

Emma Maud Spence nee Carr

Submitted by Arvilla Carleton, Rea Pederson, and Edith Bernard on behalf of the rest of the family

This is a time of reflection and a time to pay tribute to the thousands of homesteaders who came to make a new life for themselves in this most sparsely populated region of Canada. It was their dream, their mission of freedom and prosperity that prompted them to endure the loneliness of isolation and the unending physical labour necessary for survival in a region characterized by an extreme climate and repeated crop failure.

They developed almost passionate kinship with their land, animals, and their role in family and community life.

This will pay tribute to Emma Maud Spence. She faced hardships and challenges like all women of early years making a life on the prairies and raising a family with invincible determination and a positive, hard-working attitude. She was a wife, mother, teacher, leader and an adventurous woman who helped form some of the foundation of organizations that exists today. Important to the survival of pioneer life was an equal partnership of husband and wife venturing into the business of mixed farming.

Born into an affluent family in St. John, New Brunswick near the Bay of Fundy, Emma Maud Carr was the youngest of four children. She was premature and a sickly baby that was not expected to live. Because of her size, her youngest brother called her Dot which stayed with her for the duration of her life. In school she had to choose between given names, so she chose Maud.

Her father died when she was a baby. Four years later, her mother married a sea captain. She came from a family of ship builders and sea captains. Maud /Dot then lived on a farm where she developed a relationship with animals. She made a rope harness and taught a calf to obey the lines to be driven, then to pull a sleigh. She spent hours grooming cows and horses, talking to them and becoming friends. She fed them and cleaned the barn loving every minute. There was a special bond between Dot and her animals. She believed that kindness pays off.

It was her nature to be independent and her family didn't believe in women working or teaching. Dot was determined to keep up to her brothers. She felt whatever her brothers could do, she could do also.

Her mother believed in education and encouraged her to study. At sixteen, she went to normal school to become a teacher. After teaching a few years, she was invited by her brother Len, who was in Saskatchewan, to teach nearby and keep house for him. She accepted and ventured west. Her other brother Archie and his wife lived near Len's farm, bringing her into the family circle again.

Living on a farm, her love for animals was rekindled and she bought a horse for her journeys to and from school either going by buggy or riding.

After two years, her New Brunswick teaching license expired. She attended normal school again, this time in Regina. Her first teaching assignment was in Abbott, Saskatchewan, a little prairie school. She met her husband Jack Spence, a homesteader from Orkney, Scotland. They married in 1918 and life was back to a small grain farm- a choice Dot was happy to make. They found the need to diversify to be self-sufficient. It was Dot's love of animals and vision that got them started in dairy farming.

They purchased four pure bred Ayrshires because that breed produces milk higher in butterfat. Their desire was to produce the best cream possible. Dot was both an active and creative decision maker in their dairy business. To keep milk and cream cold, they made ice pits. These were holes cut in the ground lined with old railway ties. Ice was cut from the dam, put in the pits, and packed with straw. Being a dairy farmer was labour intensive with Dot participating in all aspects. This included providing feed for the cattle.

They purchased their first tractor in 1926. It was the first one in the area, and the only one they ever owned. Dot, however, preferred the use of horses over the tractor to plough or cultivate.

Drought in the 1930s was a deterrent to successful farming in south east Saskatchewan. The blizzards and crippling cold blunted the determination of the hardest pioneer. There was no electricity in the farm house or barn to provide needed heat. During these extreme cold spells and blizzards, someone had to stay up all night feeding coal to fires. If chimneys got too hot at night, it could cause a chimney fire that would lead to a house fire. They also had to go outside to shovel doorways to prevent the snow from barricading them in. Snow also blocked their cattle in the barn but as soon as the storm was over, they would clear it.

Dot faced hardships and challenges like all women of the early years making a life on the prairies and raising their families with invincible determination and a positive, hardworking outlook. With the drought continuing in 1937, they could no longer get enough feed for the cattle and had to sell most of the herd. Not to be beaten, as crops and economy improved, the dairy business was rebuilt with the same determination and pride. Dot didn't work just to get by, but to do the very best that she could.

They decided to get into the bee business and studied all the literature available on the handling and keeping of bees. Dot found it fascinating to watch, study, and work alongside her husband in this endeavour. Their bees fed on sweet clover, considered to produce the best honey in the world. They continued with the bees after retiring to Webyburn and Dot continued after her husband passed away.

In addition to working the farm, Dot also mothered six girls born over fourteen years. The girls were placed in a manger close to Dot while she worked to keep them safe around animals. It was common during this era that children were born at home. Three of Dot's children were born at home- a worrisome time due to distance to a

hospital and the unpredictability of the weather.

