

Prairie Life

An Oral History of Greta Craig

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Margret Craig was born on September 20th, 1893 in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. At the age of eleven she moved with her family to Saskatchewan to homestead. At this point her family consisted of her father and her five brothers and sisters; Art, Lizzie, Jack, Ross and Grant. At thirty-three years of age she left Saskatchewan for Manitoba and entered nurses training in 1928. Upon finishing nurses training she married Ted Craig and raised three children. Throughout this period Greta was active in the Manitoba Federation of Agriculture and Co-operation, a moving force in the advancement of the co-op system in the prairies.

Readers of this memoir should consider that it is a transcript of the spoken word. Every effort has been made to preserve the conversational style of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in February, 1981. M.A.

Q: Tell me about when your family first came to Canada.

A: Well Kenneth McBain married Elizabeth Urquart in Scotland. It was away back about 1831. They eloped, were married one day and sailed for Canada the next day. Yes, they went to the boat that night and sailed for Canada the next day.

They came to Nova Scotia. I think they were six weeks on the journey. They lived in Nova Scotia for a long time, with five or six children born there. Later on they were able to get

homesteads in Ontario, down near Blyth, so they moved there.

Grampa couldn't speak English very well at all, and there were so many Mac's applying for land, that the land titles office put a Mc in front of the Bain's name. Somebody told grampa when he started to complain, that if he complained they'd probably not let him have the land. He said it was alright, he'd let it go. So they've been McBains in Canada ever since. It started as B-A-Y-N-E, then B-A-I-N when he came over, and McBain in Canada. They stayed in Ontario until 1862 and moved then to Manitoba by covered wagon. There were two families came as far as Minneapolis in the spring of 1862 [the McLeans and the McBains]. When they got to Minneapolis the McLeans came on, but the McBain children had taken measles or something and couldn't travel. They were held up for a couple of months and didn't get to Winnipeg until the fall.

They came up through North Dakota. They had cattle and horses with them, so they stopped at a farm house one night where they could get water for the stock. Early the next morning they started north again. This was the time of the Indian uprising in North Dakota. The next night the Sioux massacred all the people in that farm house, except one boy about fourteen or fifteen years old that escaped into the bush. Later on these Sioux came up to Portage, and lived there for years.

They then came to Winnipeg. Grampa had a pair of high leather boots—great big ones pretty near to his knees and somebody offered him two river lots—right in the middle of Winnipeg now, if he'd trade him for the boots. Their strips of land were about so many rods (linear measure of 5 1/2 yards of 16 1/2 feet) wide and two miles back from the River. River lots they called them. But Grampa wouldn't give him the boots.

They didn't stay in Winnipeg they went on up to Portage. After a while they let them get land. As I remember them telling it, they could have all the land that they could plow around in a day. Grampa's was the first farm out in High Bluff. That's where Gramma died in 1875.

There were seven children when they came, and they were the first children to wear boots to the Portage school. All of the others wore moccasins. They were half breeds and Metis and they all had moccasins. The McBains got along well with the Indians. The McLeans didn't. One of the McLeans saw a young Indian boy poking around and thought maybe he was going to do some harm, so they shot him. They harassed the McLeans like nobody's business from then on. If the McLeans' horses ever got out the Indians would chase them as far away as they could. But all the McBain children, there was three or four going to school, learned to talk Cree.

My father came from Ontario to Manitoba in 1862—he was only a boy then, fourteen I think when he first came. When he was twenty was when the first Riel rebellion was on.

Q: Tell me about the Riel rebellion.

A: When he first started in 1870 in Red River, Ft. Garry in fact, he took over the whole bit. He [Riel] got a bunch that had gone down from Portage to fight. As I understand it, it was the older men that went down in the first

group, and they jailed them. The women wanted them back in Portage so they sent the younger men down as hostages. He kept the young men as hostages and let the older men go. Those people were not actually against Riel. They would have backed Riel because they didn't think the government was playing fair with them. Ottawa was too far away and it took too long to get anything back from them. They were trying to get them [the government] to ease up on getting land in the west and the Indians and Metis were afraid of the government taking over all the lands so they wouldn't have any. Most of them were in sympathy with him [Riel] until he shot Scott. That kind of spoiled it for him. Thomas Scott was in [jail] with them. He was a big happy-go-lucky Irishman. I know all the history says he was a loud mouthed thing, but the men that knew him said no, he was a big Irishman that liked to joke. Dad and Uncle Robbie said he made fun of Riel, flirted with the girl Riel liked pretty well and kind of teased him—but they said there was nothing political with him at all. Personal spite was the only thing that made him shoot Scott. When they did shoot Scott they all knew what was going to happen. The men were all in one room and they pulled off a board so they could watch it all. Aunt Penny, she was younger than Dad, went down to Winnipeg and stayed with some friends there. She used to cook and take food down to them. Riel didn't feed them much I guess. They all had ones outside bringing food in to them. I guess Riel had taken over the fort but he'd no way to cook for the prisoners and they were in there for a month.

