

# Bernard Gillie

Born 1907. Teacher.

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## Contents

### Part One

1. Carrington Story
2. Holmes Story
3. Gillie Story

### Part Two

4. My Grandfathers: William Holmes and Thomas Carrington
5. My Mother
6. My Father
7. Family Life on the Farm in Strawberry Vale
8. School and Community Life

### Part Three: When it Was Easy to Go Teaching

9. Mr. Watson Believed in Me
10. Chopping Wood
11. Becoming a Teacher in Hutton Mills

### 12. Postscript by Margaret Gillie

*This life story was contributed to Lives Retold in 2021 by Bernard Gillie's daughter Margaret Gillie. Some minor corrections/editions have been made where dates, locations, spellings etc. were inaccurate or incomplete.*



*Bernard Gillie.*

# Part One

*Part One was taped by Bernard Gillie in March, 1990 when living at the farm home on Granville Ave., Strawberry Vale, near Victoria and is intended to accompany the lineage diagrams which appear on a large sheet of cardboard to give the family background of the families with which we were involved from fairly early days. The three families that are outlined here and whose various offspring and relatives are noted on the diagram were the Holmes family, the Carringtons, and the Gillies.*

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## 1. Carrington Story

I will start with Thomas Carrington, who was of English background, born and grew up in Nottingham, England, date of birth, 1838. When just a young man, really only a boy, Thomas Carrington came with his father and mother and the rest of the family to the Philadelphia area of the United States (1847). They were involved in some way with the lace trade which at that time centred, of course, in Nottingham. They spent one year in the Philadelphia area but at the end of that year, the father (Thomas Carrington's father) died and since this upset all of their plans, of course, the family decided to move back to England. They moved back to England, I assume Nottingham, in 1848 or 1849 so they had actually been in North America just over one year.

Thomas was not satisfied to remain in England, however, and in 1856 came back to America, this time to the New York area. Knowing that there were friends and relatives in Canada, in the London area of what is now Ontario, he decided to move there in order to establish himself. He went by the Hudson River, crossed over from the source of the Hudson into Canada and reached London. Thomas worked for some time in the district around London for a carriage-making firm by the name of Plummer and Pacey.

However, since there was exciting news of the discovery of gold in the western part of the United States, California, of course, and also rumours of the same in what is now B.C., Thomas Carrington decided that he would follow the hundreds of other people from that part of the east coast and headed toward western America. He came by way of the Isthmus of Panama and from there to San Francisco and finally from San Francisco by boat to Victoria. They landed from the sailing vessel in the month of April, 1860, on the old Hudson's Bay wharf in Victoria. The story goes that Thomas had only 25 cents in his pocket when he landed, used the 25 cents to get his first meal in Canada and then had to start the vital business of getting employment in order to keep himself. He fortunately had

found many acquaintances in and around Victoria and among others became very friendly with a Woodward family who figured later in their move to the Nicola valley.

After working for some time as a carpenter in and around Victoria, he moved from there with some of the friends he'd made in Victoria to the Nicola Valley south of Kamloops. Of particular interest was his friendship with a Joseph Blackburn who for many years conducted the old hotel at what was then and is now the little community of Quilchena. In 1873, he made the trip from Victoria with his wife and 3 children, accompanied by a very special friend, Andrew Shaw. His wife was Eliza Holmes, whose background I'll deal with a little later.

In Nicola, he first worked at a part of the community known as Lower Nicola. He had his first meal at the home of a Mr. Henry Lindley. He ranched for a time and finally, selling out to the late Henry Woodward, in 1875, moved to the foot of Nicola Lake where he took charge of a ranch known as the Lakeview Ranch which at that time was owned by Robert Lattice but which previously was owned by the family known as Broadbent who had come from England and of whom we will hear more later. After a short stay on the Lakeview Ranch, Thomas Carrington and his family moved back to Victoria (by 1876) where he stayed for ten years involved in a business in Victoria known as the London Bazaar. This was located on the corner of Government and Fort Streets, where later the CPR ticket office was located for many years. This business which he started there, which was apparently very successful, specialised in importing crockery, glassware and toys from England to supply the local market.

He conducted the business for ten years and then sold out and moved back to Nicola in 1886. The reason for his move is rather interesting. His oldest boy, Willy, who was 18, had contracted what in those days was called consumption, now more generally referred to as tuberculosis, and died in their Victoria home. At that time, the recommended treatment for people who were either exposed to or contracted consumption was to move to a dry climate, thus the move which the family made back to Nicola which of course was in what is known as the dry belt of British Columbia.

In Nicola, he became involved in operating a general store in the village of Nicola, which again was highly successful and was operated for many years, finally being taken over by his oldest son, Arthur Carrington, who continued with that for some years before moving to Merritt, close to Nicola, where Arthur Carrington, his son, became involved in a real estate business that was widely known throughout the interior.

## 2. Holmes Story

I'll now go back to deal with the family and background of Eliza Holmes who had married Thomas Carrington. Eliza Holmes was the daughter of William Holmes, also a pioneer of the B.C. Coast region. He was of Irish extraction, coming from that part of Ireland known as Kilkenny and had early in his lifetime moved from Ireland out to Canada, settling in the Goderich area of Ontario in the year 1833. The Holmes family, the five brothers (and 2 sisters) and their parents, had five large farms outside of Goderich and established the little village of Holmesville, called after their family.

William Holmes was very much taken with the urge of that day to move west, in following up the gold trail, so that he left Ontario in 1858 and turned his farm over to the other members of the family and came out to the coast, landing first in Victoria, but only for a short time, then moved across the Gulf to what is now the Burnaby area, in those days part of New Westminster.

He was the first settler in what is now the municipality of Burnaby and secured the first crown grant of land issued in the new province of B.C. He had Lot 1, Block 1, beside what is now North Road. It lay between Sapperton Street and North Road, and straddled the little river which is known today as the Brunette Creek. His property in Burnaby lay at the south end of what is now Bainbridge Avenue, fronting on the Northern Shore of Burnaby Lake. It was a pleasant location with a gentle southern exposure and was in the middle of a veritable paradise of game. One of the Holmes' close neighbours was Matthew Bailey Begbie, who later became judge for the new colony, and was in later years often referred to as the "Hanging Judge", a name that became very famous.

William Holmes built on his property on Burnaby Lake the first home (dwelling) in what is now Burnaby. It was only a one room log cabin built in the most primitive fashion, really, but he was anxious to bring out to join him his wife in Ontario where there were six children, all young and all girls. They came out as soon as the log cabin was finished and for some time William Holmes and his wife with their six children lived in the one room house there on Burnaby Lake.

A path led up to it from North Road at a point where in the fall of 1861 on a cool summer evening, Mrs. Holmes in the presence of her family and of Colonel Moody of the Royal Engineers, his wife and daughter, planted the European ash tree which stood on this location for many, many years. It has since been removed but will be remembered by many of the old timers of the Sapperton area.

