

CENTRAL ALBERTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

FALL 2011

Edit

Layout

by

Shirley Dye

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## Central Alberta Historical Society Annual General Meeting

September 21 7 to 9 PM

at the

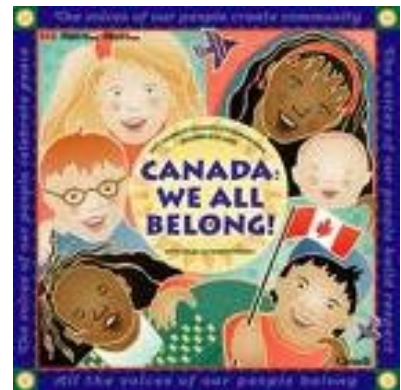
Red Deer Public Library

Snell Auditorium

**Presentation:**

**The Central Alberta  
Immigrant Experience,  
Past and Present**

**Followed by snacks from  
various countries**



CAHS Board

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Secretary Dr' Lu Piening Lacombe  
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**Visit our website**

[www.albertahistory.org](http://www.albertahistory.org) Link CAHS

September 2011

Hello and welcome to a new year!

We hope to see you all at the AGM on September 21<sup>st</sup> at the library. The AGM, although an important part of our existence as a registered Society, doesn't take very long, and then we have a great program incorporating several views of the Central Alberta immigrant experience, comparing historical and contemporary perspectives. We will have a sampling of snacks from various countries, and I think you will find this both interesting, and intellectually stimulating.

Bring along a guest – they'll find that not only are we serious about our history, but we're interesting, and can even be fun!!

We will also be taking this opportunity to say farewell to longstanding board member Don Hepburn. As many of you know, Don has been with the CAHS since the very beginning, in 1995, serving as a Board member, president, vice-president, past-president and having been very active on a number of committees, including Publications, Tours, Historic Red Deer Week, Programs, 2013 Centennial.... hmmm, is there anything Don has not organized or participated in? Many of you know Don, and I do hope you will join us in a heartfelt thank you and help us express both our sadness at his leaving, and our sincere wishes for a long and enjoyable "retirement". It has certainly been earned.

The Red Deer 2013 Centennial Committee, a committee of the CAHS is settling into an office space on the ground floor of the Scott Block, at 4818 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The office will be open for you to drop by and chat, or volunteer for committees or events, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11-2pm through September and October. Drop by and have a coffee!

The CAHS is also represented on the Heritage Preservation Committee, a committee of Red Deer City Council. This committee has an advisory role to council, and participates in planning and decisions related to a wide variety of heritage issues in Red Deer. Most recently, considerable time has been spent on designing the plaques that will be installed on the pillars of the brand new Veteran's Park, around the Cenotaph on Ross Street, and a wrap-around mural for the water treatment plant, both of which should be installed by the time this newsletter is published. Take a tour and visit these sites – the murals may have some pictures that are new to you, and the information on the Veteran's Park plaques not only chronicles the involvement of Red Deer citizens during our various military involvements, but directs you to other sources for further exploration.

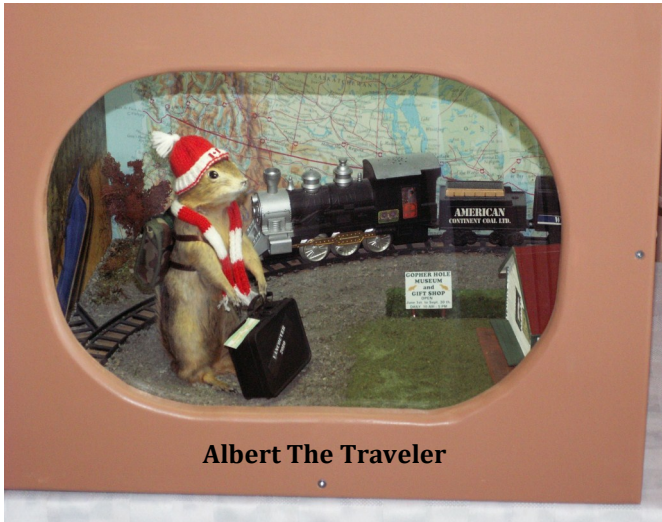
This is my last newsletter as President of the Historical Society, as we will be electing a new president at the AGM. Again, I hope to see all of you there.

