

WESTMORLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's hard to believe summer is winding down and fall is fast approaching. But, although it was short, it was busy and successful. On June 12th we held our first in-person AGM in two years at the Lady Smith Manor in Dorchester. It turned out to be an extraordinarily successful event. Miriam Andrews of the Lady Smith Manor was our guest speaker. She gave a wonderful account of the manor's history as well as of the Sir Albert Smith family and its long legacy in Dorchester. The fact that she presented her talk in the historic Smith home made it even more special.

Our museum opening day was June 11th and was attended by a number of our members. Mayor Debbie Colwell cut the ribbon for the opening ceremony. The main exhibit this summer was the Sussex Lodge No.4 display put together by Donald with his usual skill and care.

Newsletter:

For this issue of the Newsletter, Gene Goodrich wrote a fascinating article on Nellie Palmer Ryan, the daughter of Hiram and Arabella Palmer, one of Dorchester's leading ship building families during the Great Age of Sail. Nellie attended Mount Allison Ladies College, graduating with a degree in music. She was for a time engaged to John Clarence Webster, who, after a brilliant career as a gynecologist, became one of New Brunswick's leading historians. After breaking her engagement with Webster, she married dentist George Ryan and lived in Paris both before and after the First World War. She and her family made a dramatic escape just before the fall of France to the Germans in 1940 and returned to Canada. Her story offers some interesting glimpses into the social life of Victorian Dorchester as well as into certain aspects of student

life at the Mount Allison Ladies College.

Events:

We held most of our traditional events over the summer. While we could not host our Mother's Day Tea in May, in June we put on the Shire Town Festival Breakfast at the Keillor House. In July we held the Keillor House garden tour and our Hearth Cooking event. In August we offered a Yorkshire Day salad plate dinner and in September our always-popular Dinner with the Keillors, which turned out to be a sellout event. Our latest online auction was held in April, and since it was another success we decided to do another one this fall. Monitor our website and Facebook pages for details.

This winter we will again be offering our classic Christmas Victorian Din-

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KEILLOR HOUSE MUSEUM —SPECIAL EVENTS

For updates on this year's Special Events, please check our website and/or FaceBook on a regular basis

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MUSEUM MANAGER-CURATOR'S REPORT

This past year has been a challenging one. Right from the start it has been a race to get things done. Before the museums even opened I was presented with challenges in finding the staff to fill all of the positions that we received funding for. But, perhaps, the challenges should be seen as opportunities.

Really early this year I was contacted by a person asking if we had any positions available at St. James Textile Museum. It was too early in the year for any decisions to be made so I asked her to be patient and I would get in touch closer to the time we would open. Come May, the situation at St. James changed and I was now in a position that I needed to find a lead employee with a very specific skill set. I contacted the person who had inquired earlier and she agreed to meet. Tina Sharapova came to us with years of experience in the textile industry and was a graduate of the Textile Design program at the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design. Tina has proven herself to be a very valuable team member time and time again. I can't say enough about how pleased I am to have her with us this year and hopefully for years to come.

Another challenge/opportunity has been in finding students this year. Specifically, a student to fill the Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages position was a story. I was at the point that I needed to either fill the position or I would have to decline the funding. The Tantramar Heritage Trust summer staff came here for a familiarization tour on a Friday and I happened to mention that I was desperate to fill this position. The following two days I had to be at the Moncton Highland Games where I was representing the St. James Textile Museum. On the Saturday I received an email from an interested student that had been contacted by Karen Valanne of THT. Sunday, I did a zoom interview with the student while at the Highland Games and she started work Monday. It was a whirlwind of activity but the result was that we had Sarah Adsett join the team.

Paid attendance is up significantly over last year and this has definitely kept the summer staff busy. In addition to giving tours the staff have been very helpful with all the activities that have been going on. This has been a source of challenges as well. While the fundraising activities have been moderately successful, the result has been a drastic drop in the amount of work done with the collection.

Speaking of the collection, last fall, after my previous report had been written, we acquired the remaining collection of Masonic Lodge items from Sussex Lodge No. 4, here in Dorchester, along with a significant financial donation. Thank you to Sussex Lodge No. 4, it is greatly appreciated. There have also been donations received of several 'domestic arts' and household items this year. Since the Masonic Lodge exhibit has been on display, it has resulted in other private donations being made of personal Masonic ephemera. These items really help round out the story.

The summer staff team has been exceptional again this year. They have all been dedicated, hardworking team members who stepped up to meet the challenges of this season. Thank you all for helping make every day interesting:

Meaghan Smith joined us for 14 weeks through a Young Canada Works in Heritage position with Federal funding.

Brynton Innes joined to us for 14 weeks through a Young Canada Works in Heritage position with Federal funding.

Sarah Adsett joined us for 10 weeks through a Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages position with Federal funding.

Alexandria Gilliss joined us for 8 weeks through a Canada Summer Jobs position with Federal Funding.

Elijah Fournier returned to us for 8 weeks through a Canada Summer Jobs position with Federal Funding.

I was able to use the Community Museums Summer Employment Program funding from the Province to help fund positions for both Alice Folkins and Tina Sharapova. The ability to use this funding in this way has been tremendously helpful.

I must say a huge thank you to the volunteers who have stepped up and helped with numerous things here this year. The ongoing operation of the museums would not be possible without your help.

In closing I would like to thank the Westmorland Historical Society for supporting me in the work that I have done here. I look forward to a continuing relationship in a different role as a volunteer.

Yours in History,
Donald Alward

ners and will be staffing a booth at the Christmas Market to be held at the Lady Smith Manor in December. We are still uncertain about the Haunted House Tour in October owing to a shortage of staff. It takes a lot of time and effort to prepare for this event, so more planning and reflection are required. We will announce our final decision soon.

Organizing large events is now complicated by the resignation of our very talented Museum Manager and Curator, Donald Alward, in order to accept full-time employment closer to home. He made wonderful contributions to our museums over the last six years and is leaving some very large shoes to fill. However, the news is not all bad: he will continue to work as a volunteer and has expressed interest in becoming a board member, a proposal that will no doubt be met with enthusiasm. Donald came to us with a great deal of museum experience. He spent eleven years as Manager of the Albert County Museum and was the Treasurer for the Association Heritage New Brunswick. We were extremely fortunate to have had his services and are more than pleased that he wants to continue with us as a volunteer. We wish Donald all the best in his new position.

Museum activities and grants:

Donald has provided a detailed report on the museum activities and grants elsewhere in this Newsletter so I will refer you to it. We were extremely fortunate to find a rare textile talent, Tina Sharapova, a graduate of the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design who worked at the St. James Textile Museum this summer. Highly skilled in her craft, she has created some wonderfully unique tea towels, purses, and shawl designs that will be available at both our online auction and the Christmas Market this year.

Graydon Milton Trust:

As of August 31 our Trust is down \$20,889 from the \$305,365 it was on January 1, leaving us at \$284,476. In spite of this downturn—which is unlikely to be permanent—the trust has continued to yield particularly good dividends, as our cash balance as of September 1 was \$16,163. While the Board voted in March to reinvest these dividend earnings, the market this summer proved too volatile to do so prudently. So we held off until September when our adviser felt it would be safer. We decided to invest a portion of the cash (\$10,479) into Canadian Natural Resources and left the remainder in a high interest savings account to be reinvested in the near future.