It will be of special interest to people who reside in this area today to know that Brunette Creek, which winds its way through that part of Burnaby and New

Westminster to join the Fraser, got its name from Mrs. Holmes. She was very taken with the dark colour of the water, a colour which had resulted from the stream passing through swamp land farther inland, and she, on talking it over with her husband, suggested that it should be called Brunette to match its actual colour. Consequently, it has become very well known throughout that neighbourhood, although I'm sure not many people know how its name was arrived at.

Quoting from "A Short History of Burnaby and Vicinity", this will add to the general interest. The quote is as follows:

*"The first residence in Burnaby was by no means a pretentious one. It consisted of one room only with a Dutch oven in lieu of stove. The walls were chinked with moss and clay and the roof was of cedar shakes. Windows of modest size of pane admitted daylight when available and homemade candles thinly dispersed the gloom within the limited circle of night. The coal oil lamp was a luxury enjoyed by the very few of that day. Coal oil came around the Horn in cans and was limited in quantity and high in price. Nor were the luxuries of hot and cold water enjoyed by this pioneer family of Burnaby but the dark waters of the Brunette came up the hill in pails.*

*These sturdy pioneers, however, were their own inventors. Mrs. Green, one of the Holmes family, reminds us that they had no fruit jars of glass with screw tops as are available today. Whiskey bottles became their fruit containers. Blacksmiths forged iron rings of 1/2 inch iron large enough to slip over the necks and to lay on the shoulders of the bottles which stood in rows on the shelves. These rings, which had long iron handles attached, were heated red hot and placed over each bottleneck, heating the glass at each point of contact and the bottle, being immersed at once in cold water, promptly lost its head. One heating of the ring was sufficient to decapitate several bottles."*

William Homes did not spend a great deal of time at his home in Burnaby but, along with many other men of that time, headed off to the interior of the colony to find his way to the gold mines in Barkerville. He became a storekeeper in Barkerville, importing goods for the miners from the coast and made a very successful living that way. As far as is known, he did not directly involve himself in the search for the gold. It's unfortunate to note that at the time of the great fire in Barkerville, during the late period of the gold rush, William Holmes' store and all his possessions, along with those owned by many other men who were there, were lost. Consequently, little is known of the actual detail or events of his stay in the Barkerville community.

Following the fire, from what can be learned, he returned to Burnaby to join his family on the lakeshore. As mentioned earlier, the Holmes family had six girls that had come out from Ontario with their mother. There was Charlotte (later Mrs.

Green), Arabella (later Mrs. Wesley Gillanders) then there was Jane who became Mrs. Finlaison (the wife of Studdart Finlaison), Ann or Annie (who became Mrs. Johnson) and Eliza, who became Mrs. Carrington when she married Thomas Carrington mentioned earlier in our story. One of the other daughters, Arabella, who became Mrs. Gillanders, had a daughter Hilda and Hilda married Frank Fairey, well known in later years in education circles in British Columbia.

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### 3. Gillie Story

Now we come to that part of the family story which involves the Gillie side of the family who as it turns out were pioneers in this province and came to know the Carringtons and the Holmes and other people that I have mentioned very well and of course whose name I have and my family has. Paul Johnstone Gillie was my grandfather on my father's side. He was a Scot, who was born in Eyemouth (1832), in the Scottish Borders area and whose family owned a farm near the town of Berwick, Northumberland on the eastern coast, near the mouth of the Tweed River.

As strange events may occur, my father was really not born in Scotland. It happened his family had gone over for, as far as I can tell, a sort of extended holiday in southern Ireland so that though his father, Paul Johnstone Gillie, was certainly a Scot and did return and carry on his farm in the border country, my father could not claim to be Scottish born. My father then, James Dawson Gillie, was actually born in Ireland, the southern part of Ireland, the Queens County country. That was only for a passing time and for all intents and purposes, he was a Scot from Scotland and his history and his roots were very firmly embedded in the Scottish tradition.

They lived in, as I've mentioned, the Berwick area (Spindlestone) and Paul Johnstone, his father, owned this large farm there, and was known as I understand the term that used to be used, as a gentleman farmer. I had the good fortune to visit the area some years ago when we were over there, and saw something of the country that Dad used to talk about as the place where he grew up. The farm there was large and I understand very successful.

There was only one difficulty which occurred, which upset the whole family development. It appears that Paul Johnstone, my grandfather, could not overcome his fondness for liquor, and this severely interfered with the whole family operation. As a result of this and other affairs, they spent a comparatively few years after Dad's birth in the Berwick country on the farm, which was situated near a little village called Spindlestone, which was called after the great cliff nearby in which the rock formations were typical in appearance of a spindle. Hence the term Spindlestone as the location of the place where he grew up, close by the very famous castle on the east coast called Bamburgh castle.

I saw the little school, visited the little schoolhouse that Dad went to. He spent only four years in actual classroom instruction in that area and when he was about 11, the whole family moved into Edinburgh. I take it that Paul Johnstone, his father, had decided that he would be well advised to leave the Old Country and come out to Canada and start over again and try to break his unfortunate habit.



He came to Canada on his own. I think the year was 1876 although I can't confirm that. He obviously knew people in the Nicola country there from some connections he had. I guess that's why, when he came out, he went to the Nicola Valley and there bought or in some way or other acquired the Nicola ranch at the end of Nicola Lake known as the Lakeview Ranch, which was mentioned in earlier parts of these stories.

James Dawson was a young lad who was with his mother and four sisters in Edinburgh. He had been apprenticed to the plumber trade there, which in those days required a term of seven years of learning and practice. He acquired further formal education as part of his apprenticeship. He was 11, I believe, when he entered the plumber trade and worked for seven years under the guidance of a master plumber in Edinburgh so that when he became 18 he had acquired his certification as a master plumber.

He did not, however, remain in Edinburgh practicing his trade but had already decided that what he wanted to do was come out to Canada and join his father in Nicola. He came by sea, of course, to the east coast of the United States and came across the US on the Northern Pacific (by train) which brought him to Seattle and then from there he came north to British Columbia and from there to join his father in Nicola.

The ranch, the cattle ranch which it was in Nicola, was very successful, was one of the better ranches in the area there and from all accounts, they did very well. Dad made no pretence when he came of being experienced but he obviously had a good teacher in his own father and he learned a great deal about farming and ranching from the men who were working on the ranch. It was during this period, I believe it was around about '84, when he came out at about 18 years of age and spent the next 10 or 12 years working in Nicola, running the farm and generally participating in the ranching operation. I've heard my mother tell the story that his mother, who was still in Edinburgh, was very, very unhappy and shocked that her son should work on the ranch, use his hands at farm work. She used to say, "After all, your father was a gentleman farmer and never indulged in the work on the farm." I don't know how true that is, but at least it's an interesting little sideline.