Sheila Bannerman, President



## Albert Goes To The Olympics

Torrington residents held a meeting in 1994 to decide what could be done to save their town. Everyone agreed that attracting tourists would bring new life to the town but what could Torrington offer that other towns couldn't? There were many suggestions but no agreement until someone joked that the gophers far outnumbered the people of Torrington. Maybe they could offer some kind of gopher display.



The most recent addition to the museum came as a result of a request by the Museum of Vancouver. They were planning a display of taxidermy in conjunction with the Olympic Games that were held in February, 2010. A request was made, asking if Torrington would be willing to loan one of their displays for this event but it was quickly decided that it would be better to build an entirely new diorama, rather than disrupt what was already in place. "Albert" the traveller was depicted waiting for the train that is approaching in the background, outside of the Gopher Hole Museum, with his pack on his back, suitcase in hand, dressed with a hand-knit touque and scarf.

With the help of a provincial government grant, a corner lot and a pair of small buildings were obtained; one had been the Alberta Wheat Pool office and the other was a teacherage that was no longer being used. The buildings were joined together and renovations begun. At the same time, a taxidermist was located and artists began painting backdrops for the displays that were planned. When it all came together, the Torrington Gopher Hole Museum was officially opened on June 8, 1996, much to the dismay of PETA (*People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*). It was because of the flurry of protests by PETA that radio, television and newspapers began spreading the news of the controversy and the little central Alberta village became famous throughout the world.

Originally planned as a miniature model of the town with gophers dressed to represent townspeople, the displays became more generalized to depict a typical small Alberta town with the hairdresser, post office and arena among 45 others, populated by gophers meticulously dressed in handmade costumes and miniature props. Humour was used in the design of the dioramas: the hairdresser tells a customer "I'm a beautician, not a magician." and in the church, an angel gopher with wings looks down on the congregation. Today, seventy-seven gophers populate forty-eight different "gopher holes" that are seen by an average of 6,000 visitors from around the world every year.

The Gopher Hole Museum is open every day from 10 AM to 5 PM, between June 1 and September 30. Other times and dates can be arranged by calling the museum at (403) 631-2133 or e-mail [torringtontours@aol.com](mailto:torringtontours@aol.com)

Torrington is on Highway 27 east of Olds



I was born in Innisfail and raised on the family farm 8 km northwest of Innisfail where I now live. The



Bill on his Birthday

area right around the farm was settled in the early 1880s. From my earliest years I was aware of the early history of the area; stories of the Stony people travelling through the neighbourhood the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, of prairie fires, etc. There were stories about the people who came in the 1880s; Sandy Fraser, John Brown and Hugh Ross.

I attended the old brick two storey Innisfail School, which was built in the early 1900s and was the school my dad had attended for the five years he went to school. In high school I was influenced by Vi Brogan who taught French and English, but shared her personal interest in geology with me and by Nels Kvisle whose passion for biology took hold even though I never enrolled in Biology 30 in high school. My punishment for that oversight has been to write all the provincial Biology 30 final exams for the last 20

years as part of the Department of Education's Biology 30 Technical Review Committee. When the committee meets the first thing on the agenda is for all the committee members to write the exam. Once that is done we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each question in the exam under consideration.