Properties:

Nathalie Bouchard, our Property Manager, continues to do a lot of work on our properties. Unfortunately, we had an unexpected expense for the Bell Inn in August when one of our heat pumps failed. We had hoped to repair it but discovered that the parts are now obsolete. So what was expected to be a repair ended up being a complete replacement at a cost of \$6226. The other heat pump must be moved to protect it from the snowplows, and this moving job will cost approximately \$800.00. The Payzant-Card Building apartments were repainted this summer and Nathalie was able to find us new tenants, so we currently have both the Bell Inn and the Payzant-Card fully rented. We have two older fridges in the basement of the Bell Inn that we have decided to sell. They have been there since the days of the Bell Inn Restaurant and are no longer of any use there. We expect to sell them for approximately \$1100.

Acknowledgments:

In closing, I would like to thank Donald for his many contributions and accomplishments as our Museum Manager and Curator. We will miss him in this role. I would also like to thank all our summer employees for a job well done and of course the life blood of all our events, namely our volunteers. Thanks also to Alice and Tina for all the wonderful work you are doing at the St. James Museum. A big thank you to our Board members for making our AGM so successful.

It pleases me to announce the addition of two new board members, Bonnie Chapman Roy, another native of Dorchester, and her husband, Guy Roy, who joined this June. I am also happy to report that Judy Morison has rejoined the Board as our Executive secretary.

Bonnie Swift

NELLIE PALMER RYAN: THE LIFE AND LOVES OF A DORCHESTER SHIPYARD DAUGHTER

AMONG THE MANY BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES that Helen Petchey did of Dorchester's leading families and individuals are those of two interesting women who were "admired and long remembered." In *Signal Sea Changes* (1997) Helen outlined the stories of Emma Chapman O'Neal (1849-1931), Doug Howe's beloved 'Aunt Em', and Nellie Palmer Ryan (1874-1954), daughter of another of Dorchester's elite families. I made extensive use of the first-named in my article "Captain Edmund O'Neal, Aunt 'Em', and the Kaiser's Watch" (WHS Newsletter February 2017) and have known about Nellie ever since I first made it a project to read all of Helen's books. (They are a great introduction to Dorchester history.) One of the things I remembered about Nellie, besides her attendance at Mount Allison Ladies College, was Helen's remark that a number of letters she exchanged with her mother and others are now in the Mount Allison Library archives, and that "they comment...on college life and personalities and on Dorchester social life...". I have long had it at the back of my mind to take a look at them and I finally did so this spring as part of my never-ending search to find new topics for the Newsletter. What I found—and transcribed for the first time—was a fairly extensive collection of letters associated with the extended family of Hiram and Arabella Palmer, one of the three prominent Palmer ship-building families during the Great Age of Sail. They include twenty-two letters Nellie wrote to her mother in 1891 while attending the Ladies College, thirty-two that Arabella wrote to her daughter from 1890-1892, twenty-three that Nellie received from friends, relatives, and old school chums from 1893 to 1908, three that Arabella received in 1889 and 1894 from a young niece and an old friend who had moved to the US, and no less than forty-five that Nellie received in 1896 and 1897 from one of her fiancés, J. Clarence Webster, of whom much more anon. While they stem from a relatively short period in her fairly long life, and maybe not even from the most interesting part of it, they allowed me to flesh out in considerable detail the skeleton outline that Helen was able to offer in the five pages she devoted to Nellie. In fact, I found much more detail than could be jammed into a single issue, yet interesting enough that I didn't want to leave it out. So this article will appear in two parts and you will have to wait for the February 2023 issue to find out how Nellie's story ends. I hope you will think it was worth it.

Baptized Sarah Ellen, but known throughout her life by her nickname, 'Nellie' was born in 1874 the only child of Hiram Weldon Palmer (1839-1923) and Arabella ('Bella') Chapman Palmer (1846-1908). Her parents' marriage in 1872 was the second for both of them. Bella was widowed in 1869 and had had a daughter who died in infancy. Hiram's first marriage was childless and since his wife died in Cuba in 1887 we can only presume that he was divorced. Probably because of the ill health that would plague Bella for the rest of her life, there were no more children after Nellie, and so she was very special to both her parents. And they had the means to bring her up in style and support her ambitions in life. Hiram was one of three brothers who first apprenticed in the mills and shipyard of their father, Gideon Palmer II (who had gotten his start from *his* father, prominent Loyalist settler Gideon I) and then divided his estate valued at \$250,000 (multi millions in today's money) among themselves when he died in 1880. About thirty vessels were built in the Palmer shipyard on what is still called Palmer's Pond, some sold to outsiders, others operated by the brothers to ports around the world. Besides owing a good chunk of the Dorchester Marsh on which they raised cattle and sheep, a lot of them for the Saint John market, the Palmers, like the lawyers and other well-heeled worthies of the shiretown, invested in local businesses and enterprises, and profited accordingly. Helen identified the Moncton Cotton Manufacturing Company, the Havelock Mineral Spring Company, the Dorchester Coppermine, and the Dorchester Skating and Curling Rink, among others. All three brothers built handsome, well-appointed houses with matching barns, stables, and other outbuildings at convenient distances from the shipyard and, following upper-class fashion of the day, gave them aristocratic-sounding names. Two of them are still standing near the bend of Water Street (formerly Shipyard Road). Hiram's 'Woodlands', now owned by WHS member and past President Greg Partridge, was built in the Italianate style, probably about the time of his first marriage in 1867. Just across the road is Barlow's 'Belmont', built about 1871 in the newly-fashionable Second Empire style also favoured by Pierre Amand-Landry. Further down the road was older brother Philip's grand affair, which burned down many years ago. We can get a good idea of what they looked like during their heyday from the plan of Dorchester published by D.D. Currie in 1888 and from a photo-



Courtesy Mount Allison Archives



Woodlands

Belmont

Uncle Philip's Place

graph on the *Historic Places.ca*, website, taken about 1900.

Nellie was thus one of the Dorchester elite. Her father was an important man in the shiretown, a member, for example, of the skating rink committee (the skating rink was a major part of Dorchester community life), and of the committee to welcome the Governor General and his wife to Dorchester when they visited the Maritimes in 1894. No doubt Nellie was proud of Hiram's status in the community, but she valued him even more as a kind and loving parent—even if he did wear a funny old hat that embarrassed her on occasion in front of her fashion-conscious friends. In the letters to her mother she never failed to send her greetings and love to 'dearest Papa'.

She was even closer to her mother whose interests became her own. With domestic help that freed her from the worst kinds of household drudgery (although not from the usual complaints about the difficulty of finding good help), Bella could approximate the lifestyle of a proper Victorian lady—and she loved to do so. Besides her family to whom she was devoted, her life revolved around regular visits to and from a select circle of friends and relatives of similar social standing. Unless the visitee was a close relative, calling cards with all their complicated protocol were as *de rigueur* in Dorchester as they were in Boston, New York, or London. These brief morning or early afternoon 'drop-ins' were often followed by an invitation to dinner, called 'tea' after the British fashion. (Dinner to the Palmers was what we would call lunch.) After tea there was the inevitable game of cards, generally whist or euchre when Nellie was growing up. (The popularity of whist's derivative, contract bridge, was still in the future.) If guests came from a distance, say, Sackville, Moncton, or Amherst, they would usually stay overnight.

High teas and card games were not the Palmers' only diversions. In nice weather they loved to drive about the village, or even over to Sackville, with horse and carriage, in order to see and be seen. Sleighing in good winter conditions was even more pleasant, as well as a lot faster. Summer was the time for tennis, and 'Woodlands' had its own tennis court, as did a number of Dorchester's other fine homes. Of course, tennis calls for the proper attire, and, sure enough, in one of her letters to Nellie, Bella mentions a new tennis skirt she is having made by a local seamstress. Other summer pleasures included holidays in Shediac, with sailing, swimming, tennis, and of course the usual round of visiting and cards. From the surviving evidence, it is unclear whether the Palmers had a summer cottage. They may well have, but it is also possible that they stayed with Bella's Webster relatives who lived there full time.