During those years, of course, he met the Carrington family, who -- as already indicated -- were living in Nicola and were at one time owners of the Lakeview Ranch. Dad met one of the Carrington daughters, whose name was Mary Louise, although she was never known as Mary Louise, she was always known, right from as long as I knew her, as Dollie. Everybody knew Dollie Carrington, nobody knew who Mary Louise Carrington was. They married in the mid-1890's, and carried on the farm, the ranch, under the guidance of Paul Johnstone Gillie.

The ranch was a great strain, it was a tremendous amount of responsibility, I'm sure. That plus family worries and all the rest of it, resulted in James Dawson losing his eyesight. He was sent to Vancouver to consult an eye specialist who recommended to him that he should give up trying to live in the dry belt country, in Nicola, and move to the coast where he could be under the care of a practicing physician. So, in 1906, James Dawson moved the family. At that time, there were two children, my elder brother Kenneth, my elder sister Marjorie, they moved the whole family to Victoria.

They were wanting to carry on in some kind of farming, despite his handicap. I never knew my father when he had his sight. He was able to carry on the work of the farm in Strawberry Vale where I am living at the present time. They bought 50 acres there and started to work at it as a mixed farm, with emphasis largely on dairy farming. It was a tremendous strain on both Dad, James Dawson, and my mother, Dollie, because of the difficulty of Dad's handicapped sight. However, to their everlasting credit, they made a superb job, despite the handicap, of getting the farm going here, out in Strawberry Vale, and did really very well, if you can recognize that very well meant, in those days, that they were able to feed and clothe the family and at the same time establish themselves as worthy citizens in the community.

Paul Johnstone, the father, my grandfather, died in Nicola. He never came to the coast. He died in Nicola, was buried in the little graveyard, on the shore of Nicola Lake. I never knew him but he had a fascinating kind of reputation, in that people knew he drank more than he should, but at the same time he was a very pleasant host. Mother used to say that when they were in Nicola, and Paul Johnstone was there, whenever they had a party or some kind of a gathering, that Paul Johnstone was the life of the party. His death was a great shock, of course, to James Dawson (Jimmy as he was known by this time).

The farm in Strawberry Vale proved to be a very good piece of land, thoroughly lending itself to pretty good agricultural practice, and they developed a service for people in Victoria. They used to deliver milk and butter and cream and vegetables and all the rest of it to friends and acquaintances in the city. During those early years, when I was still very small, I can remember Dad taking the--what we called the democrat (a horse drawn vehicle)--into town once a week and distributing milk and butter and eggs and so on to these people. This was almost their only means of making enough money to keep the wolf from the door.

They made every effort--and very successfully--to see that the children (I had been born the year after they came, my birthday was in 1907 and they came in 1906) but we always had excellent meals, were well clothed, and attended school, all three of us, very regularly. Dad being a Scot, and being short on formal education himself, made sure that all three of us had the opportunity to go as far in education as we

were able to go, which was very, very much to their credit because it meant a very heavy sacrifice for them.

My brother Kenneth, who was ten years older than I was, went through high school here in Victoria, then went on to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, ultimately getting his degree in chemical engineering and working in that field as his lifetime occupation. My sister Marjorie did her training at the Roman Catholic convent in Victoria as a--I guess you'd say a secretary or stenographer, I don't know exactly what term they applied to it in those days.

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## Part Two

*Part Two is a transcript of an interview of Dr. Bernard Gillie carried out by Mary Jackson on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1987.*

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### 4. My Grandfathers: William Holmes and Thomas Carrington

I'm Bernard Gillie, speaking in my home in Strawberry Vale, the location of my birth also, and where my family have been for many years (since 1906). I come from a pioneer family some five generations back. On my mother's side of the family, William Holmes, who was my great grandfather, came to Ontario, originally from Ireland. His family came out to Ontario in 1833. They finally settled near Goderich, Ontario near the shores of Lake Huron. There were five boys and three girls in the Holmes family, 7 of whom made the move to Ontario along with their parents. Between them they took ownership of 5 large farms in the Goderich area and there is still a little community there that I visited some years ago called Holmesville named after the Holmes family. After some years, the third son, William Holmes, who was my great grandfather decided that he wouldn't remain with the rest of the family in Holmesville. He decided, in 1859 to come out west, as everyone was wont to do in those days. He came through the Isthmus of Panama, and up the coast to Victoria and then returned, after a short time in Victoria, returned to the gold fields in California and spent some months in California, then finally came back to Victoria.

His first visit to Victoria was in 1859, and he told the story of his coming into the city by sailing vessel. He spoke in one of his letters of a gentleman who rode out from Victoria Harbour out off Race Rocks somewhere, and met the boat, and climbed on board. It turned out that he was the editor and publisher of the then British Colonist, the newspaper. When my great grandfather came ashore, one of the first things he did was to subscribe to the British Colonist and for some reason, the British Colonist and the Colonist, and now the Times Colonist, have been in our family since 1858, which is the year in which the Colonist was first published, so we have a long history as subscribers to the Colonist.

He spent only a short time in Victoria, then moved across to the mainland, then went up the mouth of the Fraser, and landed in what was then New Westminster, and became involved in some of the work being done by the Royal Engineers or the Sappers and Miners, as they were known in the British Regiment that was sent out to act as sort of developers for New Westminster. He went to a small

community outside of New Westminster called Sapperton, and selected a site close to Burnaby Lake, and was Crown granted a section of land that it turned out that was the first Crown granted land issued in BC. It's lot 1, block 1 in the official land records of the Province.

He built a log cabin close to the shore, not far from Burnaby Lake, in this little community of Sapperton close to where the Engineers were encamped that turned out to be the first house built in what is now the Municipality of Burnaby. He had as his immediate neighbour, Matthew Bailey Begbie, the famous first judge in British Columbia, and spent some brief time really developing his little farm there. It was on a beautiful site up above the river in Sapperton, looking out over the river, and of course it is now all built up, but there are still a few signs around indicating where his home used to be. He had a wife at that time back in Ontario in Holmesville, and he sent for her and his six daughters. She (Charlotte McCullough) came out by way across the Isthmus of Panama, up the coast with the daughters, and they moved into the little log cabin in Burnaby.

William Holmes was a very active Orangeman. He was head of the Orange Lodge and of course that was not unusual coming from Ontario, because Ontario in those days was a centre for Orange organizations. As a matter of fact, in earlier days, in his youth, he was involved in the famous rebellion of 1837 in Ontario, when the political situation was boiling at that time, as many times since. However, from his home at Sapperton in New Westminster, he went up into the interior of the province, up to Barkerville, at the time of the gold rush in the early '60s, and did a good deal of hauling on the trails bringing supplies into Barkerville, and ultimately opened a store in Barkerville, and operated the store for several years, coming back down to his home from time to time. That was in the quite early days of Barkerville before the big fire, and it happened that when the fire destroyed virtually all of Barkerville, his store was among the things that were destroyed. Unfortunately all the records, and other things that he had gathered at that time were destroyed in the fire and I've never been able to find anything in the way of a relic of any kind from that time. After the gold rush was over, he returned to live in Sapperton. He farmed his acreage there and also bought acreage up the Fraser Valley in several places. He lived to a very ripe old age, and died, I'm not certain of the year (1907), but he lived to be 96 years old, and he was very active right up until very shortly before his death.

