

C H A P T E R X

# LIFE ON THE FARM



*Dave Wylie (at left) is pictured with (left to right) Jimmy McNab, Cecilia and Emily, circa 1926. When Arthur knew he didn't have long to live, he asked Dave to look in on his wife and daughter.*

**D**avid Laidlaw (Dave) Wylie emigrated to Canada from Lanark, Scotland on March 21, 1908 to join his older brothers, Hugh and Jack, who were already ranching in the De Winton area. Although Dave had served a successful apprenticeship as a joiner (carpenter) in Scotland, he did not follow that occupation after his arrival.

Dave worked as a cowboy for both the Burns and the McInnes Ranches at Midnapore and for John Dalzell at De Winton. He also hauled coal and gravel in Calgary.

In World War I, Dave enlisted in the 113th Canadian Expeditionary Force following a national recruiting drive that encouraged men from the same region to enlist and serve together. Dave, a drummer, became a member of one of the three

pipe and drum bands that were issued Highland kit which consisted of kilts and Glengarry caps. In May 1916, the battalion moved from Lethbridge to Sarcee Camp outside Calgary for further training. During that time, the battalion constructed their number by arranging painted rocks on nearby Signal Hill in Calgary. Years later, a community, would take its name from this landmark which is still there.



On September 26, 1916, the battalion embarked on the S.S. Tuscania on a trip that took 10 days to cross the Atlantic Ocean. In England, they received word that the 113th would be broken up for replacements to battalions already fighting at the front. They did not see action as a unit after all.

Dave joined the 43rd Battalion and was wounded on the front lines at Etaples, France, where he was commissioned as a lieutenant colonel during a battle. After the armistice was signed, on March 3, 1919, he sailed home from the port of Liverpool, England on the S.S. Regina. Dave was honorably discharged on March 24, 1919 in Calgary.

When he returned to Canada, Dave purchased a 160-acre parcel of land, the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ -26-21-2-W5 and 80 acres of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ -25-21-2-W5 through the Soldier Settlement Board, a government agency set up to loan money to veterans for the purchase of land. To meet the government's insurance requirement, he paid an annual premium of \$18 that covered his house, which measured 24x20 feet, valued at \$480 and two log outbuildings, each 30x16 feet. The replacement value on the barns was \$320 for one and \$80 for the second. A clause at the bottom of the policy noted that in the event of a prairie fire, the company would not be liable for loss or damage.



*Born at Smiddyhill, County Peebles, Scotland, Dave was a joiner (carpenter) by trade. One of his first jobs in Calgary was driving a team of horses to deliver gravel and material. He fought in World War I and was wounded during a battle in France.*

In 1920, Dave's taxes for the Alexandra School District No. 610 near his home were \$36.96. He made two payments to the Soldier Settlement Board on the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ -26-21-2-W5 that year. On June 5, he paid \$380 in cash and on June 17, received a receipt for \$20, listed as a balance 10 percent payment. On May 31, 1921, Dave registered a brand with the Alberta government, the  $\overline{DV}$  on the right hip.

A keen horse enthusiast like his brothers, Dave took great pleasure in raising and breaking Clydesdales. He had as many as 25 head on the ranch at one time and one of his teams was exported to Scotland.

Meanwhile, renters were living on the Fendall's Ballyhamage quarter section of land. Thanks to the financial assistance that Emily and Cecilia received from members of Arthur's family in England, the caveat on the 160 acres was removed on October 9, 1926.

Cecilia's life in Canada was very different from that of her English cousins, especially when it came to education. Some of the children who attended Ballyhamage School were very hard up in those days. Cecilia would trade knowing looks with her best friend, Jessy Patterson, when the children from one family would announce at noon that they had forgotten their lunches. She and Jessy knew better. The children's mother had no food left in the house to pack in lunches. When that occurred, the rest of the children in the one room school would divvy up their meals so everyone had something to eat. Some families were

impoverished because of hard luck or ill health but others didn't try very hard to even raise a garden, Cecilia said, looking back later in life.