My university career was checkered with time spent in engineering and physics before getting a degree in geology. My interest in geology was in palaeontology, the history of life on earth, was something Vi Brogan introduced me to, was reinforced at university by Charles Stelck who taught both Vi and I palaeontology. During my undergraduate years I took a course on Classical Greece from George Hardy who inspired an interest in the early history of the western world. Realizing that despite my interest the lifestyle of a geologist was not what I wanted. I got accepted into dentistry but when it came time to 'walk the walk' and attend class I decided my future didn't lay in looking at decaying teeth in people's mouths. I entered the Faculty of Education to try my hand as a teacher. Two years of Junior and Senior High School math and science teaching in a country high school (Ridgevalley) between Grand Prairie and Valleyview made me realize that I wouldn't be happy spending 30+ years in the class room. So, I returned to university with a plan of getting a Master's degree in zoology and teaching in a college. The Chair of the Zoology Department kindly let me know that I needed more than one course in Zoology to start a Master's degree so I finished my education degree taking as many zoology courses as possible as options. I then began my master's degree working on the comparative and environmental physiology of fish, did a Ph.D. in the same area and some post-doctoral work in biophysics. My Ph.D. supervisor, Bodil Schmidt-Nielsen, was the daughter of August Krogh, 1920 Nobel Prize winner in biology and medicine. Bodil had a strong sense of the history of science and in particular of academic pedigrees, that is the impact of who studied with whom and where they studied. In 1971 I returned to Alberta teach in the Zoology Department at the University of Alberta. While there the Chair of the department, knowing of my interest in history asked me to teach a course in the history and philosophy of biology. It was a course originally developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and later continued by Don Ross, two people for whom I had great respect for their awareness of philosophy, history and science. Teaching the course also allowed me to read widely in the history of biology & medicine and to consider the influence of various schools of philosophical thought on advancements in science. I retired from the U of A 1995, moved to Innisfail in 1997 and to the family farm in 1999.



Sharing a marsh mellow with grandson Auggie

Artefacts discovered at our farm span the period of human occupation of the area and continue to inspire me. Pemmican hammers are fairly common. I found a primitive one last summer. When I was a child, one story I heard concerned Hugh Ross who travelled with First Nations bands in the 1870s. Ross was attracted to the area where Buffalo Creek meets the Red Deer River. First Nations people stopped there in late summer and early fall to make pemmican. Ross finally homesteaded there on the quarter next to where I presently live. A few years ago my son Tye found the remains of the last of the buffalo in our area. These were the bones of a buffalo cow and calf that had been slaughtered on or near Buffalo Creek which runs through our land. The bones had been preserved in the mud. The major bones had been sawed, a sure mark of the white man.

Along the way I was encouraged to become interested in family history by two aunts. This led me to write family histories of both my mother and father’s families. One of the things I learnt was that the keepers of the oral heritage of families are the women folk who pass along the scandalous but often true personal bits, from mother to daughter or aunt to niece. Rarely do they get written down. When I was doing these histories I had two files of information on my computer; the history I was writing and the ‘family skeletons’ largely passed on through the female lineage. My mother’s family came to Prince Edward Island in the late 1700s and early 1800s, moving to the Bowden area in the first decade of the 1900s. My father’s family came from the far north of Scotland to land owned by the Duke of Sutherland (their landlord in Scotland) near Innisfail in 1912. My grandfather, my father and I in turn purchased the land on which I now live.

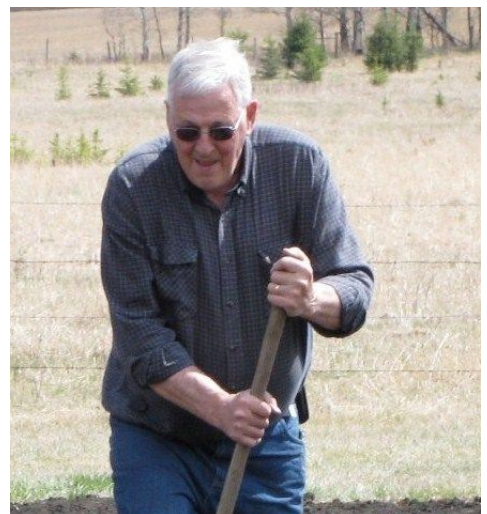
I have a strong interest in plants and in gardening, particularly succulents, lilies, and peonies. I have been active for many years in the Alberta Regional Lily Society and the Innisfail Garden Club. I have written articles and given talks on the history of lily breeding in Alberta and given talks on topics such as the history of plant classification to local groups and encouraged lily research at Olds College.