His connection to my family of course was through one of his six daughters, Eliza, who was one of the girls who came out to Sapperton with her mother when they came to join him in British Columbia. They were brought up in Burnaby of course, and when she was a young woman, she moved over to Victoria, which was then of course the Capital of the Province, and while residing in Victoria, I understand she was doing maid service or something of the kind in one of the Victoria homes. She met and married, a Thomas Carrington

who ultimately was my grandfather, as Eliza Holmes who married him was my grandmother.

Thomas Carrington's family had come from Nottingham in England originally, back in the 1840 period somewhere (1847), first to the New England coast not far from Boston, but ultimately settling in Philadelphia. They had been involved in the lace business back in Nottingham before his father and mother with Thomas, and the rest of the family moved out to Philadelphia where they spent about a year before the father died. After his death, the mother and Thomas and the rest of the family moved back to Nottingham. In 1856, by which time Thomas was grown up, he decided to come back to North America, but this time settled in London, Ontario. In the course of his working in Ontario he was a journeyman carpenter.

Eventually he decided to come out to the west of Canada, and so followed in the footsteps of the others and came around by Cape Horn (or perhaps via the Isthmus of Panama), and up the coast to Victoria. He settled in Victoria in 1860, and the story goes that when he arrived in Victoria he had twenty-five cents in his pocket, that was all the money he had. He spent that twenty-five cents on his first meal and then started to look for work and a place to stay. Apparently he did very well, succeeded by working at various jobs in carpentry and so on in Victoria, and during the course of time he met this Eliza Holmes, and they ultimately married (1867) and raised quite a large family in Victoria.

Thomas Carrington was involved in several different business ventures in his lifetime. In 1872 the Carrington family moved to the country south of Kamloops in the BC interior, to what was then known as the village of Nicola, although the village is gone now, on the shores of Nicola Lake. He went into farming, ranching, there in Nicola for a number of years, but for reasons I have been unable to find out, they decided to move back to Victoria in 1876. By this time, he had some money and a little capital and decided to open up a business in the city to handle crockery, glassware, and toys imported from England. Seems like a strange concoction, but there it was, and he had a store on the corner of Fort and Government Street in Victoria called the London Bazaar, which he operated for some ten years where they did quite a brisk business. One of his family, his oldest boy whose name was William, contracted what was called in those days consumption, which is of course now referred to as T.B. and actually died in Victoria in 1885. His father was very alarmed, as was typical of the reaction of people in those days because tuberculosis was a such scourge. He felt he should move his family away from Victoria as in those days the answer to the problem of avoiding consumption was to move to a dry climate, so he moved the whole family back up to the dry belt, to Nicola.

Their first trip into Nicola, when they first went in 1872, had been over what was known as the Nicolum trail, because there was no other way into

that country. He and the youngsters rode into Nicola by horseback over the Nicolum trail. The second time they went in 1886, they went in by wagon road, and they settled in the little Nicola community where he took on another cattle ranch and went on with this ranching business until, by this time they had quite a large family, and he decided to go back into commercial enterprise and opened a general store in Nicola. He operated that general store up until very shortly before his death around about the 1920s, I'm not certain of the actual year, but I think it was about 1926.

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## 5. My Mother

My mother, Mary Louise Carrington, was one of Thomas Carrington's children, and was raised partly in Victoria, during the time in which the family was located there, and partly in Nicola. In Victoria during that time, they lived in a home on the corner of Superior Street, and what was then called Birdcage Wharf which is now Government Street. Their house was on the corner of what is now Parliament Square where some of the remains of the old government buildings called birdcages were located. They lived there for pretty well all of the period he was operating the London Bazaar and my mother went to school at the Central School in Victoria up on the property where Central Junior High School is located now. She went through her public schooling there along with the other members of her family, then of course they were all moved again back up country to Nicola and it was during the time that they were living there, my mother was a young woman I guess in her early twenties, that she met and married my father James Dawson Gillie, who with his father were cattle ranching in the Nicola valley. The ranch that he had was on the shore of Nicola Lake. It was called the Lakeview Ranch, and is now part of the Nicola Valley Stock Farm owned by quite a large corporation. It is one of the oldest and best known of the ranches in the Nicola country.

My mother, Mary Louise Carrington (that was her real name, although no one ever knew her by that name, she was always called Dolly, and I never heard anyone call her anything else in all the years I knew her, but her real name was Mary Louise) was married to James Dawson Gillie, and they operated the Lakeview Ranch on Nicola Lake.

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## 6. My Father

Now to pick up the threads of the background of my father, James Dawson Gillie, we have to go back to the British Isles again. His family originated in Eyemouth, Scotland in the border country of Scotland, but later purchased a farm close to the town of Berwick upon Tweed just south of the border in Northumberland. James' father, Paul Johnstone Gillie, owned and operated quite a large farm there and was what in those days what was called a gentleman farmer. They had done, I would judge pretty well, but from what I can learn, Paul Johnstone let liquor get the better of him, and he decided that he would leave the old country and come out to North America which was in those days so often a pattern followed by people with a desire for wandering, as so many of them seemed to have. He left his wife and five children, not at the farm near Berwick (Spindleston), but in Edinburgh.

My father and his mother and his four sisters lived in Edinburgh while Paul Johnstone Gillie was out in Canada. Paul had gone to the Nicola valley, and in turn had bought the ranch on Nicola Lake which Thomas Carrington owned, and so the families became acquainted that way. Paul Johnstone came out in 1876 to Nicola. At that time Dad was only a young boy attending school. Incidentally, he was a student at what became the famous "George Watson's Boys' School" in Edinburgh, a school which is still there, and is still very well known. It is no longer a boys school, they've gone in for co-education, but it is still apparently a very well-known school, and some years ago I visited there myself.