The Palmers' social circle included, among others, the Hickmans, Judge Alfred E. and 'Kate' Oulton, Thomas and Mary Jane Keillor, and Pierre and Bridget Annie Landry, but above all it centered on the extended Palmer and Chapman families. Bella had at least two sisters living in Dorchester. One of them, Julia, was married to Hiram's brother, Barlow, and lived at 'Belmont'. Their children, two girls and a boy, were thus double cousins of Nellie, and were in roughly the same age group. Another sister, Ellen, was married to Alexander Robb, a grandson of John Keillor who had inherited his father's (John Robb's) oat mill and was a substantial businessman. His handsome house on Woodlawn Road, now much altered, was later acquired by Captain Edmund O'Neal and Emma Chapman O'Neal. The Robbs had two girls only a little younger than Nellie (their other children died in infancy), one of whom, Louisa, nicknamed 'Lulu', attended Mount Allison Ladies College with her. The Hiram Palmers were particularly close to the Barlow Palmers and the Robbs, but Nellie had other aunts and uncles in Dorchester, although I was unable to learn the names of their children, or whether they would have been of an age to be her playmates or companions. As noted above, Hiram had a brother, Philip, living in Dorchester, but his wife died childless in 1880. He also had a sister, Mary, married to William. T. Wilbur and another, Sarah, married to Captain Joshua King, a partner of Gideon Palmer II. In her letters to Nellie, Bella frequently mentions 'Auntie Mary', 'Auntie King', and an otherwise unidentified 'Auntie Caroline' in a way that suggests that they, too, were close to the 'Woodlands' Palmers. Nellie thus grew up in a warm network of family, friends, and familiar faces, and she was firmly attached to them.

Another focus of Palmer family life, and a large influence on Nellie's early development, was Trinity Anglican Church and its rector Roy Campbell. Hiram was a church warden and both he and Bella were regular attenders, and very devout ones, too. When the weather or other circumstances kept them from the service, they spent the day reading the published sermons of well-known divines. In one of her letters to Nellie Bella specifically mentions (Thomas de Witt) Talmage, a famous pulpit orator whose sermons were regularly published in more than 3,000 journals, and Bishop (Allan) Brooks of Massachusetts who, besides publishing a popular book of sermons, wrote the lyrics of "Little Town of Bethlehem." An amiable, well-educated Scot keenly interested in history, literature, music both sacred and secular, church architecture (before opting for the ministry he had trained as an architect), and community affairs, Roy Campbell was not only an excellent and beloved pastor, but also a valuable mentor to the youth of his parish. He was a good friend of both Hiram and Bella, frequently dropped in for a visit, and had a special regard and affection for "darling Nellie," as he called her in a Christmas greeting written years after his retirement. Was this because of a shared love of music, which Nellie seems to have evinced from an early age? Although there is no direct evidence to prove it, it's difficult to imagine her *not* singing in the church choir, given her choice of studies at Mount Allison, and perhaps I may be permitted to step out of the strict historian's role long enough to imagine, without direct evidence, that hers was one of the sweetest voices in it.

Whenever her love of music began, she came by it honestly. Bella—and for that matter, Hiram—was very interested in music, as were most of Dorchester's leading families. She could sing and play the piano and loved to attend concerts, both in Dorchester where they were a regular feature at Robb's Hall and at Mount Allison when Nellie was there. In one letter she mentions Gilmour's Band that was playing in Saint John and wonders if Nellie can get permission to come home so they can attend together. The featured singer was to be the baritone soloist, Giovanni Tagliapietra "the leading star in Grand Italian Opera in Europe & America." Other musical venues in Dorchester included private recitals such as the one given at a card party at Mrs. Allan Chapman's to celebrate Aunt Julia's birthday, parlour concerts in one or another of the finer homes, including no doubt the Palmers' (Bella mentions one being organized by two local ladies who planned to serve cake and ice cream to one hundred attendees), school concerts (Judge Oulton asked Hiram and Bella to assist in organizing one), and benefit concerts of the kind that Miss Nellie Kinder sang at to raise money for a library in Dorchester.

Another interest that Bella passed on to her daughter was clothes and fashion. She was an accomplished seamstress herself, but also had garments made and/or altered by professionals. She was forever sending away to Saint John for fabric samples, or picking them up from local stores in Dorchester (such as Hickman's or F.C. Palmer's), Sackville (Ford's) or Amherst. Of course she bought or borrowed fashion magazines such as the Ladies Magazine (Boston and Philadelphia) in order to keep up with the latest style (sometimes writing to American relatives to ask their advice) and was intensely interested in what other Dorchester ladies were wearing. At a card party of four tables with prizes held at the Robbs' (Auntie Ellen's) Mrs. Hanington had on a new black silk dress with a high collar, Mrs. Teed a new pink waistcoat that went nicely with her black silk skirt, while Bella wore her black lace and gold beads. She sewed not only for herself, but also for Nellie, who also took up the craft with enthusiasm. Their letters to each other are full of references to clothes they were making, or clothes that Nellie wanted sent to her (when she was in college) for this or that occasion, always with a view to being dressed in the proper style.

Nellie's younger years were thus a Dorchester version of upper class Victorian life, with many carryovers from the pre-industrial age, such as horse-drawn vehicles and hand-washed clothes, but also many features of modernity. There had been train service in Dorchester since just a little before she was born, and an excellent one it was, too. At least three trains a day ferried passengers, freight, and mail from Dorchester to all parts of North America and, with the affordable rates of the time, even quite ordinary people travelled regularly between Dorchester, Moncton, Sackville, and Amherst, and also to Saint John and Halifax on occasion. Train travel was no financial problem at all for the Palmers, although in good weather they often drove over to Sackville with horse and carriage—or sleigh in winter, which was actually the best time for horse-powered travel.

By the early 1890s the New Brunswick Telephone Company had services in Sackville, Dorchester, St. Joseph's College, Moncton, Salisbury, Saint John, and a number of towns up to Fredericton, and Bella mentions getting a phone call in one of her letters to Nellie. So we know the Palmers had a telephone, at least in 1899 when this letter was written, but it wasn't a completely satisfactory means of communication. Connections were often bad, or not working, and there was no privacy, as telephones were on a party line and nosy neighbours *did* like to listen in. But there was a viable alternative made possible by the frequent trains, all of which carried mail, namely letters, or in many cases hastily scribbled notes called 'postals.' Bella could easily send a letter to Sackville in the morning that would be received in the afternoon and get a reply the next day. (Can anyone imagine that happening today?) It was the late Victorian equivalent of email, and many women like Bella with a wide circle

of friends or relatives in other places spent a considerable part of their day in writing informal letters and/or notes. This is what accounts for the surviving portion of the correspondence between Bella and Nellie (which can only be a small part of the whole) and explains its chatty, disjointed, and often trivial nature.

