

Clara Benning (nee MacLean) - A Prairie Woman

Submitted: Vera Anderson, daughter

Clara Catherine MacLean was born on a farm south of Weyburn on June 12, 1904. Her parents – mother, Louise (nee Ingberg) of Swedish descent and father, Hector MacLean of Scottish descent- came to Saskatchewan from North Dakota after their marriage in 1902.

Louise, who had very little education, was an excellent homemaker and cook. She loved the outdoors so there was always garden produce and chickens to provide good food. Hector, who taught school in Ontario at one time, insisted his children get a good education. From these two Clara developed a love of home life and education.



Her elementary education was at a one room country school with pupils attending from grade one to grade eight. She had a sister and two brothers. For about three years a widowed aunt and her son lived with the MacLeans. Their farm house was small and, of course, there were no amenities.

When Clara graduated from grade eight, her parents bought a small house in Weyburn. She and her brothers and sister lived there while Clara went to the Collegiate. She was in charge of this household spring and fall; her mother stayed with them in the winter after the crop was harvested.

After graduating from grade twelve she took her teacher training which was available in Weyburn at that time. She taught at several country schools and eventually at Riverview, the school she had attended as a child.

In 1927 she married Lloyd Benning, who was the son of Mary and Henry Benning, neighbors and friends of the MacLeans. Lloyd was a farmer and Clara became a typical farm wife. Their first home was a small, poorly constructed house where their first child was born. He lived only three months after contracting pneumonia.

In 1931 Clara and Lloyd started building a house on the farm they bought. This was the beginning of the Depression years so the house wasn't really finished for several years.

Their family grew to include seven sons and four daughters. Clara coped as did all the women of those years - baking bread in the oven of a coal stove, churning butter and her sewing machine never idle as everything her girls wore was home-made. Often she remade clothes that were given to them from aunts and friends.

It was during this period in her life that her father died and her mother moved away to live with Clara's sister. Clara missed them dearly but she was so fortunate to have Mr. and Mrs. Benning for in-laws. They were unfailingly good to the young family. Clara and her mother-in-law were great friends.

Farming improved in the 1940s, crops were better, and life was a little easier for all. In December, 1944 Clara had cancer surgery in Regina followed by the birth of her son Brian in February. Then came radiation treatments. Once more she was blessed to have the love and support of Lloyd's family and her friends and neighbors. She survived and life became normal again.

In 1959 Clara became a widow - a very traumatic time for her. She and Lloyd were inseparable and there were things she had never done. She learned to drive, learned to go to church by herself, and as time went on, she travelled alone. She stayed in the old farm house they had built. Her sons, Clifton and Patrick, were the farmers; she contributed whatever she could.

She belonged to the Catholic Women's League and the Queen Elizabeth Home and School. She was a long time and very enthusiastic member of the South Weyburn Community. Picnics and Christmas concerts, where she could watch her children and grandchildren, were the best part of her life.

Three of her daughters were teachers while the youngest was a nurse. Her sons, besides running the farm, were good and productive citizens contributing to their town and community. Sadly, she was predeceased by two sons, a daughter, and a daughter-in-law.

For many years, this prairie farm woman would get nicely dressed, put on a beautiful hat, and go to town to shop on Saturdays. Hats were her treat for herself. Her family teased her that when she went to Winnipeg to see her elderly mother, she always managed to get to Eaton's to buy a new hat.

She left the farm in 1984. I believe her profession at that time in her life was grandmother - then great grandmother.

Clara Catherine Benning died at ninety three years of age. Her funeral was held in St. Vincent de Paul church where she had been a faithful member for more than seventy years.