Since moving to Central Alberta I have become more immersed in recording local history. My daughter, Kaeli and I did a project titled ‘*Remembrance and Hope*’ for the National Museum of Canada’s Virtual Museum. This project focussed on the impacts of the various wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the people of Innisfail and district. It is available at:

[http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm\\_v2.php?id=record\\_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=649](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm_v2.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=649).

In addition to my involvement in the Central Alberta Historical Society, I am also a board member of the Harvard Historical Aviation Society, a group set up to preserve the history of the Penhold Base which was established at the outbreak of WWII. I am also interested in preserving the people’s personal stories so that their descendants will know about their life experiences and perceptions. Often all that is needed is a willing typist or perhaps words of reassurance that their story is worth telling.

I have also been a long term subscriber to The Beaver, now Canadian History, as well as Alberta History. I was recruited to join the Board of the CAHS by Bob Lampard. Although I had never attended a meeting of the Society I had been a long time member of the Historical Society of Alberta through my desire to subscribe to Alberta History. Bob got my name off that list. I have enjoyed my time with CAHS and look forward to working for the Society in the years to come.



Planting potatoes

# Lawrie Knight-Steinbach's talk on Helen Belyea

By Bill Mackay



Dr. Helen Belyea

On Wednesday, May 18 at the last of this season's CAHS's speaker series, we were treated to a talk by Lawrie Knight-Steinbach on the remarkable career of pioneering female petroleum geologist Dr. Helen Belyea. Lawrie is an historian, researcher and long-time resident of central Alberta who developed the Downtown Walking Tour and Red Deer Cemetery Walking Tour as well as curating the award-winning 'Seduction of Smoking' exhibit at the MAG several years ago. Her talk was based on the display she curated on Dr. Belyea as part of the \$12 M permanent Alberta Mavericks display at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. The display features 48 Alberta mavericks one of whom is Helen Belyea. Much of the first-hand information Lawrie gathered was from Dr. Willie Norris a sedimentary geologist from U of Calgary who worked with Dr. Belyea early in his career.

Helen Belyea, a descendent of United Empire Loyalists, was born in St. John NB in 1913 where she grew up. She was attracted to rocks and geology in the Musquach area of New Brunswick where her family spent holidays. After doing her Bachelor and Master's degrees in geology at Dalhousie University, Helen did her Ph.D. at Northwestern University in Illinois. Her Ph.D. thesis topic was the geology of the Musquach Area of NB.

Although she was small in stature at 4' 9" she had a large presence, was a highly motivated field geologist and made significant contributions to our knowledge of western Canadian sedimentary geology. Dr. Belyea was a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) for 41 years with most of that time spent in their Calgary office where she was one of the first two staff. Her research focus was the Devonian Formation of western Canada. This is the geological formation that yielded most of the oil discovered in Alberta and also comprises the backbone of the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains. She was the first woman employee of the GSC who was allowed to do field work. Dr. Belyea published extensively on the Devonian formation as it is found both under our feet in Central Alberta, in front of our eyes in the Rockies and as an escarpment in the southern Northwest Territories. She opened up opportunities for women in the petroleum industry. A favorite saying of Dr. Belyea that Lawrie related to our group was 'as rare as stockings on a mermaid'.

Dr. Belyea received much recognition for her work including honorary doctoral degrees from Dalhousie and the University of Windsor and the Barlow Memorial Medal from the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy. In recognition of her accomplishments she was made a member of the Royal Society of Canada and an Officer of the Order of Canada. Dr. Belyea also was an active mountaineer, skier, walker and swimmer as well as an accomplished equestrian. She served on the boards of the Calgary Philharmonic Society and the Calgary Zoological Society. Dr. Belyea died in Calgary on May 20, 1986 at age 73.