Like other one room schools, Ballyhamage had certain stories that were its claim to fame. Once vandals broke in and peppered the blackboard that covered one wall with .22 calibre shells. Another time, one of the older boys was overly zealous in building a fire in the heater and left the drafts closed so no air could escape. Suddenly the lid of the heater blew off and spun across the classroom, narrowly missing the young student's head.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 101)



*Dave worked as a cowboy at both the Burns and McInnes Ranches and for John Dalzell before buying land west of his brothers' farms through the Canadian Government's Soldier Settlement Board. His passion was raising Clydesdale horses and at one time, he had 25 head on the farm. (At left) Swirling a lariat, Dave is on horseback wearing his chaps; (below left) part of the herd of the heavy horses that Dave raised; (below right) the Wylie home place looking east; and (bottom) Dave and Emily with an award winning colt.*



33 Devon Square  
 Newton Abbot, Devon  
 13, June 1926

Dear Cecilia,

Thank you very much for your letter of May 21. I was very glad to hear from you that I had been able to help a little and hope that you and your mother will manage to get on well. I was so sorry to hear of your father's illness and death and feel sure you must miss him very much though you could not have wished his suffering to be prolonged. I should have written to you at the time but I do not manage to get through nearly all the writing I should like to do.

I used to hear of you all sometimes when your grandmother was alive, but I can't remember how old you are and I hope you are not too grown up to mind being called by your Christian name.

Just now I am one of a family party staying at Budleigh Salterton but return to Newton Abbot on Tuesday.

Believe me

Yours sincerely  
 Mary Newbould

Despite the distance between the members of the Fendall family, they continued to share great affection and respect for each other.

Home Cottage  
 Farnham, Surrey  
 Sept. 14, 1925

My Dear Emily,

Just a few words to tell you my husband died last Saturday. He got pneumonia and was saved from much suffering so that we can but thank God he is at rest.

I am going to live near Anita's college for the present, which we had planned to do, as our lease here is up. Please address in future c/o Mrs. G.P. Campbell, Lloyds Bank, 6 Pall Mall, London S.W.1.

Cecilia's nice letter of sympathy over his illness came yesterday. You and Cecilia know what Anita and I have been through. I do hope some day that the girls will meet and be friends, even if you and I are not able to do so.

With love to you both. Yours affectionately,  
 Georgina Campbell

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 99)

Built on a ridge of hills surrounded by sloughs of stagnant water, Ballyhamage School was notorious for the clouds of blood-thirsty mosquitoes that flew in and out the open windows and door of the classroom. To combat the pests, the boys were known to create a smudge by gathering green weeds and heaping them on a small fire they built outside the windows. Rank with malodorous stinkweed, the smoke would billow in through the open windows and drive the pupils out the door coughing and rubbing their eyes. Unfortunately, the smell would hang in the classroom long after the mosquitoes had already made their comeback.



