 1908; and Sylvia, who was born on 1 August 1910.<sup>26</sup>

On 11 March 2014, Frank's grandnephew authored an article, found on *Historica Canada*, based on his mother's family research.<sup>27</sup> It recounts that prior to the war, Frank, known as Buster to his teammates, played hockey and was an outstanding forward with the Winnipeg Falcons Hockey Club. He was working as a clerk in Winnipeg at the Northern Crown Bank and, after the 1915/16 season with the Falcons, he moved to Swift Current with the bank.<sup>28</sup> In the 1916 Census, Frank was recorded as a ledger keeper at a bank and living with Vilborg and Fanny in Winnipeg, although there is an annotation that he was already at Camp Hughes.<sup>29</sup>

Frank signed up with the CEF on 1 March 1916.<sup>30</sup> He was 21 years old and unmarried, with a scar on his right knee from a hockey skate. He enlisted with the 209th Battalion

and sailed to England on RMS *Caronia* in November 1916.<sup>31</sup> Soon after he arrived in England, the 209th Battalion was absorbed into the 9th Reserve Battalion. From that battalion, Frank was posted to the 10th Battalion and joined it near Vimy Ridge. He saw action in two major battles, at Hill 70 in August 1917 and at Passchendaele in November 1917.

Shortly afterward, in December 1917, he was hospitalized with the mumps, taking four weeks to convalesce.

The 10th Battalion participated in every major Canadian battle of the Great War and at Hill 70 set a record for the most decorations earned by a Canadian unit in a single battle. The unit was known to its contemporaries simply as “the Fighting Tenth.”<sup>32</sup>

Frank returned from leave on

10 March 1918 and was assigned to D Company’s eight-man raider section, which undertook a mission on 12th March. While the raiders were crossing No Man’s Land in an area known as Twisted Alley, German mortars showered them with gas projectiles they called “pineapples.” Though the men wore gas masks,



Figure 2: The Winnipeg Falcons hockey team

Source: <http://www.winnipegfalcons.com/teampics/falcons19121913.jpg>

seven of the eight men, including Frank, reported ill effects of the gas after leaving the Front. Frank and three others were evacuated to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 13 March 1918, where Frank died the next day of gas poisoning. Two weeks later his Falcons teammate George Cumbers was killed and buried eight graves away from Frank.

Frank was buried on 15 March 1918 at the Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, Barlin, France, at Plot II, Row E, Grave 28.<sup>33</sup> The extension was commenced by French troops in October 1914, but it was taken over by Commonwealth forces in March 1916. In November 1917, Barlin began to be shelled and the hospital was moved back to Ruitz, but the extension was used again in March and April 1918 during the German advance on this front. The extension contains 1,095 Commonwealth burials of the Great War.<sup>34</sup>

Virtually every member of the Falcons hockey team was of Icelandic heritage and enlisted with the CEF, but sadly two did not return home: Frank and George Cumbers. After returning from the Great War, the Winnipeg Falcons hockey team reformed, with the memory of Frank being the inspiration for the 1919–20 season. That season culminated with the Winnipeg Falcons winning the very first gold medal in an Olympic hockey tournament,



**Figure 3: Frank Thorsteinson (seated right) and Bill Thorsteinson (standing right)**  
Source: Jim Busby

scoring 29 goals and having only one goal scored against them.<sup>35</sup> This feat is described in one of *Historica Canada's* Heritage Minutes, which can be viewed at: [https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/winnipeg-falcons?media\\_type=41&](https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/winnipeg-falcons?media_type=41&). Although Frank is not named in the video, he is portrayed as a player and then as inspiration when the two blue jerseys are shown hanging on the dressing room wall.

In 1921, Frank's mother Vilborg was living at 505 Beverley Street in Winnipeg<sup>36</sup>—a home she bought many years earlier.<sup>37</sup> His sister Fanny died in Winnipeg in 1931.<sup>38</sup> By then Frank's mother had lost so much—she had left behind two sons in Iceland, lost two children in childhood, lost her last son in the

Great War and then lost her only living child. A few years later, Vilborg died in Winnipeg at the age of 83 on 21 June 1938.<sup>39</sup>

In 1940, Frank's father was the postmaster living in Selkirk with Kristen and daughter Sylvia.<sup>40</sup>

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## Techniques and Resources

# The Cream of the Crop

*Top items from recent posts on the Canada's Anglo-Celtic-Connections blog*



BY JOHN D. REID

### Ireland

A full archive of the weekly *Church of Ireland Gazette* published from 1856 to 1923 is now freely acces-

sible at <https://gazette.ireland.anglican.org/search-gazette-archives/>. Claire Santry's blog at <http://www.>

[irishgenealogynews.com/](http://irishgenealogynews.com/), the go-to resource for Irish genealogy news, points out that "Genealogists don't need to have Church of Ireland ancestors to find the Gazette valuable to their research."