Although attitudes were changing and opportunities were opening, the general expectation of young ladies like Nellie was not that they would take over the family business or enter a profession like their male counterparts (Barlow and Julia's son became a physician). What most elite families expected and desired most for their daughters was a good, better yet a prestigious, marriage, lots of healthy, happy children, and a fine home over which to preside as chatelaine. Women were the leaders of upper class social and domestic life and their role was not only recognized, but exalted by the sentimental neo-chivalric culture of the day. In order to play it, however, they needed not only the traditional household management skills, but also the social graces of good manners, proper etiquette, engaging conversation, and good taste in everything from the books on the shelf to the china on the table. Nellie was fully in tune with these values, as were her parents, so when it came time to consider her further education after finishing school in Dorchester (about which we know nothing), it was all but inevitable, given her interest in music and her attachment to her family, that she and her parents would choose an institution that was not only ideally suited to her talents but, better yet, located just a few miles and not many more minutes away in Sackville.

As early as 1871 Mount Allison Wesleyan College (later Mount Allison University) began admitting women enrolled in the Female Academy (co-education was still in the future) to all its degree-granting programmes, so Nellie could certainly have taken a regular degree in arts or sciences. But there was an alternative more to her taste. In 1886 the Female Academy became the Ladies' College with a curriculum centred on literature, French, music, and the fine arts, especially drawing and painting. These subjects had long been taught superficially at the finishing schools popular in the 19th century, along with deportment, etiquette, and other social graces developed to attract a suitable husband, which was the main purpose of a finishing school. But the Ladies' College, under the direction of Principal B.C. Borden and Vice-Principal Mary Mellish Archibald, was far more than a mere finishing school, although it tended to be patronized by the more affluent families of the region, and there were complaints from some quarters that the girls' extravagant and expensive clothes were widening the social gap among the students. Sensitive to the term 'finishing school', which was becoming increasingly pejorative, Borden and Archibald were determined that music and fine art would be taught to the same standards as other subjects in the university, and not just as ornaments. They introduced a four year diploma course in fine arts, with the final two years devoted largely to oil painting. The music programme was strengthened by a new conservatory opened in 1891, the addition of violin, pipe organ, and voice to the existing piano course, and the requirement that all students study music history and theory. In time it would all lead to the Mount Allison music and fine arts departments becoming among the best-known in the country.

It is not possible to say with certainty when Nellie enrolled in the Ladies' College. A letter from Bella dated August 12, 1890 makes it clear that she was already there at that time and planning a visit home. Another from a friend in Amherst dated June 10, 1893 congratulates her on having graduated in music. So it appears that she enrolled in the four-year programme in 1889 when she was just fifteen, the common age for doing so at the time.

It was by no means all easy going. Given her young years and close attachment to her family and home, it is no wonder that she suffered from homesickness. The College was very strict in allowing the girls to leave campus, whether to go shopping in Sackville or Amherst, or to visit family and friends. There was no rigid schedule, but she was able to wangle permission to go home for the weekend only about once or twice a month, even though it was but a short trip by train. The renewed contact with her Dorchester world, followed by another parting, only increased her homesickness and her parents' sense of an empty nest—which was as acute as her homesickness. So they, or more precisely Nellie and her mother, attempted to fill the emotional void through weekly, bi-weekly, sometimes even daily, letters and brief notes that, far from being structured or thought out in advance, rambled from topic to topic in no particular order. This, together with the fact that only a small portion of them was preserved, and that Bella's are not coordinated in time with Nellie's, makes it impossible to extract a coherent narrative from them directly. But enough topics come up repeatedly and enough random details are included to allow an impressionistic, if somewhat disorganized, picture of Nellie's experience at the Ladies' College to be drawn.

The letters confirm that she studied music, specifically piano, pipe organ, singing, and harmony (musical theory). She also took French and oil painting, although the latter seems to have been mainly decorative. In a number of letters she mentions painting (flowers, no doubt) on cutlery and vases, as well as on a wall pocket made of bolting cloth. A lot of these items were given as Christmas gifts. She also made a tie for her papa for Christmas of 1891 and suggested to her mother that they get him a nice otter-trimmed cap, as he "certainly needs one." (She was "provoked" when he saw her off at the train on which a number of

other girls were also going back to the Ladies College wearing “that awful old hat,” which she feared her classmates would laugh at.) Like her mother, Nellie was extremely fashion conscious, always at pains to be wearing just the right thing. She continued to sew a few things herself but most of her outfits were made by her mother, by a professional seamstress, or—especially in the case of caps, overcoats and the like—bought in one of the stores in Sackville, Amherst, and of course Dorchester. Although she had to get permission to do it (as she did for Sackville as well), she fairly frequently got over to Amherst, where Ethel, the family friend mentioned above, lived. While there on one occasion, she had a couple of teeth filled. Were her cavities the result of an over-indulgence in chocolates? Her mother regularly sent her big boxes of chocolates—as did some of her friends—as well as cakes and other sweets, although to balance the picture I should add that she also sent apples and other fruit, including grapes in season, something that was only possible because of the railway.

In short Bella was extremely protective and supportive of her daughter, not to say indulgent. She regularly sent, by train, hired man, or friend/relative who happened to be “going through” to Sackville, things Nellie had forgotten on one of her visits home, or things that she simply *must* have, such as articles of clothing for this or that occasion. One day, her parents surprised her by sending over a beautiful ring that was much admired by the other girls. Of course they gave her spending money and on one occasion when she wrote with some embarrassment that she was running a little short, Bella answered back that she need never hesitate to ask for money as she (Bella) knows that she is responsible and knows how to spend it wisely. As for all that shopping for clothes, why, just have the storekeeper send papa the bill.

What did she need all those fancy clothes for? One reason was for ‘reception’, a regular gathering of faculty, students, and invited guests (often parents) held for socializing purposes. It was the only occasion when male and female students were allowed to mix—properly chaperoned, of course. Nellie didn’t really like receptions, as she was somewhat shy with people she didn’t know well, but she enjoyed the faculty recitals that often accompanied them. From one of her letters we learn what Mr. Borden and Mrs. Archibald’s idea was of a proper ‘boy meets girl’ mixer. A girl and a boy were placed at one of a number of tables spread around the room. On the tables were two baskets, one for the young lady, the other for the young gentleman, each containing slips of paper on which a part of some quotation was written. The idea, apparently, was to collaborate in matching up the slips. Then followed a half hour of chatting in a secluded corner, but we can rest assured that nothing untoward ever took place.

Another occasion for dressing up was an invitation to the elegant home of one or another of Sackville’s leading ladies. Nellie mentions one to Mrs. Wood’s who lived at Cranewood with her husband, Josiah, a member of the Board of Regents, a Member of Parliament, and one of the town’s most important businessmen. She wanted to wear her pink silk dress because all the other girls were wearing light, but it was at home, and she simply *had* to have it delivered by noon Friday. Of course it arrived on time and she reported in a following letter that she had a very good time.

Then there were the concerts and plays (she mentions *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and wonders if it will be playing in Dorchester as well), and it wouldn’t do not to be properly dressed for them. She particularly looked forward to the concerts, not only because she loved the music, but also because they were often attended by her parents, who frequently spent the night with her. They were all disappointed at not being able to attend the one celebrating the 100th anniversary of Mozart’s death on December 5th, 1891. It happened to fall on a Saturday and Nellie had made arrangements to come home Friday one last time before Christmas. In the one display of humour in her correspondence, she wonders why the composer couldn’t have had the consideration to die one day earlier so they could all attend the concert on Friday and come home that evening.

Finally there was church. Mount Allison was a Methodist institution, but it accepted students from all Protestant denominations, so, unless the weather was really foul (very rare in Sackville, of course) Nellie regularly attended services at St. Paul’s Anglican—sometimes twice on Sunday—and frequently reported back to her mother that she had done so. When Anglican services were cancelled she went to the Methodist. In one instance when this happened on short notice she tells her mother how she had to tear back upstairs to grab her Methodist hymn book. Needless to say, proper dress was mandatory whether the service was Anglican or Methodist.