After that was all over my folks took land at High Bluff, Manitoba and then later got a farm four miles from Portage la Prairie.

Q: Were you born in Portage la Prairie?

A: Yes, I was born in Portage in 1893 and lived there until 1903.

Q: Did you go to school while you were in Portage?

A: Oh, our going to school was hilarious. The teacher had a pointer, and the kids used to shove their sandwiches on it, open the stove door and toast their sandwiches on the pointer. Oh the pointer was all blackened (laughs). One of them one time, I guess this was done on purpose. The ink was frozen, they'd ink bottles and it was frozen and they put it on the stove at noon when the teacher wasn't there. Of course it blew straight up. The spots were on the ceiling for years after. In 1903 before we moved, Ella Brydon and I got a job. We were about ten then and took on the job of sweeping the school and dusting it on Friday. We had an organ and there was a big cover to put down over top of the organ. On Friday we had to dust everything because Sunday school was there on Sunday. We used to take the cover outside to dust it and if the wind was blowing good, this thing would bulge out but if it wasn't. . . . We had a good time. They gave us a dollar a month, so I waited two months to get a silver dollar. The first money I ever earned was a silver dollar.

Q: Did you have much to do with the Indians while you were in Portage?

A: Well we were good friends with the Indians all the time. The Indians used to bring us all kinds of berries in the berry time and trade mother for butter and bread. That was the Cree Indians from up on Long Plain [Reserve].

The village east of Portage was the Sioux, they're west of Portage now because they were flooded all the time so they moved them. They were there any old time. Dad had the young fellows working for him at harvest all the time. When I was a kid we never knew when we'd go home from school but Chief Longclaws would be sitting at the kitchen table. Mother would be giving him a lunch before he went on up to the reserve about ten miles west of Portage.

Q: What did Chief Longclaws wear?

A: He wore two braids of hair down the side and then a Hudson's Bay blanket around him.

Q: How did he travel?

A: Well usually with a Red River cart and a Shaganapi pony as they called them. They used to come that way all the time.

This one time, it was later on. Grant and another kid didn't go back to school after noon—they went up fooling around in the slough. There was a slough up in front of our house—it went up around the road. These kids were out there fooling on the raft and he cut his leg on a nail in the culvert [made of wooden planks]. They got off the raft and everything and the other kid ran back to school and left him howling on the side of the road. A couple of squaws came along—by that time they had a buggy and a pony, and they knew him so they picked him up and brought him home. Squaws wasn't a dirty word in those days, it was just the woman. They used to call Mother Dad's squaw because she was his woman.

My mother died in 1903 with typhoid fever in Portage Hospital. She was only sick for ten days or so. We had pretty hard winter that year. Art had appendicitis but they couldn't move him because he was too sick. The roads were frozen but there wasn't much snow. They'd have to take him either in a wagon or sleigh and they felt they couldn't. He was in bed from the middle of November and he got up to eat New Year's dinner. Mother died about the twenty-fifth of November. The day after her funeral Lizzie had Typhoid fever. My youngest brother had gone in two days after Mother went in and they [Lizzie and Grant] came home just in time for New Year's dinner. So it was a pretty rough winter.

In 1903 Saskatchewan threw open homesteads, so my Dad went up to Yorkton and filed on three homesteads; one for himself and one for each of the two oldest boys.

Q: How old were the boys then, was he allowed to file for the boys?

A: Not too old but he was a good Liberal (chuckle). He was allowed to do it for them but mainly because he was a Liberal and it was a Liberal government. The first winter he took my sister, my youngest brother and I to an aunt in Moosemin—that was about ninety miles south of our homestead. He took the older boys and went up and built a house and everything on the homestead. That was in 1904. Lizzie quit school in March, she figured she wouldn't pass. When she went from Manitoba the first of December [to Moosemin, Saskatchewan], it was about grade ten, they were taking subjects she'd never taken and they dropped some she had taken. So about March she figured she wouldn't pass anyway, so she quit school and just played hooky. She got herself a job with a dressmaker, it was mostly sewing on buttons but she saw how the dressmaker did things and was able to do our sewing from then on. Nobody knew about it until she started writing to Dad in June and asking him to come down and get us.

In 1905, the year that Saskatchewan became Saskatchewan, before that Moosemin was in Assiniboia, Dad and Ross came down with a team and wagon to get us. We took two days to go up to the homestead. Dad told us there was an upstairs in our house. It was getting dark when we got there and I thought he was fibbing. It was a log house and the logs were peeled and showed up white but they'd tar paper on the outside of the gable end so it was black and I couldn't see it. I thought he was just imagining that he had an upstairs, but when we got in there was an upstairs alright.

