

Subject: Laughton/MacDonell genealogy

6 Apr 2004

Mary Frances & David have been keeping me up-to-date on the E-mails flying about, so I have concluded I should stick my oar in too. First, the clan as they joined the British troops for the American Rebellion all were signed on as McDonell & mustered out as MacDonell. In the 1700's they were Gaelic speakers & couldn't care less which way it was spelled by the Sassenachs. The young gentlemen were, however, often fairly well educated, many of them at the Scottish College in Valladolid, Spain. My mother, Mary Elizabeth, was baptized "McD" but I got "MacD". As a general comment, the bits & pieces I have assembled are loaded with inconsistencies & contradictions. George Van Wyck's siblings are a case in point. I have all sorts of paper trails, the family tombstone in Walkerton, & several funeral cards. Fred, Harry, St. Clair [known as Clair] & Louise [known as "Tot" for reasons no one seemed to remember] Van Wyck you all know. The others were: two John's, both dying in infancy, one 2 Oct 1881 at 1 month & 15 days, the other in 1898; I also have a note of another dying at 6, but no other trace! Paul, the one who drowned at Grand Bend off the pier, was 1887 to 1 July 1899, age 12; Edna* who died of scarlet fever, was 1894 to 1894 according to the tombstone, "died April 24, 1894, aged 2 years" according to her funeral card; Bessie was 7 Nov 1898 to 26 Dec 1905, so GVL knew her well. *[*Harriet's Tot's sible, b'day 22 Apr 1894, 2 days, not 2 years.]* Richard asks for more on the Laughton brothers. He has covered GVL's military career very thoroughly. GVL joined the territorials [militia] when he was 14, but his mother ratted on him & he was tossed out as under age. GVL moved to Toronto with Tot after his mother died & his father "remarried too soon" in Tot's very strong opinion, stayed with the HVL's to finish HS [Harbord, I think], began to article with Mary as he began his law studies at U of T before going from the equivalent of the COTC into Active Service in WW I in his freshman year. I have a dim recollection that GVL met Beth at the military hospital in Saskatoon when he was the second person hired for the DSCR [Department of Soldiers' Civilian Reestablishment = DVA] with the job of setting up TB hospitals for the returning troops. TB killed more allies than the Germans. When he was mustered out after a medical board, he was told by the Colonel chairman of the board he might live a couple of years if he took it easy - easy was getting married & the DSCR! The same colonel chaired his board on his reenlistment in WW II & exclaimed, "Laughton, what are you doing here, you've been dead for 25 years!" He joined MacLean's, later Maclean-Hunter, after his stint with DSCR & as Circulation Manager, later Director, he became the leading Canadian figure in that field. He founded the Canadian wing of the Periodical Press Association, which set ethical standards for the business, & was its President for life, even after his retirement. You presumably know lots more about him. Fred was one of my & Eleanor's favourite people, kind, a great sense of humour, & a real charmer. Fred took over the store when his mother died & his father left the business to become a drummer. He was town clerk of Parkhill for over 40 years as well as parliamentary assistant as an MLA to the Minister of Highways. [There is a Laughton township somewhere in the north, Kenora county, i think.] I loved to go campaigning with him as a kid because of the number of different pies at the strawberry socials. I have his statue of Sir John A., whose hand he had once shaken. Myra, whose HS Greek texts taught me to read Greek in Grade 8, was his bookkeeper, & I often spent Saturday evening till after midnight with her at the store. They had a typewriter on which I learned to type, unfortunately. It had 3 rows of keys instead of 4, 3 fonts on each key accessed by down as well as up shift. Numerals were upper shift on the top row. It is now in the Carle-

ton U Journalism museum.

Bits about Harry are scattered through Mary & Tot. They lived quite close to us in north Toronto & we saw a lot of them.

Clair we saw less of than the others, only occasionally at Grand Bend. He was a gravelly-voiced amiable sort. Clair was a drummer, like his father in later years, in his case for a pickle manufacturer. Like Fred & Myra, they had no children. They lived latterly in Royal Oak, Michigan. When he died & Eva moved to Grand Bend, Van voluntarily looked after a lot of her affairs, but got scant thanks for his pains.