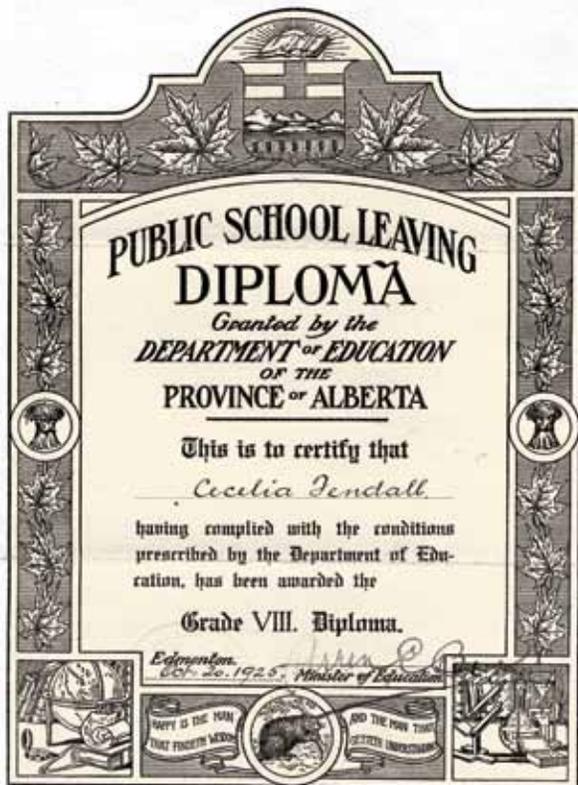
Named after school trustee Tom Jameson's old home in Ireland, Ballyhamage was typical of the thousands of white, one room schoolhouses that dotted the rural landscape of the prairie provinces in the early part of the 20th century. A 1926 Ballyhamage School class photo includes the following students (back row, left to right): Arthur Patterson, Larry Jameson and Clifford Cane. (Front row, left to right): four unidentified youngsters, Jessy Patterson, Cecilia Fendall, two unidentified students, Jean Barlow and another unidentified child.



Many of the students rode ponies to school and in those early years, bands of renegade horses would occasionally gallop up to the school. After breaking down the flimsy barbed wire gate and freeing the school ponies, all the horses would race away before the children could pour out of the classroom to drive the interlopers away with a few well-placed rocks. The youngsters whose horses had fled walked home with their saddles across their backs on those afternoons.

Every bit as important as raising cattle and horses, or, perhaps more so, was selling the cream produced from cows that the family milked by hand. This "cash crop" that paid for groceries and other necessities was as precious as gold. The weekly chore of taking the cream in heavy five-gallon metal cans to the De Winton Railway Station often was Cecilia's responsibility.

One of her most memorable winter trips was driving Dave's team of horses pulling a sleigh through the deep snow. The metal had worn through the wooden frame and the bolts were sticking out on the bottom of the runners, which wasn't a problem until Cecilia went to cross the train track in front of the De Winton General Store and the horses lurched to a stop. Her sleigh was





*The De Winton Railway Station represented the hub of the community. It was there that Dave and Emily shipped their cream off to market, purchased groceries and supplies, picked up their Eaton's Catalogue mail orders and often met the neighbors. With no telephone or TV, Dave and Emily's trips to De Winton connected them to the outside world. One of the onlookers is Dan McNab, second from left. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.*

stuck! Meanwhile, the shriek of the train whistle sliced through the winter air as it headed up the valley. As she tried to free the jam, Cecilia was so glad when two men standing outside the store ran out to help her. She jumped back on the sleigh and together the men lifted the runners off the track. Cracking the reins, Cecilia and her rig were free in the nick of time. But perhaps more importantly, the cream cans also were safe.

Farmers along the dirt road would see Cecilia's familiar rig and team passing by and regularly hail her. Would she see if they had any mail? Could she pick up a package at the station? One neighbor, who had a reputation for being a little tight-fisted, stopped her on almost every trip and entrusted her with money to buy his Bull Durham tobacco.

On a fair March day she was returning from De Winton with his purchase when the blinding snow and fierce wind of a blizzard swept in out of nowhere. Suddenly, the trees on the side of the trail were barely visible and she couldn't see the path in front of her. She gave the horses their head, hoping they could find their way home. The team was painstakingly making its way through the storm when a huge shape making a noisy clatter loomed up in the blowing snow so close to Cecilia

that she thought her rig was going to be upset. The ghostly phantom was a neighbor driving six broncs pulling a grain tanker. Within seconds, he, too, was swallowed up in the blizzard behind her.

Meanwhile, the horses plodded on with their heads down through the storm for about another four miles until they sensed a familiar gateway where Dave had driven them countless times in the past, but it wasn't even close to being their home. The neighbors, horrified at Cecilia's ordeal, gladly took her in the house to warm up while the horses were put in the barn until the storm blew itself out.