The first years homesteading now it was pretty darned rugged. And the whole country was in the same boat. Practically the main thing we had to eat from the time we planted our gardens and they became ready to use, was milk, gravy and bread. Once the gardens came

on we were O.K. You could grow anything there. Everybody took care that they had good gardens. We used to get prairie chicken. We had a little single shot, twenty-two rifle and we could all shoot it, every last one of us. In fact my sister was an expert at it, and until she died when she was about sixty-three, every Christmas she would go to a turkey shoot and get a turkey for Christmas. We didn't shoot chicken until after the season when the young chicken were big enough to be left. We were careful of that, you had to be in the early days. We could have prairie chicken and then every fall the boys would get one deer. They weren't looking for trophy in antlers or anything, just for food. The meat was frozen in the winter—we had granaries and we put it in there. There were no refrigerators. Then in the spring about March, we'd can it. We were wonderful people at canning, we could can anything. We had lots of sealers we'd brought from Portage long before. We canned fruits, meat and chicken, everything.

Q: Do you remember how you felt when you first arrived at the homestead?

A: Oh absolutely! It was wonderful. There was no school, no nothing. We were three years without a school anyways close at all. It took three years before there was enough children in the whole township to build schools. They were wonderful years, you just roamed the prairie and picked flowers. We were in an area where the crocus grew wild, and every year I got either a bud, or a full blown open crocus by Easter time. It didn't matter when Easter came, I always had one by Easter Sunday. Every blessed year and I was there for twenty-five years.

One of the first things Grant and I had to learn, when I was just eleven and twelve and he was nine and ten, was where we lived. The section, township and range. We were always having people come through looking for land, the land seekers. The livery men would bring

them from Togo to catch the other railroad. They would come along and want to know what section we were on. So the first thing we did the first summer we were there was learn we were on section south-east, quarter twenty-two, township twenty-six, range thirty. That we learned but fast.

My sister and Dad used to take off visiting, or into town and leave us kids alone. Grant and I were alone a heck of a lot. Well this was after 1907 sometime and Grant and I were alone one day. Another family had come with a boy a bit older than Grant and they went off with their twenty-two's to hunt for wolves. I hadn't wanted them to go; I didn't want to be alone all day—but I was, all afternoon. He took off hunting wolves and I'll be blowed, in the middle of the afternoon a wolf came trotting across our garden. It was away out at the end of the garden (60 feet or so). Behind the kitchen the wood was piled out a piece, so it wouldn't bring snow up around the house and stacked about a yard high. The wood was always piled along, all these nice split sticks. Art had a fifty-five, something like that rifle, so I got the darned rifle and went out and rested the rifle on the wood. I couldn't of held the rifle and shot it I'm sure. I put it on the wood and had it up just about the time the wolf was coming across, and I took a shot at it. (chuckle) Fortunately for me, it didn't hit it. It wasn't until afterwards that I thought my gosh, what would I have done if I had hit it. I was all alone there and if I hadn't actually killed it, what in heck would I have done. Anyway I had something to tell Grant—I had the chance to shoot at a wolf with a real rifle, not just a darn twenty-two. The fact that I didn't hit it was immaterial. It wasn't so hard to keep him home with me afterwards—I gotta admit that.

I was out of school June of 1905 and we went back in September 1908.

Ross used to dodge school and if any of the neighbors wanted a man to run a team for the

day they'd get Ross. He started dodging school when he was about twelve. They got him smoking cigarettes. I remember when he first started he was so darn sick when he came home, but he kept on doing it.

Q: Tell me a bit about the work you and your sister had to do.

A: Well we had to do all the work. My principle job from the time I was eleven years old was to make the beds and wash dishes. We had a log house facing west with two windows in the front. The Assiniboine River Valley was straight east and we could see the other side of the valley from sitting at the door. That used to be the favorite spot. There were no screens or anything, we had lots of flies. The first year or two in thrashing time my sister used to have to stand over the table with a flour sack dish cloth—and wave it over the heads of the men to keep the flies off, so they could get eating. One way we had of getting them was to take a piece of bread, butter it, put sugar on the one side, cut a hole in the middle and put it on top of (butter side down) the two quart sealer filled with soapy water. The flies would go down in to get the sugar out of the bottom of the piece of bread, get into the soapy water and couldn't get out. A very scientific method—but it was effective and that was the main thing. Later on we got screens.

The towns were twelve miles away from us in any direction. Togo was straight north about twelve miles. We had to go through the Assiniboine Valley the road was not graveled or anything, it was just a trail through. A trip to town took two hours anyway.