Lawrie Knight-Steinbach

Hello CAHS,

Like me, many of you may be wondering what happened to summer. It's amazing how quickly it flew by.

One thing that helped keep it busy was the HSA Casino in Calgary July 12 and 13. Thank you to everyone who volunteered and helped make the casino such a success.

I was also able to slip up to Calgary and take in a couple of tours as part of Historic Calgary Week. I also attended a few other tours by other historical societies and museums in the province. It is incredible what all of our various chapters achieve as well as how vital the historical community is in our province. I only wish I had even more time to get around the province and experience it all.

The HSA Council meets again on September 17. Planning for next year's AGM and Conference is certainly on the agenda at the meeting.

On a personal note, I had the opportunity this summer to get quite a bit of research and writing done on my book on the history of sugar beets in southern Alberta. I'm still looking for personal stories connected to beets – whether it be working in the fields or the factories or recipes for cooking using the beet when sugar was rationed. If you have some stories (or know people who might), please don't hesitate to send it my way.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with me (either through the HSA office or here in Lethbridge) if you have any questions or suggestions for how the HSA can serve you better. To me fall has always been the time of new beginnings (after all my years as a student and teacher) and I can't wait to see what fun stuff the HSA has ahead of us for the fall.

**Belinda Crowson**

President Historic Society of Alberta

## **Part of a Speech given by Stephan G. Stephansson on New Years Eve 1891 at Markerville.**

### **The Icelanders homesteaded there in 1888.**

"....If we feel our community lacks some amenities needed to make it a more pleasant place, we can do something about it. We know nature did not corral all hardships to leave them near Red Deer. So, if we feel that something is amiss, let's get our hands out of our pockets and do something about it.

.....We who have settled in this district and have been together for some time have a duty to our community. That duty is to create a thriving neighbourhood out of the wilderness. In doing so, we will be better and more useful citizens. We should evaluate our efforts and hope that the reward will be, due to our work and planning, the success of future generations.

Time passes, New Years Eve is approaching. Gatherings such as these will soon be over, just as our generation will pass away. The time will come when we have to bid our farewell as we, one by one, disappear from the scene. To those who worked to make our community a more pleasant place in which to live, our sincere thanks and to those remaining, our best wishes. If I am proud of my Icelandic heritage, I will be even prouder to be known as one who has developed a first class farm from virgin land.

The old year has left us quietly without storms. The New Year peeks at us from the future. Whether that future will be sunny, fair and clear or whether it will be cloudy and cold is uncertain. But I wish to say that I hope we will be here again next New Year's Eve, content in knowing we have worked hard for our community."