Shortly after Paul Johnstone had come out to America, Dad, James Dawson, in other words Jimmy as everybody called him, left school and was apprenticed to the plumber trade and spent seven years (in those days the period for apprenticeship was seven years) in Edinburgh, living at home, but apprenticed to a plumber in Edinburgh. When he finished his apprenticeship in 1884, the first thing he wanted to do was to come out and join his father in British Columbia in Nicola, so he left his mother and sisters in Edinburgh in 1884 and came out by boat across the Atlantic and by train across the continent. The C.P.R. was not completed until 1886, so he came across the northern part of the United States on the Northern Pacific to Seattle, and then to Victoria, and then from Victoria up to Nicola where he joined his father and assisted his father on the ranch in the Nicola valley at Lakeview, and of course as already indicated, ultimately married my mother in Nicola. During the time that they were on the ranch in Nicola, my brother Kenneth Gillie was born (1896), and my sister Marjorie was also born there in Nicola (1900). They lived on the farm, on the ranch in Nicola until 1906. About a year before that, 1905 I guess, my father lost his eyesight from what I can gather in some way as result of T.B. Although the T.B. was cured, it did result in his losing his eyesight, because the

T.B. had affected the optic nerve. He felt that he could no longer carry on the work in Nicola on the ranch, and so decided in 1906 that they would move down to Victoria. They sold the cattle ranch, the Lakeview Ranch up there, and they bought a small farm, outside of Victoria, in what was then, and is now still Strawberry Vale, and that was the farm where the Gillies settled, and where I was born a year or so later (1907), in the old farm house in Strawberry Vale.

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## 7. Family Life on the Farm in Strawberry Vale

When they bought the farm in 1906, Hastings was known as Wellington Road, but sometime later that was changed to Hastings. We used to get some satisfaction out of saying that we lived on the corner of Hastings and Granville, since that has a very special meaning in the minds of anyone who knows Vancouver. We used to always say that we would love to have that same amount of property on the corner of Hastings and Granville in Vancouver. However, they had there, to begin with, 45 acres, most of it located on the northeast corner of what was Hastings, or rather, Wellington and Granville, with some of the property being on the west side also of Granville. The farm had been, when my people bought it, owned by people called Ferguson, who had not been long on the farm, perhaps four or five years, although I can't be sure of that. They, in turn, had bought it originally from a quite well known pioneer family in Victoria called Cavin, and there are still members of the Cavin family in and around Victoria. One of them, Desmond Cavin, was a teacher and principal at one of the elementary schools in Greater Victoria, until just recently, when he retired a year or so ago.

It was a mixed farm, in the sense that they had cows, horses for all the farm work, and carried on a small business in terms of selling farm produce, such as milk and butter and eggs, and in season, fruit, because there was quite a large orchard in part of the farm property. Also hay, we grew hay, more than we needed for our own stock, so that in that way, Mother and Dad were able to, I guess you'd say, eke out a living. It was certainly very difficult, because of Dad's handicap, although he had enough sight that he was able to drive horses, and do much of the farm work and so on, and although I never knew him when he had his sight, he had his sight when I was born, but I worked with him on the farm for many years, right up until the time I left home and went out teaching in various parts of the province, and even then I always returned to the farm as home, and I never failed to marvel at my father's ability to carry on so much of the work with the very limited eyesight that he had. Of course, all transportation was by horse and wagon, and my father used to make a trip to town, and it took about an hour to go into town, and about an hour to come back with horse and wagon. My father used to do that once a week at least, to deliver milk, butter, eggs, and other farm produce of one type or another to friends and acquaintances that we had in the city.

My brother and sister were in school at the time that they came to Strawberry Vale. My brother was ready to attend high school. He had completed his elementary education up in the Nicola valley at Nicola, and my sister was attending the public school or elementary school and went to Strawberry Vale School. At that time, the Strawberry Vale school, which had been built in 1891,

was about 15 or so years old, a little older perhaps. It was a one room school, with all grades from what we called the beginners, right through to what was known as “entrance class,” which in today’s parlance would be regarded as grade 8. My brother went to Victoria High School, which was located in the city. When he started, it was located on the grounds of what is today the Central Junior High School, and while he was attending there, they built the present Victoria High, what is now called Victoria Senior Secondary School, and he used to travel from Strawberry Vale into high school, back and forth every day, usually by bicycle. It was roughly 5 miles over a gravel road, in all kinds of weather and so on, it was a pretty arduous kind of existence, but they did very well and everyone else did the same thing, and it was not regarded as any great feat, to be getting their education under those circumstances. I sometimes wonder what our young people of today, what their reaction would be if somebody suggested that they carry on a performance of that kind. There are still of course some people in some parts of the province and some of them on Vancouver Island, that do pretty much the same thing, so when you add it all up it really hasn’t changed all that much.

Mother and Dad were interested in the community. Although they were Presbyterians themselves, there was no Presbyterian church in Strawberry Vale, so they sort of circulated around for a time before they found, perhaps I guess what they wanted. Anyway, they went for some time to the Anglican church on West Saanich Road, which was known as the Lake Church. Then a church was built on Burnside Road in Strawberry Vale, and that was an Anglican church, and my father, along with others community, assisted in the building of the church. Dad hauled some of the lumber that was used, and other neighbours in the community did the same thing, so they built the church which became known as “St. Columba’s”, and is still in operation today.

My father, Jimmy Gillie, as he was known by most of the people in the community, was very interested in municipal politics, and he at one stage ran for the school board for Saanich. He was a member of the Saanich board and was interested in education, both because at that time my sister and I were attending school in Saanich, although the oldest son, Kenneth, was attending high school in town, but also, being a Scot, he had a special respect for education, and felt that it was his duty to give such assistance as he could. He was a man of limited education himself, having only spent about 5 years in regular schooling in Edinburgh, where he attended a very famous boys school in Edinburgh, “George Watson Boys’ School”. When he left there, of course he never returned to formal education, because he went into an apprenticeship with a plumber, but never lost his keen interest in education and learning. He just had the kind of mind, that no matter what the circumstances, was keenly aware of the world, and all the things that were going on, despite the terrible handicap of not having enough sight to be able to read. One of my earliest recollections is from when I started school at Strawberry Vale, and I was just beginning to learn to read, the

great thrill, so much so that still sticks in my mind, of sitting on my father's knee with a book, of which we had a good many in our home I'm glad to say, trying to read one of the stories in the book to my father, and he was helping me. I was spelling out the words, and so forth, it must have taken us at least half an hour to read one paragraph, but at least it gave me a great sense of satisfaction. He had unlimited patience to go through that kind of thing, and to encourage me. From that beginning in reading, I, along with other members of the family, developed the family habit of reading to Dad.

We read the daily newspaper to him, either I did or my Mother did, or my brother, or whoever happened to be home. In fact, there were some of the neighbours who used to come in from time to time, and read whatever was current at that time to him. We always had a newspaper, we always had some magazines, and we always had books, so that at a very early stage, we became very conscious of the world around us, and something of some sense of history, which otherwise I'm sure we never would have had.