It was very late in the afternoon before Cecilia could continue her journey. When she reached the farm where she was to deliver the tobacco, the neighbor was waiting at the gate. Surely nothing had happened to his Bull Durham? Warily, Cecilia pulled out his purchase and gave him his change.

Once when Cecilia took the cream to the station, at Dave's request she stopped by the store to pick up two boxes. When she slid them under the seat of the democrat, the storekeeper suggested that she treat the contents a little more gently because she was handling dynamite. Even for Cecilia who had learned to take life in stride, there was a first time for everything!



*Cecilia enjoyed riding and was especially proud of her saddlehorse, Firefly. She also took pleasure in showing horses at the Priddis and Millarville Fair, competing against friends like Jessie Parker.*

After hitting solid rock at 30 feet, Dave had decided he would need explosives to finish the job of hand-digging a new water well. Cecilia gave a ride to a neighbor on the way home who became a little worried when he discovered he was sitting on dynamite, but the democrat bumped along the rutted trail, reaching their destination without incident. Did the dynamite successfully break up the rock? We'll never know!

That wasn't the only time that she had an unusual trip. Cecilia usually drove the same team of horses every week when she took the cream to De Winton, but one day they were being used on the land. When Dave told her to take a colt and another horse that hadn't been driven much, Cecilia was a little afraid, uncertain as to whether she could handle the substitutes, but she knew better than to make a fuss. She loaded the cans of cream in the democrat and set out for De Winton. When she hopped off the seat to open the first gate half a mile from home, the skittish team bolted in fright, disappearing at full tilt over the hill. For two miles, Cecilia followed their tracks with her heart in her mouth. She was worried that not only would the rig be smashed but the cream would be spilt.

The horses ran until they came to a fence and couldn't run any more. Bits of broken harness were scattered along the trail behind them. A neck yoke lay snapped in two. The tongue of the democrat was shattered beyond repair. Yet, the democrat body and wheels sat intact in a clump of willow trees with the

cream cans still standing right-side-up in the back. Not a drop of the precious cargo had been lost.

After catching the horses and collecting the pieces of harness, Cecilia trudged home. Emily saw her coming over the hill above the farm and met Cecilia at the gate with the worried inquiry, "Whatever has happened to the cream?"

At that time, there was a great rivalry between the different creameries to purchase cream. As the cans were loaded at the railway stations, each company's agent attempted to be the first to put his sticker on them. Emily warned Cecilia they only wanted to do business with one creamery and not to let any other claim the family's cans. For the five-foot-two-inch Cecilia, it was sometimes a battle of wits to follow her mother's directions but tenacious and beguiling, she had her own way.

Granny Shierman, who lived across the road from the Wylie place, knew very little, if any, English. She relied upon Cecilia to write out her Eaton's catalogue order for supplies every year even though her own children were fluent in the language of their new country. The old German woman must have really admired her young neighbour's good sense and education and they became good friends, which made for wonderful neighbours.



*While Emily and Cecilia were as close as a mother and daughter could be, Cecilia may have inherited her calm, even temperament from her father. Emily could be a feisty lady when she was provoked!*

Cecilia graduated from grade eight at Ballyhamage School in 1925 and in the fall, moved to Calgary to work for her room and board in order to attend Crescent Heights Collegiate Institute which had opened in 1915 at 1019 1st Street N.W. (The facility later became Balmoral School.) One of Cecilia's teachers was William Aberhart, the first principal of Crescent Heights, a position he held from 1915 to 1935.

Mr. Aberhart, or "Bible Bill" as he was fondly called, became an Alberta legend. In 1918, he began teaching a Bible study group in Calgary that grew so successful that in 1923, the Palace Theatre in downtown Calgary was rented to better accommodate those interested in hearing his message. In 1925, CFCN, "The Voice of the Prairie," started broadcasting his Sunday sermons, taking his prophetic message beyond the confines of Calgary to listeners crowded around their radios in farm houses well beyond Alberta.

