

Susannah Burnett (nee Weir) A Real Pioneer Woman

Submitted: Susanna Heaman, Weyburn and Margaret Shier, Oxbow

Our grandmother, Susannah Burnett, born April 22, 1862, was the daughter of Robert Weir and Martha Sutton. She was born in township of London, Middlesex County, Ontario. She had one sister Hulda and two brothers, Samuel and George. Susannah became a teacher and we have proof of her attending Normal School Summer Session in 1886 in Toronto. She taught at Pilkington, Ontario.

On January 2, 1889 she married Robert F. Burnett, The ceremony was held at Brownsworth, Ontario performed by a Reverend W. J. Armstrong. Following their marriage they took up residence on their farm at Elora, Ontario.

Five of their six children were born while they lived at Elora. In 1899 her husband came west to Oxbow and rented one quarter section in the Scout Hill district. This land had a small frame house on it and also 40 acres ready to be planted.

In June of 1900 Robert moved his wife and five children out west. They boarded a mixed train for the adventure of "Taming the Wild West" as the Ontario people called it. The trip was long and tiring, but they met three other farmers who were doing the same thing and they became life-long friends in the same area.

On October 6, 1900, Susannah gave birth to her sixth child, and this prairie born baby girl lived to the age of one hundred and five.

In 1902 they purchased one half section of land from the Hudson Bay Company in the Auburn district, WV 28-3-1-W2. They built up a fine home, a large barn, and attractive outbuildings. In 1906 they received from the Indian Head Tree Nursery about 4,000 trees and planted a fine shelterbelt as well as some fruit trees. They were among the first to do this in the area.

Susannah always grew a large garden and raised poultry: chickens, ducks, turkeys, and geese. She gathered hops, made yeast, and she made her own vinegar. She had a huge asparagus garden that she harvested in season and enjoyed as a shrub the rest of the year. As well she canned meat, fruit, vegetables, and pickles and harvested herbs and spices. I can still remember the wonderful aroma in her pantry.

She sewed for herself and her family and knit socks and sweaters and even beautiful lace. She made beautiful quilts, pillows, and comforters filled with the down from her ducks and geese. She sold eggs, cream, and butter for grocery money; our Dad told us that if she didn't have enough, she didn't buy.

They were members of the Presbyterian Church in Ontario and were very involved in getting the church built at Oxbow with Robert being an Elder and Susannah involved in Women's Programs. When a time capsule was opened at the one hundredth anniversary of the church in Oxbow, their names were among those entered there.

Susannah was ever willing to help a neighbour whenever she could, and neighbours were willing to help her. In 1906 there was a bad outbreak of pneumonia and possibly diphtheria. Her two oldest children became very ill and a neighbour woman came to help her. They were able to save the boy but her oldest daughter, Martha, aged fourteen, died. This was a terrible blow to Susannah. Our dad says she never really got over it. She always kept a room as Martha's Room, and treasured many little things that had been Martha's. In fact, I have a set of candle sticks that Aunt Martha receives as a prize for perfect attendance at Sunday school.

Their home was a welcoming place for visitors and as Susannah grew older and needed help, several young women worked for her and also learned from her. She needed a wee rest after dinner so allowed everyone that little time to relax.

As she got older she developed eczema and arthritis which caused her a fair bit of discomfort.

Their oldest son farmed and lived with them and they were able to stay on the farm. They celebrated their Golden (50th) Anniversary January 2, 1938 in their own home with friends and family.

Robert's health failed but she cared for him at home, with the help of family. Her youngest daughter came home and spent a year helping to care for her father. She left her son with his father and brought her six year old girl to go to the country school close by. She stayed until his death in December, 1942 at age 88.

Susannah bravely carried on and in 1945 she had a stroke and went to live with her youngest daughter. She passed away December 16, 1945 at age 83. A life well lived.

I have always thought this little skit described our Grandma Susannah.

GRANDMA' S APRON

When I was a child, Grandma's garments made little impression on me, with the exception of her apron. Since Grandma was a woman of ample proportions, her coverall apron was big affair of printed cotton, slow to soil, and edged all around with bias tape. Its uses were limitless.

The apron made a basket when she gathered eggs from the hen house late in the afternoon. If there were fluffy yellow chicks, they were carried to the back porch during a cold spell. They made the trip in Grandma's apron. When these little darlings grew to hen hood and liked to peck and scratch in Grandma's flowers, she merely flipped her apron at them and they ran squawking to the chicken yard.

And I can see her yet, tossing cracked corn to the hungry flock from her apron. Lots of chips and kindling were needed to start fires in Grandmas' big kitchen stove, she carried them in her apron.

Vegetables and fruit too, lettuce, radish, peas, string beans, carrots, apples and peaches all made their way to the kitchen via Grandmas' apron. It was a carry-all.

While things were cooking, it was a handy "Hold-it", for removing hot pans from the stove.

If the men were in the field and not too far away, the apron waved aloft was signal to come to dinner.

In threshing time or company time, when the big dining room table was crowded with hungry men, Grandma hovered about, passing aromatic dishes, and flipping her apron at the pesky flies.

When the grandchildren came to visit, the apron stood ready to dry away a child's tears. If the little ones were shy, it made a good hiding place in case a stranger appeared suddenly or unexpectedly.

The apron was used countless times to stroke a perspiring brow as Grandma bent over the hot stove, or hoed in the garden under the blistering sun.

In chilly weather Grandma wrapped the apron around her arms as she hurried outside on errands or lingered at the door, chatting to a departing guest.

Hastily and a bit shyly, it dusted tables and chairs if company was sighted coming down the lane.

In the evening, when the day's work was done, Grandma shed her apron of many uses and draped it over the canary's cage.

NOTE: I do not know who wrote the above, but it could have been written for our Grandma Susannah, even to the canary.