

Sarah Whitehead (nee Adamson) (1850-1924)

Submitted by Kay Molder (nee Johnstone)

This is a story of my maternal great grandmother.

Sarah Whitehead (nee Adamson) was born in 1850, in Stapleford England, to Lydia and Thomas Adamson. When she was four years old, she moved with her family to Canada settling in Walkerton, Ontario, where her father worked as a tile maker. She was one of nine children.

In the 1890s, the Adamson's migrated to California, except for Sarah who had married Moses Whitehead II in 1881.

The Whiteheads, her husband's family, had a colorful history. Her husband's father, also named Moses Whitehead, left Chatham, England, in 1819. He left home when 12 years old, as a stowaway on a sailing ship, rather than attending boy's school. The family finally settled in the Guelph area, where they had property within the present site of Hamilton. History tells us that they drove cows and hauled buckwheat along what is now the main street of Hamilton. They were dispossessed of their Hamilton property without recompense, when Hamilton decided on the city's territory. It was likely at that time they moved to Walkerton.

Moses Whitehead was a widower when he married my great grandmother Sarah. He had four children from his previous marriage: Joseph, Harry, John and Catherine. Sarah and Moses had seven more children: Miriam, Byron, Pearl (my grandmother), Lydia, Aylmer, (Herbert and Violet died in infancy).

Moses filed his homestead land at Weyburn in 1898 and brought Sarah and their family out in 1899. When moving west by train, the older boys rode in the stock car to look after their horses. They disembarked at Qu'Appelle where they stayed at the home of Lt. Bulyea, who would put people up while they organized their loads for the trip to their new homesteads.

They trekked across the prairie to Weyburn, with three wagon rigs, a democrat and Clydesdale horses. The trail was roughly where highway 35 is now. They had to unload heavy bureaus and furniture each time they came to a slough, then load them up again. Mosquitoes were maddening for both horses and humans!

Sarah's uncles, Thomas, Robert and Albert, had been West previously, driving Red River Carts with supplies during the Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885.

Sarah and Moses took up their homestead near McTaggart.

The first year they lived in a tent while their house was being built (a frame structure covered with sod). She must have endured almost insurmountable hardships during the trip west and in the early days of their new pioneer life on the prairies. That first winter, Moses went to Winnipeg to earn money working on the CPR bridge building project, while Sarah and the nine children were left living in the tent for the brutal

Saskatchewan winter!

In the spring of 1900, Moses contracted typhoid fever and died in Winnipeg at the age of 49. There was enough money for hospital and burial expenses, however, only a brother-in-law went to Winnipeg for the burial, as no other family members could afford to attend.

Sarah and her family were left without any support. She did baking and washing for some of the ladies in Weyburn in order to help with the expenses. The boys, in their early teens, took on the work of the farm. They hauled wood for themselves and to sell when they were not too busy with the farm work. In a few years, they each took homesteads of their own.

After Moses died, Sarah completed his homestead duties and sold the farm. She then filed for herself on a property west of McTaggart, working that for a while before selling and moving to a small house in McTaggart. This was quite an accomplishment for a woman in the early 1900's!

Sarah then took time for long visits with her brothers and sisters in Pomona, California. While there, she had a stroke and a sister brought her back to live with family around Weyburn until she died in 1924 at the age of 74.

I was unable to glean any first hand personal stories from my grandmother Pearl, as she died before I was born. I can only imagine the hardships endured by my great grandmother, Sarah!
Her life exemplifies the spirit of a true "pioneer woman".

The Moses Whitehead
Family
Back row: John,
Catherine, Joe, Henry,
Miriam
Front row: father
Moses, Lydia, Pearl,
Byron, Aylmer, mother
Sarah