On the farm, as I've already indicated, the resources were really very limited, in that it was a veritably small place. We had milk cows, oh, I think the most we ever had, if I can remember correctly, was about 12, and usually less. We had a team of horses that did all the farm work, and provided us with transportation such as it was, and Dad used every possible opportunity he could to make a little money to keep us going, over and above what he was able to make by the sale of farm produce. He took a decided interest in the school board, he was also interested in municipal politics to a wider degree, and participated in a number of election campaigns when they were electing Reeves and Councillors and so on. Over the years, he became quite well known, and quite interested in the development of the municipality. On our property was located quite a large gravel pit, from which we for years, sold gravel to the municipality, which was used for the gravelling of the roads in and around Strawberry Vale. Also some years later when I was in my teens, Dad worked with a Mr. Kneale, who developed a wood business in the Strawberry Vale area. Kneale's end of the business consisted of getting property where there were trees available, and cutting these trees down, sawing them up, and splitting the wood, and selling it to the people in the Strawberry Vale neighbourhood. My father undertook to deliver this wood to various people around, and I can remember him so well, building a special box on one of our wagons in which the wood was carried to peoples' places. It used to take him all morning to load and deliver and unload one cord, and then he would do another one in the afternoon. At the rate of six dollars a cord, so he made 12 dollars a day, which in those days, was regarded as a very respectable kind of payment.

My mother was of course busy, trying to keep the farm business going and helping out Dad. She did all the book work, and so forth, not that there was very much, but

Dad couldn't, so she wrote letters, and sent out bills, and all the rest of it, as well as looking after the house and so on. We used to have, depending on the season, hired men who came to help us with the farm work, haying time, and in these busy periods mother had all these men to feed, certainly lunch in the middle of the day, and with very limited facilities, in the home of that day. It kept her very much occupied, so that she didn't get out into the community to any great extent really. Thinking back now, she wasn't a very gregarious type you would say. She felt that her place was at home, in the home. She was always home. She had remarkably good health. I can only remember once, in all the years that I knew her and was here at home with her, only once did she ever stay in bed, because she was ill, one day, when she had a very heavy cold. That was over a period of about 25 years, 25 or 30 years. She was remarkably regular in her habits, in her work, and in everything she did, superb house keeper, good cook, and all the rest. In many ways, we were very, very fortunate. She was a tremendous help to my father, and he thought the world of her. Couldn't possibly have operated without her. I can always remember one of the things that stuck in my mind, was when Dad came to plough in our fields. Of course when you ploughed you had a team of horses, and to begin his ploughing, what they then called to strike out, the ploughing in the field, he wanted of course to plough the first furrow in a straight line, but he couldn't see the other end of the field, or anything on the field and he couldn't trust the horses to go in a straight line, so he used to get my mother to come down to the field, she would take a white towel, and walk to the other end of the field, and stand, holding up the towel, and Dad could see that. Then he would drive the horses and the plough down to where she was, so that he got a straight line, and the people in the district used to marvel at Dad's ability to plough a very straight furrow being a blind man, but it was mother's cooperation that made this possible. For many years, mother refused on principal to learn to milk. She said she knew how, but if she ever learned to milk cows, that she would be expected to do it, but if she didn't know how, then no one would expect her to do it. However, there came a time when we had more cows than Dad could milk by himself, about 12, so mother, bless her soul, gave in on her stipulation, and learned to milk, and so for a good many years, in the latter part of the years on the farm, mother and Dad did the milking together, and during that period, much of the time, I milked also.

Some of the things I remember rather vividly about living in Strawberry Vale in my youth, and the time that I was trying to acquire an education, prepare for teaching, and so on, might be of interest to anyone who is trying to get a flavour of Saanich and the district say 40 or 50 years ago. People living today, especially young people, really have absolutely no idea of what life was like in the community in those days. The developments in terms of so-called modern conveniences, modern inventions, and so on have totally transformed the way people lived from day to day.

## 8. School and Community Life

I have mentioned already something about the struggle to just get from home to high school, or university, or normal school or wherever it might be, which today, people by and large, would simply not tolerate. If they had to go through that, they just simply wouldn't bother. In our days when I was doing it, and I'm not foolish enough to suggest that we thought it was fun, but there it was, at the time it was the only way, if you wanted to get on to do something of that kind, then you had to be prepared to do some rather difficult and trying, uncomfortable, boring. Things like travel on street cars and automobiles, and so forth under all kinds of weather conditions, day in and day out, just to get the way you wanted to go, so that some of these features of life in Saanich community at that time were dominated by the absence of what we today would call good transportation, good communication, in terms of telephones, postal service, and so forth. There were rudimentary forms of these services, but today we would find them totally inadequate. When I was living on the farm in Strawberry Vale, I can well remember the first telephone that we had in our house. I was then going to Normal School, and I was about 19 years of age or so, and my family had been in Strawberry Vale over 20 years at that time, and there was no phone anywhere near. When we got our first telephone in our home, I can remember it was a nine day wonder, one of the old kinds, that had two bells at the top of it, and a crank at one side, and you cranked it up, and hoped that you would get the operator -- not only the operator, but you usually got two of the other people in the neighbourhood as well, but it transformed the way people lived, and the way people thought.

Entertainment, amusement, so forth, was very limited. To a great extent, we made our own. In the winter time occasionally, it doesn't happen very often in and around Victoria, but occasionally, we would have a snatch of cold weather which resulted in ponds and lakes and so forth freezing over, and we would have a period of a week, or two or three weeks, of extremely good skating. I can remember something perhaps people today would find hard to believe, I remember at least two occasions on which we all skated, dozens and dozens of us on Portage Inlet. Now Portage Inlet, as most of you will know, is salt water. It's true it has a high content of fresh water as well, but I don't think Portage Inlet has been frozen over now for some probably 20 or 25 years. And yet I can remember very well going down to Portage Inlet in the afternoon, or even in the evening. We used to build bonfires on the ice, and the ice was, oh, five or six inches thick, which in Victoria's time, was thick ice, and we skated all over Portage Inlet. There was a certain amount of hazard, because there were springs in various places, but most of us knew where they were, and they were usually marked. In the evenings, when the cold weather was on, there would be literally hundreds of people skating on Portage Inlet. I can also remember them skating on

Elk Lake. I never skated on Elk Lake, my parents were a little dubious of the wisdom of that, so I didn't get the opportunity, but hundreds of people did skate on Elk Lake on one or two occasions when we had a particular cold spell, and some parts of Prospect Lake as well. Then of course there were big areas of low swamp land, we had some of it on our own property, which used to flood in those days as it still does. It would freeze over and the water was only six inches to a foot deep, and so as long as it was there, and the ice was level, why, it was tremendously good skating. Many of the young people who later went into playing hockey or other ice games, took it up seriously, learned their skating on the lakes and farms in and around the city.

The schools of course were small. The youngsters for the most part played the usual school yard games, but little by little even in those days, we were beginning to look at inter-school competitions where you went from school to school with pick-up teams, soccer, baseball, basketball and so on. There were no school gymnasiums, so if we could find a community hall such as there was in Strawberry Vale, another one in Marigold, another one at Royal Oak, these were the places that we gathered in order to play things like basketball and football in the farmers field or whatever. In the summertime, swimming was a very popular pastime, as it is today of course, and the popular places of that era were the lakes such as Prospect, Elk Lake, Beaver Lake and to some extent Thetis Lake, although Thetis Lake was not accessible as it is now. Then we went to the salt water beaches, such as what is now called Island View, and Cadboro Bay, Cordova Bay, there was always a certain degree of reluctance then as now, because the water was extremely cold. It was the hardier ones that got the most out of it.