Mary Jane Hutton wasn't anywhere near the first woman MD to graduate in Canada. That honour goes to Augusta Gullen, nee Stowe, a Vic student who got her degrees in 1883 through the Toronto School of Medicine. The next four graduated in 1884 were from Queen's, the first two from Trinity were in 1887. Mary Jane McDonell, nee Hutton, was from Trinity in 1890 at age 20! She kept up her medical society membership as long as I am aware, & therefore received all the ads for new drugs, which were kept in a rolltop desk downstairs where I was allowed to rummage. I also have several of her texts, including her Chemistry [1885; "Chromium is thought to be a metal. Its salts are used in tanning...Formic acid is prepared by distilling red ants"] & Gray's "Anatomy". When Eleanor visited Goldie in Hensall, where Goldie's father was bank manager, Molly [Mary Jane] was their Sunday School teacher! Word of Eleanor & me "going together" reached our parents by the Hensall conduit. Molly was a daughter of Dr. James Hutton of Denny, Stirlingshire, son of Capt Hutton, a commander who lost an arm at Trafalgar & was awarded an estate. James emigrated at 19 to Forest, Ont. He was a Vic grad, & as a telegrapher received the first news in Canada about the battle of Balaclava. Molly's sister Jemima [Aunt Mina] was a suffragette, a U of T grad, 1898, with a German MA.

I knew Mary's mother, the large Mrs Buckley, completely dominated by her tiny but redoubtable mother, Mrs Powell. I was at Mrs P's 90th birthday, where she debated the male Laughton siblings into the ground, announced she was going to see them again for her 100th & die, same result, did. Mary was a very sharp cookie, but brittle with everyone except Mary Frances. Harry was as easy-going as she was brittle, a strangely disparate pair. She & Harry joked that she stood first in their law studies, he came second. Their son, Barent Van Wyck [Cornelius Barentse VW was the one who emigrated from the Netherlands to New Amsterdam in 1660 & established the family farm in Flatbush, later home of the Brooklyn Dodgers] was a brilliant student & musician, but very sensitive & somewhat effeminate. He joined the RCAF in WW II, stripped naked in a hotel, left the windows open in the winter time & froze to death. Earlier attempts to commit suicide failed. Harry developed a doctor-induced deadly phenobarbital addiction. I visited them on my way to a summer RCAF posting to find Harry had just died & waited with Mary for the police & a coroner because their GP was out of town & therefore unable to sign the death certificate.

On the advice of Fred & Harry, Tot went to Business College. Tot worshipped her mother & cut her father dead for the rest of his life. I have the love letters of John Hugh to Louella when he was struggling in Walkerton to make a life to which he could bring her. He wrote long loving letters about his work, his church & the youth groups he was helping. Her replies were single pages filled in a huge script with complaints that he was taking too long! Because of the rift, I rarely saw my grandfather, except a couple of times at Grand Bend when Tot wasn't there. I was quite surprised to read the glowing obituaries collected by Ivan Laughton in Nelson, BC, with encomia from the Gideons, the Travellers, school boards & other groups which he had helped. Tot worked for a bit at the Canadian Bank of Commerce [before the