The first trip I took to Yorkton, we went with a team in a buggy—in a Democrat, that was a big buggy with two seats in it. It took us three days. We went up one day, heard Sir Wilfred Laurier speak and came back the next day. Four of us had gone up, my sister and I, my brother and another young fellow. Oh it

was worth it. My sister wouldn't go and shake hands with him, that's the only thing I regretted. I wanted to but I wouldn't go alone and she wouldn't go with me. (chuckle) That was in 1910. I can remember my kid brother saying three things he was proud of: first that he was Scottish, second a Presbyterian and third a Liberal. He was about ten years old when he told me that.

Q: Tell me more about the work you had to do.

A: Well we had to do everything. We were the first ones to get a well dug and by reason of that we were the first that had a power washer. We got the well dug in the fall of 1913 and it was 125 feet deep. Pumping by hand you had to pump for an hour before you'd get any water at all. They didn't do anything about building a pump house that fall because it was too late by the time the well was finished. They had a lot of trouble with our well. There was sand in it and they couldn't get a bottom in it. They were there for over six weeks getting our well dug. My sister got married in the spring and this was that fall.

The washing machine was worked by armstrong power. It was a great big tub that was on a stand and you could move a lever back and forth. I think the centre stayed solid and the clothes were rubbed down between corrugated things on the outside. The washing machine played out and we had to wash with armstrong power on a washboard. Even the wringer wouldn't work. They'd decided we had to get an engine to run the pump and to get a washing machine in the spring. That winter I had to wash all the clothes by hand. Battleship Grey was in my clothes, don't ever fool yourself. All the men wore either heavy fleece lined underwear or heavy woolen stuff and I couldn't wring them out enough to make them half decent. The next spring they built a pump-house, and in 1914 we got a washing machine run by a gasoline engine.

I got a kids' wagon and a clothes basket and used to haul my clothes down after dinner and put in the washing. I'd do all the washing down there, haul it back up, and hang it on the clothesline by the house. Then I could get it done in an hour or so and bring it all up at one time. I had the wagon for hauling water too. We had a great big eight gallon milk can from Portage to haul water in. I used the wagon until I wore it out.

Q: What did you do for water before the well was dug?

A: In the summer time they had a well fairly close to the house, but it was just surface water really and once cold weather came it stopped. Once the snow came we melted snow in a barrel in the kitchen. We had to drink snow water and that is not very pleasant. Dr. Alfred theorized when anybody had to have an appendix out, they didn't have very good water. It was lack of enough drinking water that caused the problem.

We had our own thrashing machine. Ross had his own and he used to go thrashing. One year he thrashed all fall and didn't get back until the day before Christmas. There was only about two machines in the whole area. Art would thrash whatever was ready to go around the place and he'd shift all over everywhere.

Q: How many men were at your place during thrashing?

A: At first there was about eighteen, when they had teams. Later when they got a stook loader, they'd have one man with four horses on one outfit so there'd be eleven to fifteen.

Q: What was typical "cooking" day for you?

A: Well starting for breakfast we had porridge if anybody wanted it. Art would get up and start the fire and put on the porridge. All the men were in for breakfast at 6:00 a.m. They could have porridge, cold meat and fried potatoes—we used to fry a great big pan of

potatoes, bread and jam, jellies or fruit of some kind. We didn't fry many individual eggs but we always had cold meats. We'd slice it at night and leave it in a cool spot—it was always good. By the time they'd get started in the field it was about 8:00 a.m. and they came in at 12:00 p.m. for dinner.

For dinner it would generally be a big roast of meat, potatoes and whatever vegetables you had. We always had gardens so there was lots of vegetables. Then we had pie. I had a rule that there was no darn pie eating contests at our place at noon. They could have two pieces each if they wanted but they couldn't have a third. I got so I could judge and have enough that anybody could have a second piece if they wanted. Some of those crazy guys would make it into a pie festival, see who could eat the most. Well I didn't figure they needed it and I was doing the baking.

After dinner, at about 4:00 p.m. we used to give them lunch out in the fields. We used to take it out by horse and buggy. I used to bake great big pans full of biscuits. We put butter on them, usually had them hot and put them in a great big bread pan with a lid, lined with a clean flour bag. I used to like to make Johnny Cake or Gingerbread. A great big pan of hot gingerbread, the warm biscuits and if we had some meat we'd put some of that on. We'd take that out with a great big pot of tea with cream and sugar. As soon as dinner was over I'd start baking again to get it ready for 4:00. I had an American neighbor helping me in the daytime during thrashing, but she never got the dishes done in time to eat with everyone.

Supper was about 8:00 p.m. They were working horses all the time and the horses had to be fed. By that time it was dark and they hadn't the lights to work later. All the thrashing machines in the country would blow the whistle at 8:00. They had a whistle like the old steam whistle. For supper we generally had a

stew and fresh boiled potatoes. The stew would be full of vegetables and we'd have stewed fruit or some kind of cookies and cakes.

Q: How did you keep all your food?

