

Nellie Mooney and Mr. Schultz



In the final scene in Nellie McClung's memoir, "Clearing in the West" we find Nellie and her husband, Wes, on a train en route from Wawanesa, where they had just been married, to their new home in Manitou. The weather had been stormy all day.

"Suddenly the rain stopped and the wind too, grew less. I think we had reached Baldur where my dear old teacher..."

To someone who hadn't just read the book, the reference to "my dear old teacher" might seem merely an innocent detail dropped inadvertently into the narrative.

Not so.

In fact, the seemingly off-hand mention of her early childhood teacher was a deliberate and considered element of a story told by a veteran writer.

Her "dear old teacher" was a big part of the story.

"The great event of our first three years was the building of the school..." is how Nellie begins the story of her early education.



This one simple sentence sums up the aspirations the pioneer settlers held for their children. In her case she had more interest in the process than the average ten year old.

Her older sister and brother had attended school in Ontario – she had not, and was keenly aware of the fact that she couldn't read or write – something she perceived as a monumental shortcoming.

She was nervous about beginning school. She was keenly aware that she had a lot of catching up to do.

Fortunately for Nellie, and for us, she was about to meet just the right person.



Originally from Ontario, Frank and Margaret Schultz moved to the **Belmont** district in the early 1880's where Frank took up a homestead south of the town. Needing money, he took a job at **Northfield** School near **Wawanesa**.

He was Nellie's first teacher.

According to Nellie, Mr. Schultz influenced her in several ways. Her account of how he assured her that starting late was no problem, that she would learn to read readily, that school wasn't a scary place, must have had some influence on her decision to become a teacher.

Not only did she learn to read and write in his care, she had the opportunity to experience views that she might not have encountered otherwise.

The year 1885 saw hot debate, and a little hysteria, over the Metis uprising. Mr. Schultz offered what today is a conventional view; that the Metis had legitimate grievances, and that the native people who supported the Metis, or merely sympathised with them, had legitimate grievances as well. These were not popular sentiments in the region, but Frank Schultz was able to offer them in such a way that he impressed Nellie and avoided antagonizing the parents.

In relating a discussion, Nellie remembers thinking that her teacher's comments about the issues were quite at odds with the opinions of family and friends.

She relates an incident at school.

"One day at Northfield School the cry arose that the Indians were coming!" They were said to be in war paint – in a procession a mile long.

Mr. Schultz tried to reason with his students.

“Yes, I know ...they come every spring, on their way to Brandon. These Indians are no relation to the Indians in Saskatchewan. They are Crees, and ours are Sioux and they are not friends. They won't hurt anyone, and they certainly wouldn't fight for the Crees. Indians have their friends, just like white people”

He tried to reassure them...

“My wife and two little boys are alone, in a house right beside the trail... and I know they are safe.”

And tried to get them to see some perspective...

“Use your imaginations now, and think what you would feel like, if you saw another race living on the land that had been yours.”

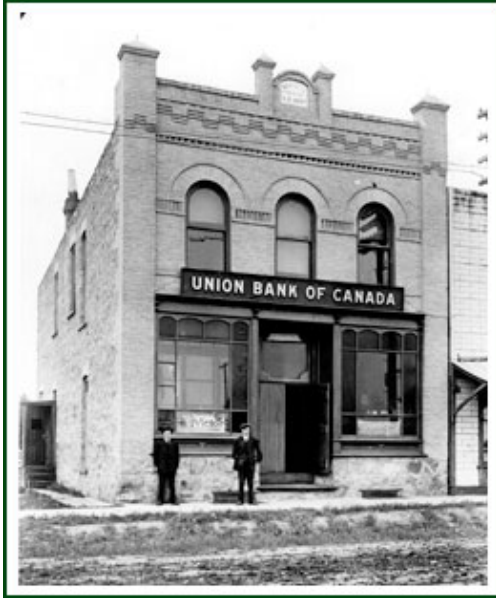
Today we know that the native populations across the west almost unanimously refused to have anything to do with the Riel uprising.

Schultz's moderate views on Riel, and on the local aboriginal people, seems to have touched her deeply. She gives Schultz a lot of credit rather than claiming his thoughts as her own.

Her childhood experiences, when put together, prepared her for seeing the world in her own way.

So what became of this teacher who was so influential, who seemed to be destined for a career in education?

In 1892 Frank opened a real estate and insurance office and established a little private bank in the new town of Baldur. After a few years the Union Bank decided to open a branch in Baldur. They took over his little branch and he became their manager, a position he held for the rest of his life.



His wife Margaret, who outlived Frank by many years, never forgot a promise Frank once made to support the establishment of a hospital.

When “Maggie” died in 1947, she bequeathed a parcel of land to the Municipality of Argyle for the single purpose to which it had always been intended — as the site for a hospital.



The Argyle Museum displays this portrait of Mrs. Schultz.

Both Frank and Margaret are profiled in “We Made Baldur”, a booklet available at the Museum and online at:

<http://www.virtualmanitoba.com/argyleheritage/wemade/index.html>