## Central Alberta Historical Society Board Members Honoured by Their Community

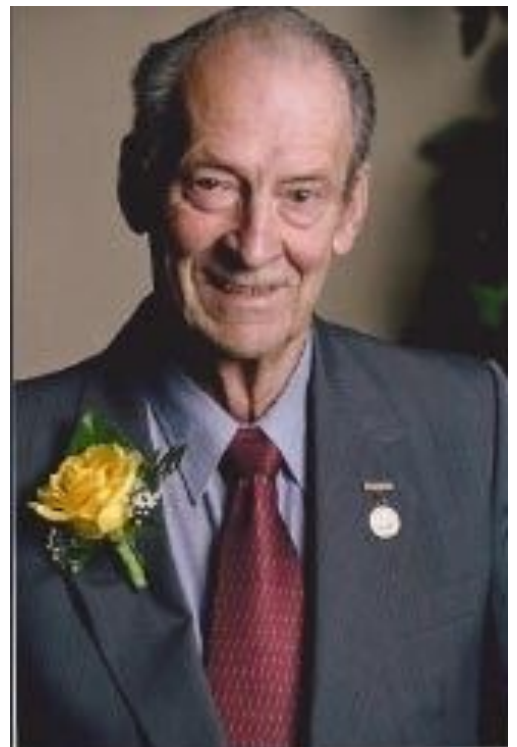


### Mayor's Recognition Awards Faye Hughes

Faye has contributed over 20 years of community service in Red Deer. She volunteers at the hospital, RDC Arts Centre, LifeLine, Sunnybrook United Church, Cancer Centre, Gramma Link Africa, plus she supports festivals and events all over Central Alberta. Seldom a day goes by that does not devote some time to the community, one day she may make some phone calls or bake some cookies another she might be catering a luncheon at noon and ushering at the Art Centre that evening. One of her co-volunteers described her as an Energizer Bunny.

### Mayor's Recognition Awards Bill Baergen

Bill is a charter member of the Central Alberta Historical Society. He has served as president, publication committee chair and president of the Historical Society of Alberta. He has authored several publications including the *Klu Klux Klan in Central Alberta*, chronicling a dark chapter in the history of Red Deer and District. Bill has made and continues to make a major contribution to the preservation of history in Red Deer and beyond.



### Red Deer Express      The Best of Red Deer Michael Dawe

Citizens of Red Deer choose Michael as the "Most Beloved Red Deerian" in 2011 Express Survey. Michael was born in Red Deer. He is a fifth generation Albertan on his father's side and a fifth generation Red Deerian on his mother's side. Michael really is everybody's favourite.



## John Tobias



One of the most significant figures in Red Deer's heritage community was Dr. John Tobias, long-time instructor and administrator at Red Deer College and active member of a number of local heritage groups.

John Luke Tobias was born in February 1942 in Pennsylvania, but moved in 1964 to the University of Alberta to pursue his post graduate studies in history. He became a noted historical researcher, particularly while he worked for the Federation of Saskatchewan First Nations. His work on treaties, land claims and other related matters are still considered authoritative sources on these nationally significant issues.

In 1975, John secured a position as a history instructor with Red Deer College and remained a key member of faculty and administration for 32 years. He developed the first course in Alberta on First Nations and non-native relations in Canada. In 1984, he received national recognition as one of the top seven faculty achievers in Canada.

John was consistently rated one of the top instructors at Red Deer College, not only by administration, but also by his colleagues and, most importantly his students. He became widely acclaimed for his ability to "make history come alive" and to encourage students to pursue further studies in history.

Given his many years of research work at the National Archives of Canada and other archival institutions, John knew the value of acquiring and preserving original historical documents. He became the secretary of the Red Deer and District Archives Committee and was instrumental in the creation of the first full-time permanent archivist position in the community. John also acquired for the Red Deer College Library the complete microform set of Peel's Bibliography, the leading source of Western Canadian historical documents in the pre-virtual world of historical documentation and research.

John worked hard to improve the knowledge and discussion of historical issues not only at the College, but also in the broader community. He organized and participated in numerous conferences and seminars. He organized a history lecture series at the Red Deer and District Museum. He wrote articles for several publications.

John became an active member of the Central Alberta Historical Society and assisted with the Society's publications and monthly programs.

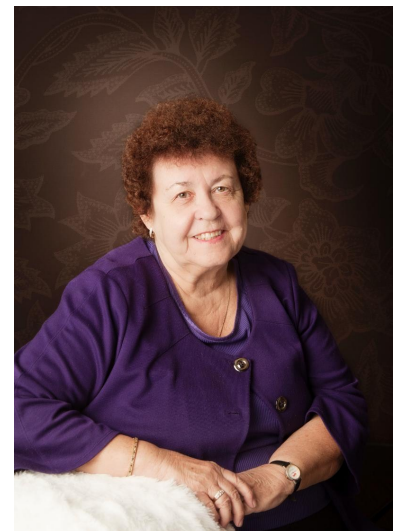
Tragically, Dr. John Tobias passed away on December 23, 2009. However, his legacy of local, provincial and national historical research, instruction and promotion continues for current and future members of the heritage community.