Mr. Aberhart's broadcasts proved as popular as his Bible studies, drawing regular listeners across the prairies and even some listeners in the northern United

States. In 1927, Mr. Aberhart was appointed dean of the newly-founded Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute.

Mr. Aberhart became interested in politics during the Great Depression, a period which was especially harsh for Alberta and Saskatchewan farmers, and went on to help found the Social Credit Party of Alberta, which won the 1935 provincial election. He was elected Premier of Alberta and his party stayed in power in the province until the 1971 election, decades after his death. Although he wasn't able to make the sweeping changes he believed in, he remained popular with the province's voters.

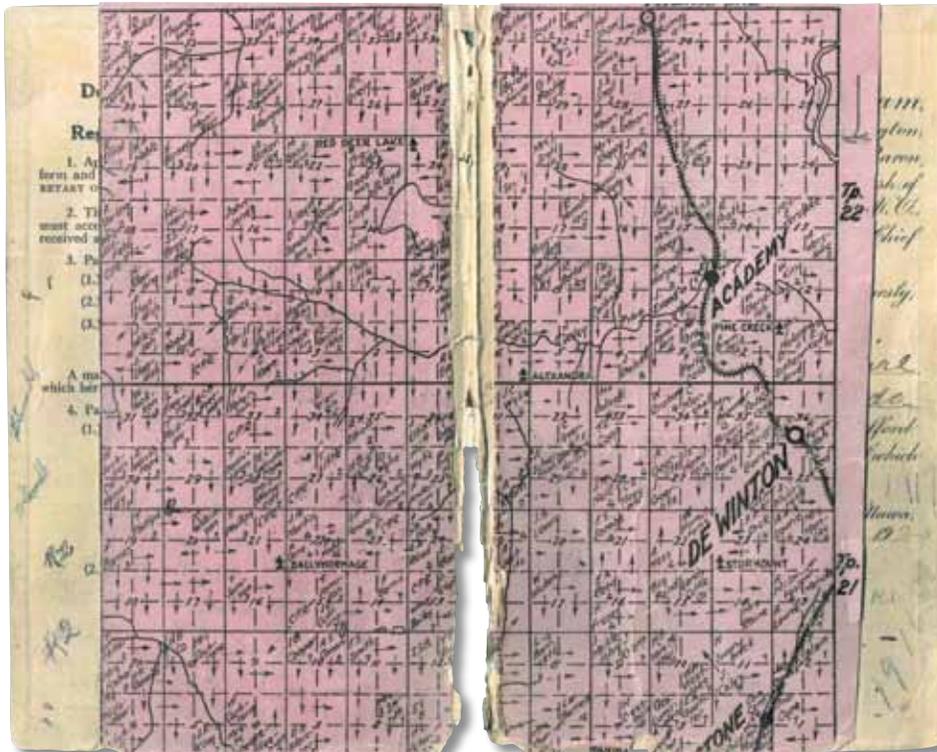
Meanwhile, back home in the hills, Dave and Emily decided to make their living arrangement permanent. They were married on June 2, 1928 by the Rev. P. McNabb, a Presbyterian clergyman, at his Calgary residence. Dave was 40 years of age and Emily was 43. He always liked to joke that he had married a much older woman.

Once again, Emily's life was on firm ground.

The newlyweds were greeted by a shiveree - a surprise party at which all the neighbors made an appearance late at night. Emily was not amused

that Cecilia had heard whispers about the gathering but had never murmured a word to her mother!

Meanwhile, Cecilia was getting along well in Calgary. She graduated from Crescent Heights, setting her sights on learning a trade or skill. Having watched her mother struggle so hard after her father's death, Cecilia was determined to be more self-sufficient.



*When Dave's neighbour, Jim Wilson, took the census in the De Winton area in the early 1920s, he used a map of the sections and all the landowners. His comprehensive record serves as a fascinating look at the district almost a century ago.*