As well as exploring the major national and international issues of the day, the paper also carried localized church and social news, which would have been of relevance to all

local communities whatever their beliefs." Searching "Ottawa" gives more than 100 articles; there are more than 450 for Toronto.

## Scotland

*ScotlandsPeople* at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/) has posted the annual update to civil registrations. More than 233,000 newly released records of 1917 births, 1942 marriages and 1967 deaths are added to those from the start of Scottish civil registration in 1855.

The *Internet Archive* provides free access to the Edinburgh Academy register [1824–1914], a record of all those entering the school from its foundation to the Great War. Search it for "Canada" and you'll find many alumni who settled or passed through during their careers, and three with an Ottawa connection. Find it at <https://archive.org/stream/edinburghacademy00edinuoft#page/n0/mode/2up/>.

*Old Scottish Genealogy and Family History* has indexed the first 14 volumes of the General Register of Lunatics in Asylum from the National Records of Scotland series MC7 for 1858 to 1915. The register includes every patient admitted to an asylum in Scotland in this period as well as nearly 4,000 patients in asylums on 1 January 1858. It covers 180,731 admissions involving 115,900 individual patients. The free index, browsable by surname,

is fairly detailed. You can order an image of the original for a fee. Find the records at [http://www.oldscottish.com/asylum-patients.html](http://www.oldscot-tish.com/asylum-patients.html).

## England and Wales

The General Register Office (GRO) has extended to June the pilot project mentioned in my last column. You can order a pdf copy of birth (1837–1916) or death (1837–1957) records for £6.00, reduced from £9.25. It contains all the information you receive in a certificate. Start by logging on to the GRO online ordering service at [www.gro.gov.uk/](http://www.gro.gov.uk/).

*Findmypast* now includes 423,400 transcription records of more than 120 schools across the county of Cheshire. Transcriptions may include the student's name, birth date, residence, the school's name, years attended and, importantly, the father's name, which helps link generations.

Each of the 583 volumes is for a diocese and year or group of years. At the start of each is an index by place name and by given name. The names are not searchable. This collection includes images of transcripts from *FamilySearch*. Staying with the north-west, the recent addition of records for the Diocese of Manchester means there are now over 12 million records in 20 *Findmypast* databases with Manchester in the title. New records include 811,408 baptisms for 1571–1910;

910,776 banns and marriages for 1570–1936; and 499,216 burials for 1570–1990.

Browsable files of “Wales Probate Abstracts 1544–1858” are now on *Findmypast* for the Welsh dioceses of Bangor, Hawarden, Llandaff, St. Asaph’s (which includes 11 parishes in Shropshire, England), and St. David’s. The abstracts include the testator’s name, residence, the date of the will and probate as well as the names and relationships of other family members.

Each of the 583 volumes is for a diocese and year or group of years. At the start of each is an index by place name and by given name. The names are not searchable. This collection also includes images of transcripts from *FamilySearch*.

From the National Library of Wales, in beta, search and browse over 300,000 entries from the tithe maps and accompanying apportionment documents using original and present-day maps. I suggest starting at the help page, linked at <https://places.library.wales/>.

## The UK

Tracing relatives down to (almost) the present day is less of a challenge if you have a phone book or electoral register. So *Ancestry’s* “UK, Electoral Registers, 2003–2010” database, new and updated with 65,219,361 records, is welcome. “One-namers” and those seeking

DNA matches will find it particularly valuable. You can search by name, approximate birth year, location and keyword, which could include street name. When searching by location I suggest choosing from the drop-down list as you type, for the search seems sensitive to the format. There are no images; likely the original is digital. To find all the electors in a household search for a known person then use the address to find the others.

Do you have an interest in shipping, perhaps to fill out an ancestor’s story? Then you need *Lloyd’s List*, a newspaper reporting shipping movements and casualties, maritime news and other commercial information, which is being digitized by the folks at the *British Newspaper Archive*. There are now only a few gaps between 1801 and 1910. Issues for 1741 to 1826, with gaps, are also available at <http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/lloyds-list.html/>.