Michael Dawe

## 2011 Women of Excellence Awards Marguerite Watson

### Arts, Culture and Heritage: Category Sponsor: Sunworks

Marguerite has always been an active community volunteer; some of the organizations she has been involved with are: Waskasoo Museum Foundation, Central Alberta Historical Society, Sacred Heart Parish, Liberals and Red Deer Elks. She was invited to join the Museum Society in the early 80s and one of the highlights of her service there was to be the president who received the gift of Sunnybrook Farm from Mr. Bower. As a lifetime resident of Red Deer, Marguerite is proud to continue to serve her community by bringing a historical perspective to the organizations of which she is a part.



# OUR PRECIOUS HERITAGE

Courage, endurance and fortitude were required for women to survive on a homestead, and childbearing was just one of the many hardships they faced. Mildred Rasmussen in her book, *A Swedish Girl*, tells the following story about her mother Ellen's ordeal. Similar to Ellen, many pioneer women gave birth in extenuating circumstances: some had easier experiences, some harder and some, like my grandfather's first wife, died in childbirth. At the time no one wrote about such delicate matters. That is just what women did! No big deal!

Shirley Dye

She had just started to milk the second cow when a wave of dizziness hit her. She swayed on the stool but it did not tip. Another pain doubled her over and she pushed her head into the flank of the cow. Today her baby would be born; she knew.

"Run quickly Mearl," "she moaned. "Tell dad to come home. We need to get Mrs. John right away."

Panic swept through Ellen's body when she realized that she was alone with Evelyn. The contractions were coming faster and more intense. There was no relief, just a constant biting in her lower back. Was something wrong? She had not experienced this fear with either of the other children. She left the barn before she had finished milking. Beads of sweat dotted her brow as she took off her big apron and spread it carefully over the milk pails. She took Evelyn by the hand and hurried as best she could to the house. She had only taken a few steps when she realized she may not make it in spite of the short distance. She took a deep breath and did not exhale until she was almost at the door. The pain was very severe. She held on to the milk-pail post as she pondered her next move. Evelyn opened the screen door and Ellen staggered in and onto her bed.

Mearl continued to run and was all out of breath when he reached his father. "Come home right away," he gasped. "Get Mrs. John right away!"

It seemed like ages to Ellen since Mearl had left. Why was it taking so long? She could feel she was at times losing consciousness, but when she was alert she realized the seriousness of her situation. There was the feeling of being alone mixed with fear, and she was suffering excruciating pain. Evelyn crawled up on the bed with her mother. She sensed that all was not well and she tried to comfort her mother, the wee girl was not able to help.

After what seemed an eternity, Ellen heard the dog barking to announce the arrival of her husband. He tied the horses to the fence so they would be ready to go back to the field. Ellen could hear footsteps on the wooden kitchen floor. She felt relieved now that he was home. When he came into the bedroom he was shocked at the sight of her condition. She was pale and wet with perspiration and moaning in a state of semi-consciousness.

"Ellen, Ellen," he called. "Is the time now?" "Can you hear me?" He gently took her hand and squeezed it. There was no response. He tried to raise her head but it was useless. Her body was limp and sagging. With a sense of urgency and uneasiness, he dropped her hand. Carl got the Model T ready and then on second thought he decided to take the children with him. Why should little ones so young be exposed to this kind of experience. In desperation he left Ellen alone as he hurried to get help from his neighbour.

The road was rough with many deep ruts, but he did not hold back their speed. Mrs. John was home and ready to come when she saw the cloud of dust on the road.

Mrs. John found Ellen laying in the fetal position with her hands pressing hard on her skull. She was sobbing and gasping for air. Mrs. John held a small vial of smelling salts under her nose. "I am so glad you are here," she said in a weak voice.

The pain was more severe as each hour passed, but it wasn't until nine-thirty that night that relief came to Ellen and Mrs. John held a tiny baby in the palm of her hand.

Printed with the permission of Mildred's son Gordon Rasmussen