A: The boys hauled ice from the valley in the winter. They built an ice house, and used to pack straw all around it. We'd a basement cellar in the kitchen and it was good and cool down there. It had shelves and big bins for the vegetables. I was never without canned fruit. Right after New Years I used to go down and count how many jars I had left. I'd clear one place and put one of all the different kinds of fruit I had, and dole out the others that I had according to the number I could use a week—maybe two or three, and the rest of the time I'd use dried fruit. This basement had a big door where the steps went down. The guys thought it was funny if I went down for something and they shut the door on me. That used to just about drive me clean up the wall, I could have panicked. It was all I could do to keep my mouth shut and not scream. If I ever did that, they'd do it forever. They soon played out. I knew better than to ever let them know it bothered me. (chuckle) I learned early the art of self-preservation.

When my sister was home we scrubbed the floor all the time, kept it white. We had too much sand around and it would cut the paint. By the end of the summer you'd never know it had been painted. I did some reading and found that stores didn't have nice white floors, they had nice black ones. They [the men] would get me anything I wanted—so I ordered some linseed oil. I can't remember if it had to be boiled or if it was raw. I put it on the floor one Saturday when there was nobody home. When they came home—Oh! Where'd the nice white floor go they'd expected to see when they came in. It just wasn't there anymore. Harry Millar thought it was a lazy trick, but I thought it was a darn smart one. It wasn't bad when there was two of us to do it, but when I was all

alone—no way. I decided when I took over the job that I'd work as long as the boys did, not hours afterwards just for the sake of getting things done. It can wait until tomorrow.

Q: Did you have any help after your sister left besides the American woman who just helped out during thrashing?

A: Well I had a hired girl for three years between 1915-1918. By that time there was schools but I couldn't go again because I had to look after the place, In 1912 an Irish couple went over to the old country, they had some small children, and when they came back she came over as a hired girl. She thought she was just going to take care of the children, be a nurse maid but she was to be the hired girl. She didn't stay with them very long, she couldn't take it. I had her for three years. She got fed up and somebody in Swan River wanted a housekeeper, so she took that on. She ended up getting married and staying there.

In 1912 a wave of diphtheria went through. Before there was any anti-toxin for it at all. By this time there was settlements of Ukrainians from Europe. When a child died in one of the families, everybody went to the funeral. To get that stopped [because of the spread of diphtheria] they had to bring in the Mounted Police from Yorkton. They swore in a lot of extra fellows to help them. The doctors would tell them which had diphtheria, they'd quarantine the house and the Mounties would guard it making sure nobody went in or out. It would have spread all over the prairie like crazy. There was hardly a family to the west of us that didn't lose one or two children. It was awful. You see the doctor was twenty-five miles away and they all had the idea that if a man took sick—get a doctor but if the kid . . . well no way.

Q: Why do you think they thought that?

A: Kids were replaceable, a man wasn't.

Q: What about when women got sick?

A: Well it was much like the kids, they were replaceable. Darn right they were replaceable. They always had some woman around that would take on the guy. They had no trouble that way.

There was a lot of Germans, they'd got out of Germany, they wouldn't go fight or something. These people had a marriage counsellor that used to arrange weddings to marry off the girls.

Q: Did the counsellor farm too?

A: Well yes, they were among the Germans. He lived in the area south of us. In 1912 the railroad went through west of us and brought up a terrific lot of newcomers. Most of them were European. The Germans had it so they'd pick out a good man for the girl, they didn't bother about the girl at all—they'd pick out a man that would suit and if the father could pay enough cows or something, that sort of a dowry, they'd arrange a wedding for them. The girls had no say in the matter. Some of the girls would be away working for somebody and the father and this other guy would come along and tell them they were going to get married in two weeks, and they had to come home. Most of these women were ones I'd known as girls too, but there was some that did come over from the old country to marry. The girls had no say in it—absolutely none.

There was a German outfit south of us, an Icelandic group out to the south-west of us and Ukrainians mainly straight west of us.

Q: Did any of these girls that had to get married tell you how they felt about it?

A: No they didn't but this is quite funny—we had a young German girl with us, she was about sixteen and we used to know this rhyme [about marriage].

Monday for health

Tuesday for wealth

Wednesday best day of all
 Thursday for losses
 Friday for crosses
 Saturday no luck at all

She was supposed to be married in two weeks or something so we sang this rhyme to her just for fun. She wouldn't go home with her dad until they'd promise to let her get married on Tuesday. Tuesday for wealth. I don't know whether she did or not.

Q: Was this mainly in the European families? Did anyone ever tell you to get married?

A: Absolutely, what a hope. The only thing I had to promise was that when I got married I'd go home to their place and get married there. And I did that.

Q: Do you remember other women saying they were lonely?