Probably because she was so sheltered by her parents and extended family, she sought solace in their absence in a small group of college friends, particularly her roommate, Lottie, and another girl, Al (short for Alice) McEwen. She also saw a lot of her cousin, Lulu Robb, who was a student there. She hated to sleep alone and when Lottie was sick Al would join her in her room. They sometimes came home with her for the weekend, and Nellie wanted to invite one of her favourite teachers, Miss Ayer, asking her mother to be sure to put up the lace curtains in the back parlour. Miss Ayer wanted to come but there was a

scheduling problem and she had to postpone. Whether she came at a later date is not revealed in Nellie's letters, but there is an amusing description of a lunch that she, Lottie, and Al put on in her and Lottie's room, inviting some other girls to join them. They ate so much that they had to get excused from going to 'tea' (supper). "We had canned tongue, mixed pickles, soda crackers & two kinds of fancy biscuits, canned peaches, pears, apples, bananas and chocolates and cocoa. Quite a lunch, was it not?" Al wangled permission to stay the evening and then they snuck her in for the night, when she slept with Nellie. (Bed sharing didn't have the same implication that it does now; it was common in inns and hotels even for complete strangers to share a bed—and depart still complete strangers the next day.)

I said that Bella was very anxious to see that Nellie was comfortable at college and had everything she needed, or wanted, whenever she needed or wanted it. She was even more solicitous about her health. In letter after letter she admonishes her to dress warmly, wear her rubbers in wet weather, and not go out at all in foul, all with a view to avoid catching a cold. She caught them anyway, although assuring her mother that she always dressed warmly in cold weather. In almost every letter she reports on her latest cold—and in one case on what appears to have been an attack of stomach flu—and enquires about Bella's latest malady. Bella was often sick, staying in bed until noon and spending the rest of the day on the sofa, as was half of Dorchester at any given time, to judge from her letters to Nellie. Enjoying ill health, or at least talking about it, seems to have been one of the pleasures of Victorian life. Concern over Nellie's susceptibility to colds was the reason she wrote to Mr. Borden when the college boiler broke down just as winter was coming on. Nellie had written to her asking for a quilt or blanket to be sent over as well as the little oil stove, it was that cold in her room, and she wanted something done about it. (When the boiler was fixed Mr. Borden came around to Nellie's room to ask if it was warm enough.)

Another reason for writing to Mr. Borden was to offer an excuse for Nellie's not having her essays finished on time. English composition was a required subject, although only for one term, but Nellie hated it, or at least found it hard to get down to the business of writing and so kept putting it off. As the deadline drew near she asked her mother to write an excuse and when it seemed that it wouldn't arrive on time she sent her a frantic note. "So I am nearly crazy for I have not written any composition and now know that I cannot get your excuse before eleven o'clock tomorrow, the time the compositions have to be handed in. It has made me very homesick. If I do not have the excuse I expect it will just be the means of making Mr. B. very cross at me, and it will be unpleasant for me for the rest of the time I am here." We don't learn the details, but in the event Borden did grant her an extension and she finally managed to finish some essays. She must have been pleased with the results, because two of them have been preserved in the Palmer papers at Mount Allison, and in fact they are quite well-written. One of them is a summary, with a little bit of historical background, of Longfellow's famous, but indeed very long, epic poem *Evangeline*. The other, entitled "Table Talk," describes the table conversation of the young ladies at the College. Since it is only 265 words long, and offers an interesting glimpse into Nellie's personality as well as life at the Ladies' College, I will quote it in full: *At our table we do rather a small amount of talking, for as much as we have very sharp appetites, and cannot spare time for conversation. But as there is often a great deal of chattering heard in the dining hall, I presume we do our share of talking as well as eating. Our topics of conversation are humorous and of various kinds, as is usual among school girls. Just before reception you will hear every body asking of every other body if she intends going, what she will wear if she does go, and if it is going to be a Topic Reception, etc. The evening after reception even if it is Sunday, it is next thing to impossible not to speak about the pleasant evening or unpleasant as the case may be. At dinner of course all such frivolous nonsense has been driven from our minds and the subject must be the length of the sermon, how hot or cold the church was, and what we thought of the singing. Perhaps our conversation is not all that it should be at the table. I do not mean that it is ever at all improper but often we could converse about things that would be much more instructive to our minds. It is about the only time we girls all come together when we can talk as much as we will, and it is so nice to have just a little bit of gossip. I think we enjoy the meals very much better if pleasant and bright conversation is being carried on.*

Nellie's close attachment to family and home thus continued through her college years, which prepared her for the career she and they had evidently chosen, namely marriage. This duly happened, or was about to happen, in the summer of 1894 when there was a change of plans. We only know about it from a chance remark that an old friend of Bella's who had moved to Savannah made to her in a letter dated May 17, 1894: "Mrs. Ward told me the other day that Nellie was to be married this summer." (Helen was unaware of this, understandable as the letter was written in a very difficult hand.) We learn the young man's name, and not much else except that he was a local, from another letter that a cousin Birdie, who had moved to New York, wrote to Nellie in November, 1895, congratulating her on her new engagement. "But what in the world does poor Ritchie do now? Oh Nell, you're cruel... What are the Dorchester people saying about it? I suppose the regular gossip." Whatever embar-

rassment, or guilt, that Nellie and/or her parents may have felt about the breakup with Ritchie was soon assuaged by their satisfaction over the new man of the hour.

He was John Clarence Webster, and what a catch he was—or seemed to be. Born in 1863 and thus eleven years older than Nellie, he was the son of a prosperous Shediac boot and shoe manufacturer and a first cousin of Bella's. He was also something of a local prodigy. After graduating in 1883 with a B.A. from Mount Allison (whose curriculum didn't impress him), he did a medical degree at the University of Edinburgh, one of the best in the world, and went on to postgraduate studies in Leipzig and Berlin, also among the world's top medical schools, specializing in gynecology and obstetrics. Returning to Edinburgh, a city he loved, he set up a smashingly successful practice that allowed him to live at 20 Charlotte Square, one of the swankiest houses in architecturally famous New Town. A confirmed workaholic, he not only carried on a busy practice, but also published numerous research articles and several textbooks, one of which was translated into German. By 1896 his efforts had earned him election as a Fellow of both the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Nellie would have known him from a young age, as the Palmers regularly vacationed in Shediac and, as speculated above, may have stayed with their Webster relatives. From Bella's and Nellie's letters it is apparent that his sister, Jennie, was a frequent visitor in Dorchester.



The romance probably began in the summer of 1895 when Clarence, the name he went by, was home for a visit. In a letter dated October 21, 1895 a lady in Scotland whose husband he had treated told Nellie how glad she was to have “heard from Dr. Webster of the great joy and rest that has come into his life,” and that she hoped to have the great pleasure of meeting her if she comes to Scotland next spring. Two other letters from former classmates congratulating her on her engagement date from early November, with apologies for not having written sooner. So they must have decided to tie the knot that summer. Clarence went back to Edinburgh soon thereafter and, pending the anticipated event, the romance was carried on through letters, of which only his survive, and then only from May 9, 1896. It is unclear whether Nellie intended to move to Scotland, but sometime before the first surviving letter was written developments intervened to ensure that she would not. Clarence was subject to lung infections, and, much as he loved Edinburgh in spite of its cold, damp, coal-dust-infected climate (they didn't call Edinburgh ‘auld Reeky’ for nothing), he decided to follow the advice of his medical colleagues, who feared tuberculosis for him, and return to Canada. Until he did so in July 1896 all his letters were written with this in mind, with a clear implication that they would be married there soon after his arrival.

