

Margaret Isabella Thompson Baillie

Compiled by: Gladys H. (Milford) Paulhus October 20, 2015

Margaret Isabella Thompson Baillie was a pioneer of Saskatchewan.

Margaret Isabella Fowlie was born January 25, 1885, the fifth child of John Fowlie and Elizabeth (Taylor) of. Rosehearty, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

When Maggie, as she was commonly known by friends and family, was fifteen years of age, she sailed to Canada to be with her older sister Jessie. Jessie was married to James Duncan, and lived in Winnipeg. In Winnipeg Maggie worked in a dress making and millinery shop. Maggie met and married William Thompson in May of 1901 when she was sixteen years of age. William Thompson owned a profitable draying business and they were known as teamsters.

In 1903 William and Maggie moved to a little community of Scottish people known as Gap View, near Broadview, Saskatchewan. A few years later William Thompson bought a farm just north of Stoughton, Saskatchewan. He built a beautiful large farm house and barn. William and Maggie had four sons: Fred who remained a bachelor, William who married Dorothy Bolton, Cecil who married Ruby Smales, and Gordon also remained a bachelor. They also had three daughters: Bella who never married, Annie who married Eric Procknow, and Elizabeth who married David Milford.

Early in 1915 William went by train to Rochester, Minnesota for an operation on a stomach ulcer. While recovering back home on the farm in Stoughton, he was called to the barn to pull a colt coming feet first. While pulling the colt, it kicked him and ruptured his stomach. Maggie nursed him for ten days, but William died in his own bed on April 26, 1915. Maggie held the funeral for her husband in her own large parlor at home on the farm. Elizabeth, the youngest child, was a year and a half old at that time.

James Baillie, William Thompson's first cousin, had been lead hand on the Thompson farm for some time. James Baillie took over the complete operation of the farm. James Baillie and Margaret Isabela were married in 1916.

It is hard to imagine the heartbreak and hardship Maggie had to endure when she was forced by Estate Laws of Canada to leave the beautiful farm home that she had helped establish and move to a tiny rented frame house to live as a share cropper.

Margaret Baillie gave birth to another seven children. James and Margaret Baillie had four sons: James who married Jean Bossenberry, Garfield who married Wilma Smales, Forbes who married Jean Buckingham, and Allan who never married. They also had three daughters: Melvina who married Archie MacDonald, Margaret who married Howard Hall and Evelyn who married Leo La Valley.

The Thompson farm was well established; it had many horses and various livestock. It was well equipped with fine farm machinery including a threshing machine and steam engine which were used for custom threshing.

It was a very sad and devastating fact that Maggie's first husband William left no will; within two years the farm and all property they owned had to be sold. Everything except for a few things, for Jim Baillie to continue farming, was gone. The family had to move to a rented farm four miles north of Stoughton.

The Estate Laws of Canada, at the time, had all money from the sale of property put into a trust fund until the youngest child was twenty-one years of age. In 1935, when Elizabeth Milford turned twenty-one, the proceeds from the trust fund were equally divided amongst the Thompson family. During the Great Recession of 1929, the trust fund money was nearly all lost. Maggie, who was fifty years old at that time, must have been shaken by this terrible loss for herself and her children.

The terrible Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 brought hardship and sorrow to many pioneer families. The whole Baillie -Thompson family were stricken by this epidemic. A nurse was brought out from Stoughton to live in the house and care for them. Bella, Maggie's sixteen year old daughter, was training as a nurse in Stoughton at this time. She came down with the flu and went back to work too soon. Bella died of a relapse in 1919. Now Maggie had to endure the heart break of burying her eldest daughter.

Margaret Isabella was also interested in nursing and studied medical texts to eventually become a mid-wife. She was called upon to help the women of the district in the birthing of their children. The doctors did not always get to their patients in time and she delivered many children on her own. Women required a nurse for up to ten days, so she would stay in the home giving special care to mother and baby. She was called to treat pneumonia, cuts and bruises. Doctors were often not called because of poor road conditions and great distances.

In 1927 the Baillie family moved to another rented farm south of Froude in the Blackheath school district. Elizabeth Thompson and seven Baillie children went to Blackheath School.

The new farm had a large red barn and a large green house. There were a lot of trees around a great garden. Her oldest son, Fred, lived at home as a hired man. There was a lot of work to be done with such a large family. He would take over a lot of the cooking when Maw, as everyone called her, was called to nurse many of her friends when they had their children.

Maggie had a strange looking washing machine that rocked back and forth by pushing a wooden handle. It took a lot of muscle to rock that machine full of water and clothing. When she did find time to sit down to listen to "Maw Perkins" on the radio, she kept her fingers busy darning and knitting socks, mittens, gloves, and sweaters for her children and grandchildren.

Maggie also found time to get to church and Ladies Aid meetings. As president she was instrumental in getting box cars of food and clothing to Froude from women in Ontario. This was during the Dirty Thirties when many families were in great need.

In 1947 Jim and Maggie moved to a comfortable home which they bought in Weyburn. She now had running water and electricity which made her life a lot easier. She continued to work very hard in her garden and made good money taking in boarders.

Her sister, Jessie Duncan, came to live with her. She cared for Jessie until Jessie's death. In 1956 Maggie's husband James passed away from complications as a result of a tractor rollover.

Maggie lived to see two husbands and nine of her children pass away. Through all of her hardships, and heartbreaks, Maggie never lost her joy of living or her joy of seeing each new grandchild. She understood and loved every one of them.

Margaret Isabella was born on Robbie Bum's Day. She loved her trips on the train to Regina where she would meet with many of her Fowlie relatives to make haggis and hear the pipes and watch the Highland dancing. In her broad Scottish accent she would tell stories and her ringing laughter brought joy to any room.

One of her most memorable sayings was "that's life" as she met each adversity in an amazing life of ninety-nine years. Our pioneer grand-mother passed away in June of 1984.

As descendants of such amazing and courageous pioneer women who came west to open up the prairies, we should try to live up to their legacy. It is a great challenge.