A: No I don't, most of us adjusted very well. Oh up in Saskatchewan there were women that had a rotten life. The fool men would go and get drunk. I knew one woman that got battered up pretty much, every once in a while.

Q: Was drinking a problem?

A: Oh drinking was always a problem. My dad drank all his life. He was what you'd call a moderate drinker—he never really got tanked up. Some of them would come in to our place on their way home for a cup of tea or something and they'd be so darn loaded.

Q: Why do you think the men drank so much?

A: Well the old fellas you see had nothing else to drink for the first years they'd been out there. Tea and stuff was so scarce, they locked it up and just used it very very carefully. They used to make it [alcohol]. My uncle was an expert at making it, he used to go soak the wheat in the river and make booze with it.

Q: So when did you leave the McBain homestead?

A: Well my sister was married in 1913 and my

dad married when he was seventy years old. A woman came up and kept house for a bachelor about two miles away. She was an English woman who had been out in service from about the time she was fourteen. She had never had a home of her own. My sister was six miles west by the side of a lake so we spent every Sunday afternoon out there. Everybody would take their lunch and she'd make a big pot of tea. My dad started saying how we didn't have to hurry home, that he'd do the chores. I got curious after a while and thought it was kind of a dirty trick to go and leave him alone every Sunday, so I stayed home—and I got left alone for the Sunday. He took off to see this lady. Then he told me that every Sunday he had been going down to see this housekeeper that was left alone. She went back to Winnipeg that fall. Dad had put in an awful winter and wanted to get married. He talked to the boys and they thought he was too old and shouldn't get married. I said "Well I think you should, she's not marrying you for your money." "She knows what she's getting into so you'd better go ahead." It went on that way all winter and eventually he went down and married her. The poor woman told me afterwards that he and Mr. Holmes [the man she worked for] spent the wedding day talking old times. They'd known each other since they were kids—so they had a big time. The bride was kind of left out in the cold. Dad was married in the spring of 1918, he was seventy and she was around fifty.

So they cleared out gradually. One summer there was only two of us there, everyone was married or gone. I was cooking for Jack and any hired men we had in one house and Annie was cooking for Art. I thought this was a little too much—two men to cook for and two women around. I was taking off.

After 1926 I went down to Oakville, Manitoba. All the family had scattered by then. I stayed with my aunt. One day we went to Win-

nipeg and saw a woman, she was an Anglican deaconess in the church. I told them that I always wanted to be a nurse, so she went over to the hospital and saw the superintendent of nurses. The nun said "Well send her over to see me." She told me if I went to school for a year she'd take me into training the next year. I had grade eight in Saskatchewan and she said she'd take me if I got grade nine. We went to see the principal and the only place they could put me was with the grade eight failures. He was just putting them on because they were too young to stop school. The rest of the school called them the dumbbell class. I couldn't have had a better class, those teachers were working their crazy heads off trying to get those little brats to do something. Out of thirty-two, four of us passed the next year. All the dumbbell kids were thirteen and fourteen year olds and after two days nobody paid any attention to me. I was the same size as the kids [five feet tall] and ran around all winter on kids bus tickets.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I went to school in 1927 and I was born in 1893 [34 years old].

Q: What had made you decide you wanted to be a nurse?

A: I'd always wanted to be a nurse, I had so much nursing to do at home without knowing anything about it. I had brought one guy through—he had quinsy one time—that was an abscess under his chin. Things like that.

Q: How old were you when you went into nurses training?

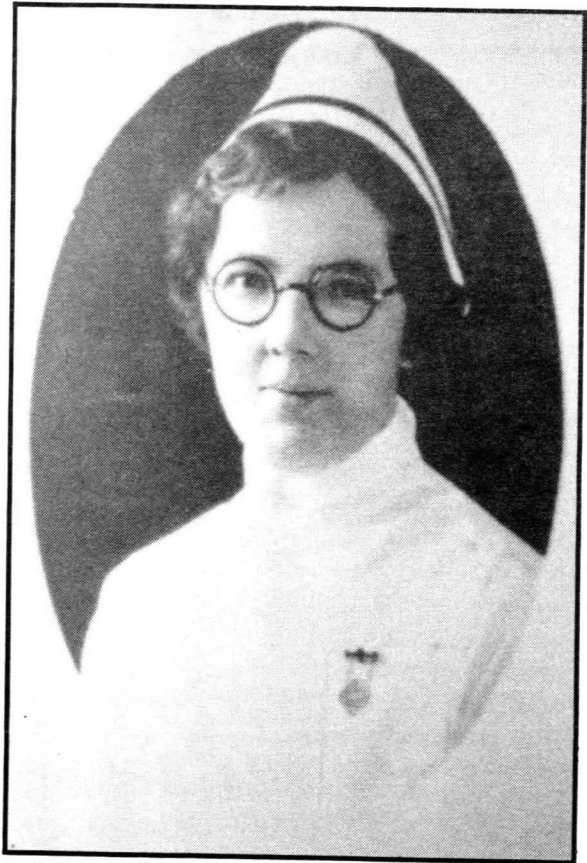
A: Nobody ever asked me my age, which is a darn good job because I was thirty-five when I started.