Three recurrent themes mark these early letters: his passionate love for Nellie; his many accomplishments and awards; and his sorrow over leaving Edinburgh and the many friends who have been so kind to him. Regarding the first, there can be no doubt of the genuineness and intensity of his feelings, expressed in such cooings as “are you really longing to see me, my girlie?” “What would I not give to see your dear sweet face?” “I can never tire of hearing you tell me how much you love me.” However, there are also hints that her ardour did not quite match his own, that maybe she was more attracted by his success than by him. What else could explain his curious remark, “As I look back on that week [presumably the previous summer when they were last together in Shediac], I sometimes shiver when I think of your coldness though I know it was quite a natural attitude when you thought you did not care for me?” From this it seems that she had hesitated a bit before saying ‘yes’. By the time this letter was written she had evidently renewed her commitment, as it begins, “Your last letter has made me very happy,” but he still wanted reassurance: “You must respond warmly to me always or you will make me miserable. But you will open yourself to me in the coming days to be begun in July.”

One way to accomplish this, he thought, was to impress her with accounts of his accomplishments and accolades, for example his speech as guest of honour at a meeting of the Royal Society of London (“I was congratulated by many”), or winning First Research Prize of the Royal College of Physicians for the second time (the only one ever to do so, he pointed out), or with reports on the culture he had been soaking up, such as a visit to the Royal Academy to view pictures. This presupposes, of course, that he thought Nellie would understand and appreciate such things, and from later letters it seems that she did. Mount Allison Ladies' College had done its work well.

His other way of increasing her appreciation of him was to emphasize how much he would miss his Edinburgh friends (and they

him) and, by implication, how much he was giving up to return to Canada and her. (There is no mention of his health problem in any of his surviving letters to her.) Speaking of some “very old friends,” he was “very sad at saying ‘goodbye’ . His sorrow at leaving put an even greater obligation on her to love him without reserve: “You will require to be very good and nice to me, dear Nellie, when I go out and must love me intensely... You are to make up with your love for all the sadness I have gone through in leaving my friends here.”

After a big farewell dinner, which he did not fail to mention, Clarence left Edinburgh in early July and went straight to Shediac where he stayed until August 25. While there (and probably in Dorchester as well) he saw a lot of Nellie. She was indeed “very good and nice” to him and it seemed that marriage was just around the corner. The only hitch was that he wanted to set up a lucrative practice commensurate with the prestige he had already acquired, and figured that Montreal, or perhaps Ottawa, was the place to do it, while Shediac or Dorchester (especially Dorchester, as we shall see) definitely was not. So he went to Montreal to meet the medical establishment, which was thrilled to offer him any number of positions, as his glowing reputation had long preceded his arrival. But he had no intention of forgetting Nellie. “I wish you were here with me,” he wrote her soon after his arrival. “It was very hard to leave you. I have felt you as part of my life during these past days. Your tenderness and sympathy have been very precious. How can I leave you again during the coming months? I would like to settle down close to you now... I hope you think much of me and live over again the happy hours experienced by us in the past.”

Immediately after the gratifying bites in Montreal he went to Ottawa to fish in the waters there. His reception was, if anything, even more gratifying. Not only were the Ottawa medical men eager to recruit him, he was introduced to pretty much all the important people of the town, starting with the Governor General of Canada himself and his wife, Lord and Lady Aberdeen. The Aberdeens loved Canada, had travelled extensively throughout it (as mentioned above, Hiram Palmer was on the welcoming committee when they visited Dorchester, probably in 1894) and they were delighted to meet this accomplished Canadian of Scots ancestry (on his father’s side) who had made such a mark in their home town. They invited him to stay at Rideau Hall where, for the next ten days or so, he enjoyed a busy round of dinners and social gatherings, meeting politicians and other big-wigs and being welcomed by them. Lest Nellie think all the accolades made him forget her even for a moment, he declared in one of the four letters he wrote her between August 29 and September 2 that “last night I wished you had been at the table. You would have been a great feature in the feminine display.” He had received a reply from her to his missive from Montreal, presumably a warm one, but he still wanted reassurance: “Now, Nellie, dearie, think of me every hour. Dream of me always and long for me with your whole soul.”

Clarence went back to the family home in Shediac in September for a visit before returning to Montreal to take up the positions he was offered there. Nellie no doubt looked forward to the sailing excursions that had been planned, while his ardour was at a high pitch. While on the train he penned her a semi-erotic fantasy he was having in which a morning sunbeam, after “planting warm kisses on my lips,” is bidden to hasten to “where yet sleeps my loved one” and “wander at thy sweet will over her loveliness, peep into the secret treasure-places that never unhallowed eyes shall gaze upon, etc.” (The rest is censored.) They did, of course, see each other while he was there, including in Dorchester, but their time together was shortened by his busy schedule of seeing people who wanted to lionize him and also attending women who begged his services as a gynecologist. And medical matters seemed to take precedence over Nellie, as when he wrote to her from Shediac (remember the speed of the mails), “please don’t arrange the boat sail for Tuesday. I think I must go to Point de Bute to operate.” A couple of days later he wrote her again from Shediac where he was busy seeing people and mentions “the Harper girls and some others” who had been invited to the Websters’ for tea. It was “dreadful to listen to them chattering, pouring out their silly and frivolous stupidities. This continual indulgence in gossip, this simply-headed chit-chat, this comparing of notes as to easting, dressing, etc. bores me and angers me...” Clearly, he did not consider Nellie to be like that at all; indeed, we will see direct evidence that he considered her to be as cultured and refined as any woman he knew. But their time together was all too short and by September 26 he was on his way back to Montreal, looking “forward with interest” to his new life. She had written to him from Dorchester, evidently very warmly, for he thanked her for it, saying, “I have missed you very much indeed. It is difficult to feel that these happy days are to come to an end for a time. I have been kept very busy seeing cases since I came here.” There is no mention of an upcoming wedding but as a P.S. he asked, “Why don’t you arrange a St. John visit so as to see me?” There is no indication that she did so, something that presaged the future of their relationship.

Clarence set up a practice in Montreal then bought or rented a fine house on Mountain Street and furnished it tastefully. In his

letters he continued to describe his busy social life and the important people he was meeting. Lady Aberdeen, for example, had hit him up about supporting her scheme of establishing an order of visiting nurses. (In the following year it would become the Victorian Order of Nurses and Webster was given partial credit). He also mentions meetings with literary and artistic folk, fine orchestra performances he has heard, and splendid private art collections he was invited to see, clearly in order to get Nellie excited about the life that awaited her in Montreal. After describing an interesting afternoon at the Chateau de Ramezay (the old residence of the Governor of Quebec) where thirty “very handsome” French and English girls were dressed in 18th century costumes, he remarked, “I think you would have enjoyed yourself at the Chateau. You must have looked splendid in one of the pretty costumes.” Above all, he talked about how busy he was, especially with getting settled, and how much he wished that she were there. “I wish you were here to help me. It is dreary work setting up bachelor’s hell again.” Then a new theme creeps in, more explicitly than before, that would be repeated with increasing frequency in later letters: the attractive women and girls he was meeting. This is not to say that he had any serious intentions towards them. On the contrary, he only wanted to tease her a bit in the hope that she would respond a little more warmly in her letters. One such specimen was going to send him her picture. “I asked it as a special favour because she was my first patient here. Don’t be jealous!” He had had a game of golf with a Miss Stephenson, and beat her badly. A fellow physician had given a “charming little theatre party. An artist and I were there and three ladies, one of them the chaperone [he hastily added].”