If you’re looking for a particular ship be aware that names weren’t unique. You’re also more likely to find something useful if you can limit the search to a year or two. Fortunately, the site allows an approach where you can start broad and then filter the results.

What was the weather like for an event in your UK family history? The UK Meteorological Office’s

Daily Weather Report provides a summary of the observed weather for each day for a selection of UK stations with charts and tables and textual descriptions of the weather on that day. The format and content of the daily weather summary vary over the many years of its publication.

You may find tabulations of observations every six hours, or the same information in map format. Expect to find a UK weather map. Some years will provide a broader-scale northern hemisphere map, some have images from weather satellites. Produced since September 1860, so back several generations, it is available free from <https://digital.nmla.metoffice.gov.uk/archive/sdb%3Acollection%7C86058de1-8d55-4bc5-8305-5698d0bd7e13/>.

### **Channel Islands—Jersey**

With recent additions for the Bailiwick of Jersey, *Findmypast* now has transcripts of baptisms for 1540–1915 (228,652 records), marriages for 1542–1940 (124,778 records), and burials for 1541–1940 (155,641 records). Don't overlook the 14,342 records of wills for 1564–2000 at the site.

### **DNA**

Mitochondrial DNA is generally considered the least useful for genealogical purposes. There are exceptions. BIFHSGO Member Leanne Cooper has five posts on her blog explaining "how I used mtDNA

to attempt to answer the question, 'Who were Charlotte Richardson's parents?' "

It's an adaptation of the presentation she gave at our September 2016 conference and worth a look, to understand how to use conventional genealogical and DNA evidence together. Find it at <https://leannecoopergenealogy.ca/using-mtdna-for-genealogy-a-case-study/>.

Two academic studies appeared in December showing finer-scale geographic structure to Irish DNA than given by the major DNA testing companies. One of the new studies, from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, shows 10 distinct geographically stratified genetic clusters; seven of "Gaelic" Irish ancestry (surprisingly faithful to the historical boundaries of Irish provinces and kingdoms), and three of shared Irish–British ancestry. The other, from Trinity College Dublin, shows 23 discrete genetic clusters that segregate with geographical provenance.

The best Irish resolution from the commercial sites is AncestryDNA, which recognizes three broad clusters: Ulster, Connacht, and Munster, subdivided into 16 genetic communities, the definition of which depends on more than DNA.

Will the major companies find a way to incorporate data from these academic studies into their results?

# Minutes of the 23rd Annual General Meeting of the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa 10 June 2017

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held in The Chamber at Ben Franklin Place, 101 Centrepointe Drive, Ottawa, Ontario. The notice of the meeting and the 2016 AGM Minutes had been published in the *Anglo-Celtic Roots* Spring 2017 issue. These documents, along with the 2016 financial statements, were also sent to members by email or postal mail at least 21 days in advance of the meeting.

### Call to Order and Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 9:10 a.m. by the President, Barbara Tose. She introduced herself as the chair of the meeting and welcomed everyone.

### Approval of the Minutes of the 2016 AGM

There were no changes to the minutes as circulated. A motion to approve the minutes of the 2016 AGM was proposed by Gloria Tubman and seconded by Ann Burns. **MOTION CARRIED.**

### Reports of the President and Directors

The President mentioned several highlights of the past year, including solid attendance at monthly meetings, which has averaged 150 people per meeting. She also noted that while BIFHSGO membership fluctuates slightly, the society averages about 550 members annually.

Barbara reported that two new research databases have been made available on the BIFHSGO website: the Lancashire Diaries Collection, added in June 2016, and the Canadian Militia Database, posted in February 2017. BIFHSGO funds were directed to the OGS Ottawa Branch to support the integration of the former BIFHSGO library into its library and to the Ottawa Public Library to enable the purchase of genealogy-related materials. She highlighted the partnerships that the Society has forged with the City of Ottawa Archives and the Ottawa Public Library in regards to our annual conference.

She also mentioned the OGS annual conference, to be held in Ottawa June 16–18, 2017, and the significant amount of time being devoted to it by

BIFHSGO members who are on the organizing committee or doing other tasks. This has meant that some planned BIFHSGO initiatives such as workshops were not accomplished in 2016–2017. However, the Ulster Historical Foundation will return to Ottawa in March 2018 to offer lectures on Irish family history. Barbara thanked all of the BIFHSGO members who have contributed to the OGS conference and noted that the BIFHSGO Pub Night, which is being held on June 15, is sold out.