Q: What was the age limit?

A: I found out afterwards that was the limit.

Q: Tell me about the conditions during nurses training?

A: You went on duty at 7:30 a.m. and came off at 7:30 p.m. with two hours off in the afternoon. If it was your half day off—you got a half day off a week, you stayed and kept things going until 12:30 p.m. when the first ones had their dinner. They'd go back to work and you got off at 1:00 p.m. for your half day. You could stay out until 11:00 p.m. if the superintendent was in good humor, otherwise it was 9:00 p.m. you'd have to be home. Usually that's what it was. Occasionally she'd let you have until 11:00 p.m. but you'd have to have a good excuse to get that. It was a twelve hour day and we got an allowance of \$5.00 a month.



GRETA CRAIG:
graduation 1930.

Q: Were you on the wards right from the beginning?

A: Absolutely, right from the day I went in. My trunk didn't arrive in time with my uniforms—we had to have our uniforms before we went in there, so they put us rolling bandages for the first two days until our trunks came. They had built a new nurses home and were able to have them all together. Before that the nurses were all boarding out around the town. They'd opened it up a lot more, there were more nurses in than ever before. There was about seventy-five of us that graduated in 1930.

Q: How many qualified nurses were there on the floor with you?

A: There would be one head nurse, a sister—the sisters were registered nurses too and the rest were students. We were well supervised. We were there for six months before we got a cap at all and we had a medical before they gave us our cap. They have the reputation down through the States and everywhere else for being the best most qualified nurses there are. If any of our nurses went down to the States they could get jobs so fast it would make them dizzy. St. Boniface was good.

Q: St. Boniface, was that the hospital you were at?

A: Yes, soup beans and hash we used to call it. It was run by the Grey Nuns then. A nun ran the whole blinking outfit and there was two buildings. There was one regular hospital with about five hundred beds and then there was the isolation hospital where they used to have patients with T.B., diphtheria and all that. We all had a spell of working there, we had to learn that type of stuff too.

Q: Do you remember there being many woman doctors?

A: There were some, they were just starting but they weren't accepted by the medical profession generously at all.

I came out of training when I was thirty-eight and got married that fall. I never did much nursing out actually. I did help one woman later on. There was some Dutch people working a farm near where my husband was farming. She was having a baby so I went and stayed with her. She had three before that but this one was the first one that she could nurse afterward herself. The doctors took a notion after a while that they should put them on formula right away. She had done it with her others. I was with her when the baby was born. In fact *really* with her. (chuckle)

Q: You were the midwife?

A: Yeah I was the midwife, and something happened that I have never seen before or since. She was keeping house for an old bachelor, and the old sap just burned green wood and it never kept the house warm. The baby's head came out and she started to squawk to no end because the cold air hit her. She let everybody know she was there before she was there. Just her head was out but she sure told the world. (chuckles) By the time the baby was completely born the doctor arrived and looked after the rest of it. That was about all the nursing I did after training until long afterwards.

Q: Where did you meet your husband?

A: I had met him when we were little kids. We started school the same time in Mt. Pleasant school west of Portage la Prairie. They moved to Oakville in 1902 and I didn't see him again until I was twenty-six I guess. When I was in training he used to come down every once in a while and see me. His sister went in training a year after I did so he had a good excuse to come and visit. He was a confirmed bachelor from Oakville. His chum always said when they'd ask him when he was going to get married, "Oh I will after Ted Craig does." And he did, the year after. The first years we were married, 1931 the start of the depression, the price of stuff was down terrifically. We

went to Togo to get married. We took our bridesmaid and best man along with us. (chuckle)

Q: Did you get married in a church?

A: No we got married at Dad's house. A little wee log house out on the side of the hill. The preacher was from Togo.

Q: Did most people get married at home?

A: Yes most of the weddings were just at home.

Q: Did you have a little party afterwards?

A: No my stepmother and my sister-in-law put on a big turkey dinner for us. Then we went back to Oakville to the shack.

Q: Did your husband have a farm in Oakville?

A: Yes his dad got land for both he and his brother. We lived there and had three children, Martha, Edna and Jack.

Q: Did you have your children in the shack on the farm?

A: Well my sister-in-law and her chum were staying at a house in town so I went there to have Martha because we just had a little small place. Edna was born in the little small place. When I had Edna, Beulah Holiday a nurse that graduated with me came down and stayed in the shack. The house wasn't built then, it was built the next summer. There was only seventeen months between Edna and Martha and I wondered how in the blazes I was going to live with two kids that year.