School picnics were a feature of school life in those days. I can remember very well, my father had a cousin who moved a lot of hay on our place. He had a team of horses, taking the Sunday School classes from the Strawberry Vale community, particularly from St. Columba's Church on Burnside Road, and taking them for a hayride, for a picnic, from Strawberry Vale, out to Cordova Bay to what is now Mount Douglas Park. I think it was in fact the first time that I ever saw Mount Douglas Park, and it hasn't really changed very much, even up to now I'm glad to say, they've left most of it natural. But I remember going to a picnic out there, on the auspices of Sunday School. My most vivid recollection was that it poured rain from the time we left home in the morning until we got back at night, and riding in an open hay wagon, most of us covered only with a piece of canvas or an overcoat or whatever. We were absolutely soaked when we got home, but happy as clams, because we'd had a picnic. That kind of thing would be regarded as a pretty reluctant enterprise today. I don't think you would find any youngsters who would go out on a picnic on the circumstances of that time.

Common games in the schools, the school yard games, have almost completely



disappeared. I find that youngsters in the schools don't play the same school games. We used to play games with strange kinds of names. There was one we had, we called Prisoner's Base, another one was called Palm, Palm, Pull Away, you wonder what on earth these names... but I won't bore you with the details of how they were played. Then there was another one called Ante-I-over that consisted of, at school we usually stood in the middle of the playground, and it consisted of throwing a ball over the school with a team at each side. You threw the ball over and if somebody on the other side could catch the ball, then that whole side tore madly around the school, and tried to capture as many people of the opposing team as they could. Then marbles, we all played marbles. My mother objected strenuously to this I remember, because I used to come home with hands with dirt ground into them from playing marbles in the mud. There wasn't such a thing as a black top playground at that time. Those are some of the games, the kind of games that we played. They required no equipment, outside of the marbles to play with or perhaps a ball. The ball was not supplied by the school, it was supplied by a generous parent who was willing to buy one for his or her boy or girl and let them bring it to school. We played with it until it was lost and that was the end of the game.

There was horse chestnuts, yes that's right! I didn't play it, but I can remember we did play a lot of it in Strawberry Vale because there were a lot of horse chestnut trees in those days around the Strawberry Vale School. I often wondered where that game came from. I remember them playing it there in the fall when the chestnuts were coming down, and the shells were breaking off. There was another game called Run Sheep Run, which earned an evil reputation I can remember because it consisted of dividing up into two teams. Everyone wanted to play and one team was on one side of the playground and the other team was on the other against the fence, and the idea was that you had to capture people from the other team, and whichever side could capture the whole of the other team, you had them all captured, you had won. You couldn't touch them as long as they were staying hanging on to the fence, but if they ventured forth from the fence then you were free to tackle them anyway you could and drag them across to your particular side of the playground. It was incredibly rough, rough on our bodies, and even rougher on our clothes. The parents took a very dim view of this as an exercise, but it was a host of fun.

Then of course, there began to be some signs of organized games coming to the fore. I well remember the very first time I participated in an interschool track meet, which included the schools of Saanich and Victoria, and the meet was held out of what was the Willows race track in those days. It's long since gone, but it had a track where the horses used to run for horse races, and this was turned into a track for running. I remember very well going there to represent Strawberry Vale school at a -- bicycle race, that was it. I think back of it now, I didn't even own a bicycle, but I managed to borrow one from somebody, and I went to the race to

represent the bicycle riders of Strawberry Vale. There were similar bicycle riders from all the various schools around, and the race consisted of once around the race track, and if you can imagine the result of turning 20 or 25 youngsters on bicycles of various sundry descriptions starting off to ride madly around the race track, usually in most cases not more than two or three would finish, the others were left at various forms of disarray around the track, bicycles broken, sometimes arms broken, heads cut, goodness knows what all. It was a rough and tumble kind of business. I remember that particular one, because to my knowledge that would have been back around about 1918-20, I would think, just after the First World War, somewhere in about there.

The social life of the community, quite aside from children, was again pretty restricted. Transportation was difficult and facilities were not often available but in many of the smaller communities, like Strawberry Vale, people got together, particularly if they had a building in which they could gather. For instance, Strawberry Vale had a hall, which is still there by the way, Strawberry Vale Hall. It's the original hall which was built I would guess around about the turn of the century. It has been remodelled and repaired, but it's still the original building. They used to have dances there, and sometimes the school, or the community association, would put on entertainment, concerts, or musicals, and so forth. I can remember participating in a Shakespearian play, the Merchant of Venice, at Strawberry Vale Hall when I was about I guess at the grade 8 level at Strawberry Vale School. I remember very well the teacher, a Mr. Butterworth – no – sorry – his name was Butterfield. Mr. Butterfield was very interested in drama and in our developing some kind of a taste for Shakespeare, and he undertook to have us put on some excerpts from the Merchant of Venice. I think back of it now, it really was a tremendous undertaking because the facilities were very limited. Most people, adults as well as children, knew absolutely nothing about Shakespeare, it was just a name, yet when the play was put on, and I'm sure it was not a particularly outstanding success from a dramatic point of view, it certainly was a success from the standpoint of the interest that it created in the community. The place was packed, I can remember very well. I was frightened out of my wits, I can also remember that.

Whist drives were another great source of entertainment, which gradually disappeared. Their place was taken by 500 drives. There was a card game called 500, which was very, very popular, before the era of bridge. 500 was a rather more elaborate and intricate game than Whist, although many people of that era thought that Whist was for intellectual people who knew what they were doing, whereas 500 was sort of a fly by night operation intended for people who couldn't be bothered to learn how to play Whist. But 500 drives were again, very common and I know that the same was true in most of the other small communities of Saanich. There were many community halls. A number of them were built by, or sponsored in some way by, such organizations as the Womens'

Institute. There were a number of them throughout Saanich, some of them incidentally still in existence. They provided an outlet for the social interests and entertainment activities of the adults of the community. Not particularly well organized I suppose, although some of them did some very fine work, because it was not only – the Womens' Institute was certainly not only for entertainment, they also did a great deal of community work of a more serious nature – service kind and so on and they were a very powerful, quite a powerful influence in many of the communities, not only in Saanich, but right across Canada. The Womens' Institute was a very powerful organization. There are certain communities now where there is still a Womens' Institute and where the Womens' Institute still receives a small grant from the government for their activities.