merger with Imperial], then as Harry's secretary when Harry was estate manager at National Trust [later senior VP]. She left to travel around the world with a friend, Aileen McDougall. They stopped in Vancouver to earn some money, & Tot worked as secretary for the Men's Credit Association, met Pearl Hopper at a Chautauqua Settlement House & became interested in welfare work. [Pearl's niece Liz was later one of Eleanor's college friends!] I have a letter to Tot at the Settlement from Harry advising her not to take all the cares of the world on her shoulders (written on 12 Dec 1920, the day of Van's christening - "was proud of Van's perfect behaviour".) When she returned to TO, she took a certificate (1923) & diploma (1924) in social work, but got so involved with the girls in a home for wayward girls that she had to quit, & retired to Terra Cotta with a canning factory job, at Brampton if I remember correctly. Her Terra Cotta home had been a way station for drivers taking supplies to Niagara during the war of 1812. My mother said she was an occupational physiotherapist. A gal who was on the governing board of the physiotherapists visited Van & Maureen at Grand Bend, saw the pair of pictures of Beth & GVL in their WW I uniforms, & exclaimed "That's the original physiotherapy uniform; I've read about it but never seen it before." I don't know when the occupational & physio were separated. I have many unlabelled pictures of soldiers in what seems to be a hospital setting, some with Beth in them. Beth stayed with Aunt Gretta Gauld in Clinton when she was going to HS there, as reported by much-awarded children's author, Jean Little, whom I knew as a baby. Gretta was Molly's first cousin. She & Rev. Gauld were medical missionaries in Formosa, now Taiwan. She taught me some Chinese phrases. Jean was blind at birth, improved somewhat, slowly worsened to using a computer with one letter filling the screen at a time, is now forced to use a computer with voice synthesizer. Lots more where this came from - some of it may even possibly be true!

Paul MacDonell Laughton, 6 Apr 2004

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More E-mails arrived today from MF, whose patience is outstanding. I am glad to hear that Tot's family Bible has been preserved by you, Geordie, with the blank-filling dates in it. Especially the birthdate for Edna of 22 Apr 1894, showing that the funeral card should have read 2 days instead of 2 years, & the date for Clair.

Aunt Myra's name was Myra Elmira Rogers, although I have forgotten why. She was born in Long Lake, NY. Her father became manager of an apple-packing plant in Parkhill & Myra bookkeeper for White & Mays' store. When the apple plant folded, the rest of the family went back to the US but Myra stayed on.

Mary's father Buckley owned a hotel in Parkhill, her grandfather Powell a hotel in Thetford. John VW Laughton, the first child of JH & Louella, was born in Thetford, Fred at St Mary's, so JH & Louella moved around a bit before settling in Parkhill where Harry & the rest were born. JH was town clerk of Parkhill before Fred, & active in the School Board.

Geordie mentions Beth's siblings. She had 3, not 4, of whom Mildred is the only one still very much alive in Listowel. Dorothy was a very sad case. It was alleged that she had a sunstroke, but for whatever reason she quit teaching & spent the rest of her life sitting in a big window looking out at the street & being a bit of the family drudge. GVL was her executor by common consent, since she died intestate. Getting rid of the few bonds that made up her life savings just about drove him around the bend, with all the distant relatives to be contacted who had some possible claim on the pittance. GVL and Ted Taman were also trustees for Molly's assets, charged with paying her \$40 twice monthly out of them.

Beth's brother Alan was a bit of a handsome ne'er-do-well. He took me for a ride in his car along the country roads, sitting in his lap & driving the car. I fell out without significant damage but considerable family consternation. His beautiful wife Melba died from childbirth complications shortly after the arrival of Patsy, so Patsy was initially brought up by Molly. Since Patsy thought Molly was her mother, I was induced to call Molly Auntie, to my dismay. That left me without a Grannie, so that's what I called my grandfather McDonell! When Molly grew too old to cope with Patsy, she was shipped off to Melba's mother in Tulsa, Oklahoma, & contact with Patsy became rare. She married Don Bissell, a chemical engineer who probably was one of the first to computerize the operations of a chemical factory. He was in great demand to extend his ideas to glass manufacture & brewing, among others. He is rather deaf. [We visited Patsy in Ohio on our way to Kentucky during his glass period.] We visited them in Arkansas a few years ago, & they came to our 50th anniversary in 1996. On a second visit to Ottawa, they went on to visit Keith & Linda in Fredericton, then went on to NS where Patsy was victim of a brain catastrophe & died after an air ambulance trip back to Arkansas. When I was in Hensall I used to try to teach poor Patsy what I was learning in school at the time. She was a gifted writer & advocate for the down & out. Their children included a famed danseur noble some of you may have heard of.