Barbara also spoke of the very significant contributions made by two retiring Board members: Jane Down and Dave Cross. Jane first came onto the Board in 2009 and served the society tirelessly as Program Director for the maximum period allowable. Dave has served two terms as a valuable Director of Research.

### **Financial Statements for the Fiscal Year 2016**

Marianne Rasmus, Treasurer, spoke to her report, which had been circulated to members, and reviewed the society's financial position. She noted that the Society ended the fiscal year with assets of \$91,183 and that 2016 operations concluded with a surplus of \$4,525. There were no questions.

### **Appointment of Public Accountant for 2017**

Marianne Rasmus moved that the firm of McCay Duff LLP be appointed as the BIFHSGO public accountant for 2017. The motion was seconded by Barbara Tose. **MOTION CARRIED.**

### **Awards and Presentations**

Three Certificates of Recognition were presented, and one new member of the Hall of Fame was announced.

- The award for the Best Presentation by a Member at a Monthly Meeting was given to Christine Jackson, for her talk: "The Queen's Coachman—Our Only Claim to Fame," given at the February 2017 meeting.
- Glenn Wright received the award for the Best "Before BIFHSGO" Talk by a Member at a Monthly Meeting for his talk, "Canadians on Vimy Ridge 1917: A Short Guide to Resources and Research," given at the April 2017 meeting.
- The Best *Anglo-Celtic Roots* Article for 2016 award was presented to Terry Findley, for the article written with Tad Findley, entitled "The Cutler with a Social Conscience," which appeared in the Winter 2016 issue.
- Gail Dever was inducted into the BIFHSGO Hall of Fame for her wide-ranging work on behalf of BIFHSGO and genealogy in general. She was unable to attend the AGM, so her certificate will be presented to her in the fall.

## **Election of 2017–2018 Board of Directors**

Past President Glenn Wright, Chair of the Nominations Committee, presented his report. There were three positions up for renewal: Program, Research and Secretary. Two are vacant due to the departures of Jane Down and Dave Cross. Glenn explained that Andrea Harding, the current Education Director, has agreed to become the Program Director. Gillian Leitch has agreed to stay on as Secretary. Further nominations from the floor were solicited three times. There were no nominations from the floor. This leaves the Education and Research Director positions vacant without nominations. Lisa-Dawn Crawley joined the Board as a Director-at-Large but will not take on a given directorate. She will continue in her role as E-newsletter editor, and as a member of the social media team. Anyone interested in either the Education or Research Director positions is encouraged to come forward at any time.

## **Other Business**

David Jeanes reminded members about the Heritage Ottawa walking tours.

## **Adjournment**

There being no other business, the President adjourned the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

### **Notice of the 2018 Annual General Meeting**

**Saturday, 9 June 2018, 9:00 a.m.**

Take notice that the 24th Annual General Meeting of the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa will take place on Saturday, 9 June 2018, at 101 Centrepointhe Drive, Ottawa, to receive and conduct business in accordance with the bylaws. Members are reminded that they may appoint a proxy to attend the meeting and act on their behalf. The proxy holder must also be a member.

The agenda for the meeting is as follows:

1. Call to order
2. Approval of the minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting
3. Summary of the Directors' reports
4. Presentation of the financial statements for 2017
5. Appointment of the Public Accountant for 2018
6. Awards and presentations
7. Report of the Nominating Committee
8. Election of Directors
9. Any other business
10. Adjournment



# Membership Report

BY KATHY WALLACE

New BIFHSGO Members 5 Nov 2017–13 Feb 2018		
Member No.	Name	Address
719	Barbara Anne Smith	Smiths Falls, ON
833	Eleanor Ryan	Ottawa, ON
998	Patricia Steele	Ottawa, ON
1138	Roberta Kay	Ottawa, ON
1896	John Scott	Arnprior, ON
1897	Francie Heagney	Arnprior, ON
1898	Catherine Morrison	Ottawa, ON
1899	Margaret Zafiriou	Nepean, ON
1900	Bert Renwick	Cranbrook, Kent, UK
1901	Alf McCabe	Ottawa, ON
1901	Kirstin Davidson	Ottawa, ON
1902	Kathy Thompson	Kanata, ON
1902	Neil Thompson	Kanata, ON
1903	Juanita MacDonald	Ottawa, ON
1904	Keith Nixon	Kemptville, ON
1904	Judy Nixon	Kemptville, ON
1905	Gale Hamilton-Murphy	Ottawa, ON
1906	Jim Donaldson	Ottawa, ON
1907	Catherine Stevens	Nepean, ON
1908	Carol Nichols	Toronto, ON
1909	Morna Paterson	Ottawa, ON
1910	Suzanne Richter	Ottawa, ON
1911	Shelley Martin	Ottawa, ON
1911	Rick McVey	Ottawa, ON
1912	Rebecca Campbell	Kemptville, ON
1912	Andrew Brown	Kemptville, ON
1913	Ruth Gordon	Woodlawn, ON