Nellie’s response was not what he hoped for. Her letters were slow in coming and evidently none too passionate. “Do write to me soon,” he asked on October 2. “Write to me soon,” he implored on October 10. “You have scarcely written me a line,” he complained on October 16. “What are you doing? I am sorry to hear of your cold. Take care!” By the 27th he had gotten an explanation. “Many thanks for your letter & for your mother’s enclosure. I am glad she has been getting out . . . You distress me with your news of your own self. I hope that wretched cold has worked away.” Not only was Nellie battling her usual fall cold, Bella’s condition had worsened to the point where he had asked her (in an earlier letter) to describe it to him so that he could offer medical advice. Perhaps he thought to cheer them up with another report, included in this letter, on his social and cultural activities and by expressing his hope that Nellie was “longing to see me very greatly.” By mid November he was glad to learn that her cold was gone, but sorry that her mother was worse. It seems that Nellie was spending a good deal of her time looking after her. Nevertheless, this is the letter in which he said he wished she was there to help him, as it was dreary work setting up a bachelor’s hell. Perhaps he shouldn’t have added “However, one must make the most of a hard lot.” In order to feel a little closer to her he asked her to lend him a tea cozy he had evidently seen her using at Woodlands. He wanted it for the tea parties he was giving for his Montreal friends. She sent the cozy but no letter. “Naughty girl!” he scolded, and went on to mention the charming little theatre party with the three ladies. “You see what lies before you,” he ended enticingly, “Write to me soon.” She did, sometime before December 9 when he was “*very very* distressed” to hear about her (latest) cold. “Do take care, Nellie! You will make me alarmed about you.” He announced that he would go to Shediac for a few days at Christmas and then to Dorchester. He also wanted her to come to Shediac and bring her skates, as the rink was now open. (“Waltzing on the ice is glorious.”) In the meantime he asked her to mail copies of the latest issue of the *Argosy* to some of his friends in Scotland, England, and Russia as Christmas gifts; he had an article in it on Robert Louis Stevenson. He expected to arrive in Shediac on Christmas Day by I.C.R.

Again their time together was shortened by people wanting to meet Clarence and his having to run to Saint John on the 30th to read a paper before the Medical Society, but it seems to have been quality time, at least for him. In a letter written after his return to Montreal he tells her that he was lying down one afternoon after a hard spell of intensive writing and she was “vividly before” him, “close to me as at Xmas time.” One of the things they talked about on the Christmas visit was her painful menstrual cramps and excessive bleeding—he was, after all, one of the country’s leading gynecologists—which suggests that, while they probably weren’t intimate in the conventional sense (Nellie was too conventionally religious for that) they were everything else but. Back in Montreal by January 9 (1897), he continued to send her medical advice as well as enticing accounts of sleighing and skating parties with waltzes on the ice and grand suppers afterwards. “How would you like that?” He also continued to tease her with the spectre of flirtation with other girls. “This afternoon I go to the rink to waltz with some of the girls. They are glad I am back at last, so they say.” Then there was the work, the endless work, which only made him long for her the more. “I only wish you were beside me. You could sit by me and work while I write & could encourage me with a kiss and I would stop at times and make love to you. Hasten the day!”

Clarence's letters carried on in this vein until mid May 1897 when a new development occurred that would end their relationship. At the end of January he went to New York to meet important men in the Academy of Medicine, read a paper, and of course also to soak up the culture, which included a performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Nellie wrote describing some kind of accident (probably a sleigh upset) that she was in. "Poor little thing! You must have been very nervous... I wish I had been on the spot to calm you." "How I wish you were here with me!" "I miss you always and long for your loving caresses." Back in Montreal, he reported on his own close call when a large sleigh in which he was returning from a ball went out of control on a hill (the girls "got excited and yelled," but it didn't affect him in the slightest) and announced his appointments to the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University. In mid February there was another visit in Shediac/Dorchester when they went out driving together. It must have been romantic, for he wrote from Shediac on the 16th "I have felt you close to me driving these days... Good night! Remember what you said today. I kiss your dear mouth." Back in Montreal by the 21st, he was glad to learn that her female problem was better (he had put her on ergot, no longer used by gynecologists, but effective in its day for excessive bleeding) and assured her that it would improve with time, when she should stop using morphine, a common pain killer of the time. He had been at select little parties at Senator Drummond's house to read papers and discuss "certain literary matters" and wanted to know if she was keeping up with her music, more evidence that they shared a common interest in highbrow culture. As if to confirm this for us, in a letter dated March 23 he enclosed some lines of poetry he had come across on the importance of love that ended, "the light of a whole life dies when love is done," and added, "My dearest girl, you are my very light. Of the crowd I know here, there is not one I would put near you. Every night I think of you and long to reach for you." Of course he couldn't resist mentioning a big ball he had recently attended with all the more pleasure as "I am considered an expert waltzer on the ice and I have taught lots of the girls to dance English fashion on the floor... Don't be jealous." There is another remark worth remembering in his March letters, as it will become relevant below. "I suppose it is as dull as ditch-water at the County Capital, now that the trial is over. Is there any fun about?" (He was referring to the trial of John Sullivan, the murderer of Eliza Dutcher and her young son and the near-murderer of her even younger daughter, Maggie, featured in the June 2019 issue of the Newsletter.)

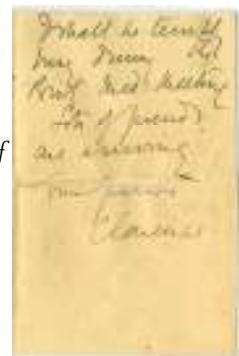
Once again Nellie seems not to have responded as quickly as he would have liked. His next letter to her is dated April 22 and in it he "wished to goodness" that she could come up on a visit during the summer. To her anticipated Victorian concern (which he had encountered before) that it would seem improper to visit him so far away by herself, he had an answer. A certain Belle, a married woman and apparently a relative of his, was to accompany a wealthy Saint John lady to the Royal Victoria Hospital on May 17 where Webster would treat her in a private room. Belle would be staying in a nearby boarding house, and she could chaperone Nellie. It all seemed prim and proper, and there was no reason not to come as her mother was somewhat better and he trusted Nellie would be able to keep her from "killing herself in the house." May 3 came and he hadn't received much response. Had she seen his article in the *Canadian Magazine*? Had she been reading much this spring? "You have not told me."

On May 14, three days before Belle's slated arrival, he wrote again. "I earnestly trust you will be able to come up here. It is quite impossible for me to say when I can get away, having the responsibility of the Royal Victoria on my hands." On May 25 he expressed his disappointment, but mildly. "I wish you had come up with Belle." After the usual report on his busy schedule, he said he was sorry her mother was so miserable and wished he had her in the Royal Victoria. Then he alluded to a visit that Nellie was thinking of making to Mrs. Landry. It seems that her last letter was mainly about her mother's health and the latest Dorchester news. June 15 came and still no warm response. He wrote her about his heavy, but satisfying, hospital work ("my operations have been very successful") and fundraising for the V.O.N. and asked "How are you keeping, dearie? What are you doing? I would give much to get away to you." A short time later (the letter is only dated 'June', without the day) he announced his intention to go to Shediac about the middle of July. "Of course we shall spend all the time together & you shall come to Shediac with me, for I must go there for a time." He was hard at work on his latest book and had a lot of invitations, but had declined them all, as he only wanted to get to her as soon as possible. "You will be good to me, won't you?" he asked anxiously.