Being a homemaker was as labour intensive as any of the tasks to be done on the farm. There was caring for the animals as well as preserving food for the long winters. Some beef was canned while some was frozen by burying it in wheat. Pigs were butchered for ham and bacon. For added income they supplied the hospital with meat and produce. Over the years, they purchased Yorkshire pigs, Barred Rock chickens, geese, and Peking ducks. Dot shot rabbits for stew and made quilts out of the hide. She would cut strips and put them between sheets. She made other quilts with down from the ducks and geese. Children's clothing was all handmade, some from old coats turned inside out. Sewing was done by hand and later by a pedal Singer.

Gardening was another passion of Dot's. She grew many vegetables as well as plum and apple trees and various berries. This helped supply food for summer with the extra put in cold storage and canned for winter meals. Very little was bought at the store. Only necessities such as flour, sugar, teas and coffee were ever needed. Sometimes a wagon load of grain was hauled into Weyburn to be milled into flour. Bread was baked at home along with all of the other baking and cooking that needed to be done, as well as caring for her six girls.

Mondays were usually wash day, an all day job. Water had to be carried or hauled in barrels and heated on the coal stove. Clothes were scrubbed with a wash board. When a machine was bought, it had to be hand turned which was very hard work. Cloth diapers were also washed this way. Dot worked in a small farm house with no conveniences. She had to carry wood and coal for the stove. The well and drinking water had to be pulled up by pail and was quarter mile from the house. The barn was also a fair distance from the house. Dot learned to drive a team of horses to haul water as well as pull machinery. She was small in stature and found it difficult to harness a horse but managed and loved every minute of it.

It was a hard life for everyone, especially women on the homestead. They missed the companionship of other women because it was seldom they would see one another.

During harvest (thrashing) many men were to be fed. A day started as early as four a.m. and all meals were hearty. As soon as one meal was over, the next was being prepared for. Lunch between meals was taken to the field in mid-afternoon.

Education was important to Dot and she wanted her children as well as others to get an education. During the Depression there was little money to keep the school open. She would take over teaching without pay if a teacher was ill or had to be away. She did books for free so the school could remain open.

The school was a hub of the community. It was the centre for meetings, funerals, weddings and all social events. Everyone brought something to eat and Dot always brought coffee in a five gallon cream can. She was known for her good coffee. It was a time to celebrate life, to talk, to laugh and to be a community. They shared the same problems, same dreams, and the same aspirations. Church was also held at

the school. Generally they were Presbyterians; however, everyone came no matter what religion they were.

When Jack and Dot retired and moved to Weyburn, it was not a time to be inactive. They joined the pensioners and senior citizen organization in which they were active members. Dot served as secretary treasurer, director, and provincial representative travelling to many meetings. With her strong sense of community and dedication, she helped form services for senior citizens which were the first of their kind in Canada such as Meals on Wheels, subsidized tax services, New Horizons, and Aid for Ageing. She received an award from the city of Weyburn for her outstanding contribution in the field of community service. They also became members of the Horticulture Society and received lifetime memberships.

Jack Spence passed away suddenly in February of 1960. For Dot it was the loss of a husband and a partner. They had shared the same passionate kinship for the land, the animals, their family and for life. Dot carried on for the next twenty-nine years with the same dedication for family, community and her garden.

Dot, along with her friend Bessie Butters, played a big part in The Bingo Club. They outgrew the building they were using as it became too small for all of their activities. Dot bargained with the city for another building and the sale of their present building sowing the seeds of the Wheatland Senior Centre.

The Spence family has grown in size with the deep sense of history and heritage that will live proudly forever in the hearts of many descendants.
Emma Maud (Dot) passed away January 15th, 1991.

The following is a poem tribute written by Ivol Kreuger, a friend of Emma Maud on the occasion of her birthday:

I met the little lady
who is ninety-six today.
The way I really met her
was through her generous way.

She drove the little car she used,
up to Pioneer Place kitchen door,
and proceeded to empty its contents
into the cold room store.

It was nature's wealth from her garden.
And she gave it with a smile-
The wealth of the land, God's gift to her-
She passed on-and made life worthwhile.

For herself she acquired contentment.
For others she furnished good food,
to grace the community tables.

Her wealth she was happy to share!

It is wonderful to know one so giving,
of Strength, Body and Mind-
She shares her wealth of knowledge,
with her community, no pay assigned!

I'm proud to call her friend-
her door is open wide.
One heard the bark of the doggie,
that came to the door at her side.