24th Annual  
**BIFHSGO Conference**  
*Explore Your Anglo-Celtic Roots!*

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**Scotland**   
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....“an' a' that”!  
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## **BIFHSGO Board of Directors 2017–2018**

President	Barbara Tose	president@bifhsgo.ca
Recording Secretary	Gillian Leitch	secretary@bifhsgo.ca
Treasurer	Marianne Rasmus	treasurer@bifhsgo.ca
Research & Projects	Lynda Gibson	research@bifhsgo.ca
Membership	Kathy Wallace	membership@bifhsgo.ca
Communications	Susan Davis	communications@bifhsgo.ca
Publicity	Mary-Lou Simac	publicity@bifhsgo.ca
Director at Large	John McConkey	video@bifhsgo.ca
Programs/Education	Andrea Harding	programs@bifhsgo.ca
Past President	Glenn Wright	pastpresident@bifhsgo.ca

## **Associate Directors 2017–2018**

<i>Anglo-Celtic Roots</i> Editor	Jean Kitchen
E-newsletter Editor	Wanda Quinn
Web Manager	Gail Dever
Photographer	Dena Palamedes
Publication Sales	Brian Chamberlain
Queries	Sheila Dohoo Faure
Voicemail	Ann Adams
Conference 2018	Duncan Monkhouse, Jane Down
<b>Public Accountant</b>	McCay Duff LLP

## **The Society**

The British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa (BIFHSGO) is an independent, federally incorporated society and a registered charity (Reg. No. 89227 4044 RR0001). Our purpose is to encourage, carry on and facilitate research into, and publication of, family histories by people who have ancestors in the British Isles.

We have two objectives: to research, preserve, and disseminate Canadian and British Isles family and social history, and to promote genealogical research through a program of public education, showing how to conduct this research and preserve the findings in a readily accessible form.

We publish genealogical research findings and information on research resources and techniques, hold public meetings on family history, and participate in the activities of related organizations.

Membership dues for 2018 are \$45 for individuals, \$55 for families, and \$45 for institutions. Members enjoy four issues of *Anglo-Celtic Roots*, ten family history meetings, members-only information on [bifhsgo.ca](http://bifhsgo.ca), friendly advice from other members, and participation in special interest groups.

# BIFHSGO Calendar of Events

## Saturday Morning Meetings

The Chamber, Ben Franklin Place,  
101 CentrepoinTE Drive, Ottawa

- 14 Apr 2018** *Identifying the Remains of Canadian Soldiers from the First and Second World Wars*—using two recent examples, Dr. Sarah Lockyer from the Department of National Defence will talk about the Casualty Identification Program, which aims to identify the newly discovered skeletal remains of Canadian service members.
- 12 May 2018** *Were You in Salem in 1692?*—Three descendants of people involved in the Salem Witch Trials—Susan Davis, Darrel Kennedy, and Marianne Rasmus—will share their stories and examine the life and times of their Puritan ancestors in the seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- 9 June 2018** *Annual General Meeting and Great Moments in Genealogy*—After the AGM (9:00) and a short break, BIFHSGO members Dianne Brydon, David Jeanes and John D. Reid will describe some exciting experiences in breaking down brick walls while researching their ancestors. For details go to [www.bifhsgo.ca/Meetings](http://www.bifhsgo.ca/Meetings).

## Schedule

- 9:00–9:30 Before BIFHSGO Educational Sessions: check [www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca) for up-to-date information.
- 9:30 Discovery Tables
- 10:00–11:30 Meeting and Presentation
- 11:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. Writing Group

For information on meetings of other special interest groups (Scottish, Irish, DNA, Master Genealogist Users), check [www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca).

## Articles for *Anglo-Celtic Roots*

Articles and illustrations for publication are welcome. For advice on preparing manuscripts, please email the Editor, at [acreditor@bifhsgo.ca](mailto:acreditor@bifhsgo.ca). The deadline for submissions to the Summer issue is 28 April 2018.