He must have written another letter not preserved about mid July saying that he couldn't make it down after all and asking her if she could come up, again probably with Belle, or certainly with some other married woman to act as chaperone. This is evident from the next letter that *is* preserved, dated July 28. "I don't think by the tone of your letter that you care to come up here. You must know, however, that it is the only way in which we can meet, for I can't go down." The reason was that his

colleague, who had seniority, wanted that time slot for *his* vacation, and Clarence didn't want to make a fuss about it. He was very sorry "not to see your poor mother" and wished that "Dorchester was about 300 miles nearer Montreal." He closed with the words "Cheer up, little girl! Ever your own, Clarence" It appears that she had written in gloomy tones and probably talked mainly about her mother's health. This is more than confirmed in his next letter, dated August 11, in response to *her* latest (which isn't preserved) informing him that she had no intention of coming up—ever, under present circumstances. It is important enough in the present context to be quoted in full. Be prepared to be shocked by its angry tone: *The cold and formal manner in which you state that you will not come here is not pleasant. You do not even explain why you won't come, nor do you as much as say that you are sorry you can't come. I can only believe that you are very happy where you are and that you do not think it worth while, under the circumstances in which I am placed, to make any effort to get away. Well, follow your own sweet will. You will doubtless enjoy yourself every day & find your Dorchester companions the chief solace of your life. I am very busy next week. I expect several friends from the old country. I shall be very glad to see them and will have plenty to do in the way of entertaining them. I am glad that your aunt is better, and regret greatly that your mother is not stronger.*

Nellie replied immediately, explaining that 'Ella', who seems to have been Clarence's sister, had raised a concern about the propriety of her visiting him in Montreal, even with a chaperone. His response, dated August 16, was even angrier than his first one: *So it was Ella who poisoned you. Confound her and her stupid priggish prudery. She was always an old maid and always will be... When I shook clear of the atmosphere of Shediac fourteen years ago I felt as though I had escaped from a prison. I hated the dreary and oppressive stupidity of Presbyterian narrowness as a very young boy. I hate oppression and fetters of every sort and am at complete spiritual and intellectual freedom... To think that there are any people who could dare to question the propriety of you coming here with a married woman... If you came up here by yourself people might possibly have some excuse to talk... Under the proposed arrangement all possible criticism is simply—I can't say the word [hint: it probably started with 'b']. However, having expressed my feelings I shall do nothing more. As you are the one who will suffer from this terrible public opinion, you must be most particular to walk in such a straight and narrow way as that the Grundiest of the Mrs. Grundy Sisterhood shall not raise a single eye-lash... I shall be terribly busy during the British Medical Meeting. Lots of friends are arriving. Ever yours...* These were his last words to her.



What had happened? Without Nellie's letters to him, which for obvious reasons he didn't keep (in fact the real question—which I can't answer—is why she, or someone in the family, kept his), it is impossible to say with certainty or without risk of being unfair to one or both of them. For what it is worth this is my opinion, based on incomplete evidence. The relationship was probably doomed from the start. Although they came from similar backgrounds, Clarence had grown away from his roots, indeed was alienated from them, while Nellie had not and was not. He simply loved Edinburgh with all its sophisticated culture and lively social life, and Montreal almost as much. He found the Shediac-Dorchester scene narrow and dull, and didn't mind saying so. Nellie was no rube. Everything we know about her life before the engagement suggests that she would have enjoyed sharing his social and cultural life in Montreal, but as the wife of a very prominent man, the chatelaine of a grand mansion with a circle of talented and successful friends, not as a fiancée up for a prenuptial visit while awaiting the wedding. But, unlike his, her roots in the community of her birth still ran deep. She was very attached to her extended family in Dorchester, fully engaged in its active social round of whist and tea parties—livened by a little gossip now and then—driving around in carriage or sleigh to see and be seen, and of course regularly attending church. Then there was her mother's chronic illness, which would continue until Bella's death eleven years later. Nellie was spending more and more time in care giving and was clearly very concerned about her. Could she really go off for a visit and leave her bereft of her beloved daughter? There can be little doubt that Clarence thought she could hold her own in any company and even less that he was passionately in love with her at a certain level. But he was also self-absorbed, utterly dedicated to his medical career and his avocation—writing history—both of which he put above all else, including her, and not a little egotistical, a common hazard of unremitting success. I think she would have noticed that, and been increasingly alienated by it. These factors may have been more important in her decision to end the relationship than her concern for propriety and appearances. What we learned about her college years suggests that she did indeed pay attention to what others thought, but Clarence was surely right in pointing out that visiting him in Montreal with a chaperone did not violate contemporary standards of morality. I think he put his finger on it in the second last letter: Nellie was too attached to her hometown and her mother to invest more time in what seemed like a dream too far in the future. She had probably learned to love him in her own way, but it was not enough to overcome the obstacles in their relationship from her

point of view.

It was probably just as well, as it's difficult to see how the marriage could have been happy for very long. His quick anger at her refusal to come up for a visit suggests that his love was of the passionate, not the unselfish variety that puts the interests of the beloved before all else, while his repeated pleadings to be "good" to him, to long for him as he did for her, etc., suggest that she may not have been able to do so in the way he needed. Perhaps by the time he wrote his two last letters to her he had come to realize this himself. One thing is for sure: Two years later, in 1899, he accepted the chair of obstetrics and gynecology at Rush Medical College (University of Chicago), promptly married the daughter of well known New York physician, William Lusk, whom he had met, together with his family, during his trip to the Big Apple in late January 1897, and had three children in rapid succession, starting in 1900. (He mentioned meeting the Lusks in his letter to Nellie from there, but didn't elaborate.)

Clarence went on to an even more brilliant career in Chicago than the ones in Montreal and Edinburgh, becoming well known for his pioneering work in his chosen field. In 1919 he retired to Shediac to take up a second career in what had been his avocation during his first one—history, specifically the early history of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and especially Acadia. Already in Edinburgh and then later in Montreal and Chicago he assembled a collection of artifacts, documents, and historical art that was "unrivalled in North America," including James Barry's famous portrayal of the battlefield death of James Wolfe, now on display at the New Brunswick Museum. He used the documents and other historical resources he had acquired to produce numerous books and articles that are still considered among the best in the field. (He later donated his collections to the New Brunswick Museum and Fort Beauséjour, much of the latter finally ending up at Mount Allison.) He was assisted in this by his wife, Alice, who translated archaic French for him and was an important collector of art in her own right as well as the founder of the Fine Arts Department at the New Brunswick Museum, which the Websters were instrumental in establishing. Appointed to the Historic and Monuments Board of Canada, Webster travelled throughout the Maritimes identifying potential historic sites to be restored, among them Fortress Louisbourg, Fort Anne, and Fort Beauséjour. He was almost singlehandedly responsible for the restoration of the latter, even going so far as to buy the land and donate it to the cause, and also for its recognition as a national historic site. His youngest son, William Lusk Webster, a brilliant physicist and mathematician who had worked on the Manhattan Project, also retired to Shediac after his father's death in 1950. Likewise keenly interested in local history, William was a charter member of the Westmorland Historical Society. Diligent readers of the Newsletter (September 2015) may remember that he was a chief mover and shaker in the acquisition of Keillor House for a museum.

So, this is the end of Clarence's story. What about Nellie's? As you can see, we are nearly out of space here, so let's find out in the next issue.

Gene Goodrich



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