Charles Alexander McDonell was the Hensall entrepreneur, owning the hardware & furniture-undertaking businesses. I think he was the local car dealer & insurance man as well, but check with Mildred on that. I think there was a fire that damaged both stores, & Charlie used the insurance to help his two managers to get the businesses going again. [He continued with the insurance business, I believe. Van will know.] We got our blond maple furniture that we still use from his furniture guy, Mr Bonthron, essentially at cost. Charlie was also said to hold the Canadian distance record

for throwing a baseball. He loved lawn bowling in his later years. One of my more vivid memories was that he was prescribed a raw egg daily, which he expertly slurped out of the shell! He was a bridge shark, with a phenomenal memory. He remembered every card played. His McDonell father is buried in the RC cemetery attached to St Peter's RC church, #4 N of Clandeboye, E side. He died 18 Apr 1886. He married a strong Protestant & is said to have sat in his rocking chair muttering to himself in Gaelic.

By the way, if anyone is interested in reading about one of the more colourful McDonell's, uncle of the one at Queenston Heights with Brock, try Ontario Historical Society Papers & Records, Vol XXII, 1925, pp.20-57, for Lieut. Col. John Macdonell of Glengarry, first speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada & terror of the Mohawk Valley with Butler's Rangers behind the US lines in the Rebellion.

I can't figure out who "Brother Jack" is re the letter to LVL of 2 Oct 1912. Her half-brother Jack came from the second marriage of John Hugh. Re married women not being allowed to sign as Nursing sister: Eleanor was denied admission to Library school when she admitted being engaged to me. Richard, I have been to Orkney & seen Willie o' the Park in a nursing home not long before he died. Unfortunately he spoke Orcadian, not English. He was the youngest son of the youngest brother, David [married Margaret Laughton of Easterbister], of John, John Hugh's father, & Jerome. I have piles of genealogical charts from Jessie Aitken, granddaughter of Sara[h] Laughton Wooldrage. I carried on correspondence with Jessie, & John, Archie & Lily L. of Kirkwall until the last one [Lily] recently died. I also corresponded until recently with Norman, grandson of Jerome, who is buried at Walkerton where I talked to a gravedigger who remembered sitting on Jerome's lap fascinated by his tall tales about Orkney. Mary Frances knows Lily's son. Holm [pronounced Ham] is an Orkney parish ~ township, & includes Vigga & also the family island Lamman or Lambholm, now part of the Churchill barricade of Scapa Flow, the great Royal Navy roadstead that was penetrated by German subs with deadly effect at the outset of WW II [like Pearl Harbour - several battleships sunk.]

Jane & Jean are interchangeable in Orkney. Spelling may just be our more recent preoccupation. I have the birth & marriage certificates of Eleanor's little milliner aunt "Wearie", & all 3 of her given names are spelled differently on the two documents. Eleanor's maternal grandmother was plain Mary Critchley, & she ran amuck with her kids, eg Lily Hannah Valerie, Leola Priscilla Maude, Percy William John.

Richard, you know not what you ask of David. I have fat folders of bumph on MacDonell & Laughton, & a drawer full of miscellaneous junk, much of it little scraps of paper jotted down when one of relatives got in the mood to communicate when I was unprepared. One is a brown bag filled with tombstone information in the Holm church cemetery by flashlight while E sorted laundry on the back of the little station wagon.

Geordie, I am curious to know whether the state is mentioned where Louise Estelle's Charleston birthplace is to be found...Getting dates for Holm, Orkney is unlikely, because the parish church burned down with all its records about 1815. Census records only give you 10-year periods. John Laughton was born 30 Apr 1801 to Gilbert Laughton & Margaret Miller. In 1841 he was head of the Vigga farm, married to Jean [Jane] Spence. No mention of sons John [born 1829] or Thomas, but Jerom [sic] was there. In 1851, no mention of John senior, & Thomas is head of the household, tho' John was the elder. Two sisters, Jean & Sarah are missing, but they would have been 20 & 19, so may have gone off married. In 1851 it is now Jerome in the parochial records & Jerom in the census. PML, 18 Apr 04