Q: Do you mean it was so crowded with two kids?

A: Well yes, it was just a garage—just one room with two kids!

And my gosh we had a crop of oats that year that went over a hundred bushels to the acre. By the time we got it sold we were able to buy enough lumber to build a house. They started the house in the fall and we moved in the six-

teenth of November, a beautiful day. This was 1934.

We just had to live for a year and a half with the two kids in the small place. When Jack was born I had Flora Fulton from Portage with me.

Q: Was the doctor there when you had your children?

A: Yes the doctor was there every time. It used to be a nice place for him to come. We just had one room and the couch there so he just parked himself and went to sleep until he had to get up and look after me. It was comfortable, he used to enjoy it I think. We stayed in bed for ten days in those days. Most of us after we had one or two kids felt that was just perfect, we could stand it a little longer. (chuckle)

Q: So the nurse would stay that long?

A: Oh yes the nurse would stay that long.

Q: Did most women have nurses come, or were you just lucky because you knew them?

A: Well there was a nurse that trained in the Grace Hospital in Winnipeg who lived in the neighborhood and she used to go around nursing. She'd go and stay until the mother was up again.

Q: How often did you visit with people?

A: Most of the time we went visiting. We had good friends, an old couple who had a big house and we used to go over there pretty near every Sunday.

Q: Tell me about the grain co-ops.

A: Well we had the MFAC, that was the Manitoba Federation of Agriculture and Co-operation. The woman that got it all started was Mrs. Wood. She was a farmer's wife down in Oakville. She's one of the celebrated women in the Hall of Fame. She'd been a school teacher and went around lecturing and organizing a lot of it. The farm women all belonged to the MFAC. Everybody backed it, all the farmers

backed it. The co-op started in Saskatchewan and made its biggest move there.

Q: How did you get involved in the movement?

A: I got involved as being sent as a representative of the women's organization to a convention in Saskatchewan. A guy came up from California around 1923 and gave a talk on it. My brother was sent up as a delegate for the men and I went up as a delegate for the women. They recognize my brother for this but they won't recognize me because I'm a woman. They wouldn't and haven't yet recognized women the same way as they have the men.

Q: What happened at this conference?

A: We had a women's convention and we'd send resolutions to the men's part [of the MFAC]. To get anything anywhere we'd send in the resolutions made by the women and if the men would send it, it went on. We were supposed to be an auxiliary. They didn't let us be an auxiliary unless it suited them. Men don't very easily let women take over in anything if they can help it.

Q: What were you concerned with as farm women?

A: With everything! You can hardly believe how the old elevator outfits ripped off the farmers. It was horrible. I knew two Ukrainian fellows who didn't speak good English, who took their loads of grain in. My brother had thrashed for them, he'd been a thrasher for a long time and he told us the nicest wheat he'd seen all fall was theirs. When these fellows came down to pay their thrashing bill, because he'd thrashed for them I asked how they made out with their wheat. Most of the wheat that fall was going number one Northern, and do you know what those so and so's in the elevator did to those guys? Gave them number four. Just because they were Ukrainian and didn't

speaking good English. That was the free enterprise elevator business. This was the kind of thing the co-op killed. They ripped farmers off as much as they could all the way through.

Q: What other work did you do for the MFAC?

A: The MFAC used to put on suppers for the co-op movement when it first started. A group of people from all over the world came over to see how the cooperation system worked. So the MFAC put on a banquet for them under the co-op banner. They did everything. The farm women were trying to get women doing things.

We had the Red Cross in the war time. My husband could knit and he knitted during the war. He would knit the men's big sweaters with the rolled neck. In two weeks he'd finish a whole blooming sweater. The Red Cross supplied the wool and this woman would go and get it and dole it out to everyone. She gave me the pin [for war work] but she said "You shouldn't have it, this belongs to Ted by rights". They all knew Ted was doing the knitting. He had more spare time than I did and would knit when he listened to the news. They used to come in and listen to the news all the time. I'd start a pair of socks and in a couple of days he'd have the things finished.

There was so many men killed overseas. Before that there was hardly enough women to go around and then there was a totally larger number of women than men. That made a heck of a difference in every way. When I was a kid women were very scarce. We'd go to dances and there would be many more men—we'd get all the dances we could possibly stand. After the war they used to have ladies choice to give all the women a chance to have a dance.

Q: Did you do any other type of group work?

A: Well one Christmas six of us got together and everybody made a big batch of their

special type of cookie. We had a meeting and divided all the cookies so we each had six different types of cookies for Christmas.

There was the United Farm Women of Manitoba, we used to have a meeting every month or so.

Q: What was the purpose of the United Farm Women of Manitoba?

A: It was to get women involved in all the different works, the schools and the community. The farm women were trying to get what they're still trying to get, women involved in everything.