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## Part Three: When It Was Easy to Go Teaching

*Part Three was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Spring 1996 issue of the British Columbia Historical News magazine. It was written by Bernard Gillie.*

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### 9. Mr. Watson Believed in Me

June 1926 was a ‘banner year’ for me – I had completed my ‘teacher training’ at Victoria Normal School during that year and also one year at Victoria College toward my degree. My wings were ready to start the long journey toward retirement in about 50 years. Armed with a first class teaching certificate and an ‘Honours Standing’ from Normal school, how could I miss! If you’ll stay with me for ten or twenty years I’ll tell you how easy it was!

Let’s go back a bit first. I was a farm boy born and brought up on a dairy farm outside Victoria. My good luck was that I had a mother and father who supported and encouraged me from a one roomed school – Strawberry Vale – to June 1926 as noted above. They were angels to me because they were always there when I wanted to quit, which I threatened occasionally. From Dad’s Scottish background they really believed an education made men – or women – as the case might be. I had a brother who graduated as an Engineer from the University of British Columbia and a sister who completed a business programme. My sister was my favourite person and my brother was my tireless example or maybe ‘tiresome’. After four years overseas in the First World War and now a Master’s Degree in Engineering ‘he’ stood for everything I felt I could do without. All that on top of my Dad’s blindness, and his terrible struggle to keep us fed and clothed, was rather daunting, for a farm boy who didn’t know where he was going. At least I had some superb examples of what a young man should be.

So, to begin, I decided to apply for a teaching position in British Columbia. Fifty-seven applications later, without even one reply didn’t provide much encouragement. Someone suggested I pay a visit too Mr. Watson at the Department of Education who seemed to be worshipped by every teacher I knew. Off I went to the ‘Buildings’ and asked if I could talk to Mr. Watson, the Teacher’s Registrar. His opening words were a wonder to my ears, ‘Good morning, Mr. Gillie, I’ve been waiting to see you! I notice that you have an ‘Honours Standing’ from the Normal School. Have you found a job yet?’ Those words and the manner that went with them turned me into a teacher on the spot. For better or worse, I vowed then and there to become a ‘real’ teacher no matter what. Looking

back now after a lifetime in Education I realize that I simply couldn't ever fail Mr. Watson. All I can say is that I never stopped trying because here was a man who believed in me, almost without knowing me.

We talked – man to man – something that I found erased my fears of failure. If my work as a teacher and principal for half a century has made any contribution to my profession, then Mr. Watson should be thanked! He told me that there was a school at Hutton Mills that needed a teacher. That if I would send them my 58<sup>th</sup> application, he would put in a word for me. I did and lo!...back came an offer of the job. The whole world took on a rosy glow – my feet were on the bottom rung.

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# 11. Chopping Wood

Needless to say there were difficulties to overcome but for some reason they didn't seem very important. One of the first was the fact that Hutton Mills was a long way from Victoria and I had no money at all and I couldn't possibly ask Mother and Dad for help since I knew they had even less. Dad reminded me that he hauled wood for a neighbour who was in the business of supplying firewood for our community. 'Perhaps', Dad said, 'you could get a job splitting fresh cut fir for this chap'. Off I went to the wood lot, talked to the 'chap' and was delighted to get the job of splitting the wood that he cut from a fine stand of fir. After a long period on a farm, I was on excellent terms with an axe and the techniques of splitting firewood. At least I thought I was. I reported for work the next day along with my axe. 'What's that for?', says the Boss. Nobody with any sense uses one for splitting freshly cut fir – what you need is a splitting 'maul'. Here's one you can use!'. In case you are as ignorant of such matters as I was – a splitting maul is like a sledge hammer except one side is sharpened like an axe. There the similarity ends. It weighs 8–10 pounds, and splitting large blocks is really quite easy after the first couple of days. He showed me the technique and, believe me, it is that easy. I was surrounded by a large stack of fresh cut fir that was to be split into large sections that had to be split into smaller pieces for the stoves in most houses. I was glad I knew how to handle the maul after a few experiments and found it really was quite easy. Incidentally, I was to be paid \$1.10 per cord stacked as I worked. It was really a very pleasant experience and that kind of money was really pretty generous. One day I split and stacked six cords, pocketed my \$6.60 and arrived home feeling like the luckiest worker in the place. I could just feel the \$250 I needed to get to Hutton. After about six weeks I had my money and felt strong enough to lick my weight in wildcats. Further to that, Mother and Dad were proud of me and said so!

So where was Hutton Mills and how could I get there? A little geographical research provided an answer to both questions. The Canadian National Railway office found it on their northern British Columbia line from Jasper to Prince Rupert, about half way between Jasper and Prince George. To get there I should take the CN train from Vancouver to Red Pass Junction in Jasper National Park, transfer there to the train from Edmonton to Prince Rupert. That way I could get off at Hutton Mills about 75 miles east of Prince George. There was a train once a day and I would have to wait at Red Pass for several hours for the Rupert train to pick me up. So far so good but what is there at Hutton Mills? About 900 people – a large lumber mill owned and operated by the United Grain growers and six feet of snow in January. You're wondering why the Grain Growers had a lumber mill about 1,000 miles from the grain fields of the Prairies. Join the club! So did I; and even a year later I wasn't at all sure. As a farm boy, even I knew that wheat didn't

need a sawmill to harvest it. Something to do with supplying the farmers of Saskatchewan with lumber to build elevators. Sounded reasonable.

My wood splitting wages covered the cost of trains, meals and one night's sleep. I'm sure the Canadian National travel agent went to bed chuckling that night; I was so green, I'm sure he felt they could use me in a lumber mill – green lumber!

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## 12. Becoming a Teacher in Hutton Mills



*Bernard Gillie's journey to his first teaching post at Hutton Mills.*

Mother, bless her heart, made a list of what I'd need for the coming year, even including a large leather trunk. Time proved her about 100% right. She wanted to know, what I would wear to school, where I would sleep, how would I get my meals, who would do my washing, and what would I do in the evenings. She drew a blank on the answers, so we tried using our imagination and common sense in that order. Frankly, I was terrified and lay awake a few nights in a total panic. Time went by, as it has a habit of doing and when the last day at home came I was past worrying. It finally dawned on me that life as I'd known it for 19 years was at an end. Everything I knew so well on the farm suddenly had a value that was unfamiliar. So this is growing up – nothing will ever be quite the same again.

Fortunately Mother and Dad were not the 'panicky' types. They understood, I guess, what I was going through, and treated the whole affair as natural as breathing, or I'm sure I'd never have boarded the Vancouver boat. The trip over



was such a new experience, I forgot to be lonely and arrived with things under control. 'Take a taxi to the Canadian National station' they said. Sure enough, there was a taxi at the door of the Canadian Pacific Railway dock so I walked over to it; the driver opened the door, and off we went. 'Where to, sir', he asked and I managed to remember 'The CN Station please'. I'd never been in a city as large as Vancouver so that everything I saw was a new experience. When we got to the station, I even remembered to ask the driver 'how much' and to include an extra 25c for a tip. Dad had managed to get it into my head that such was essential.

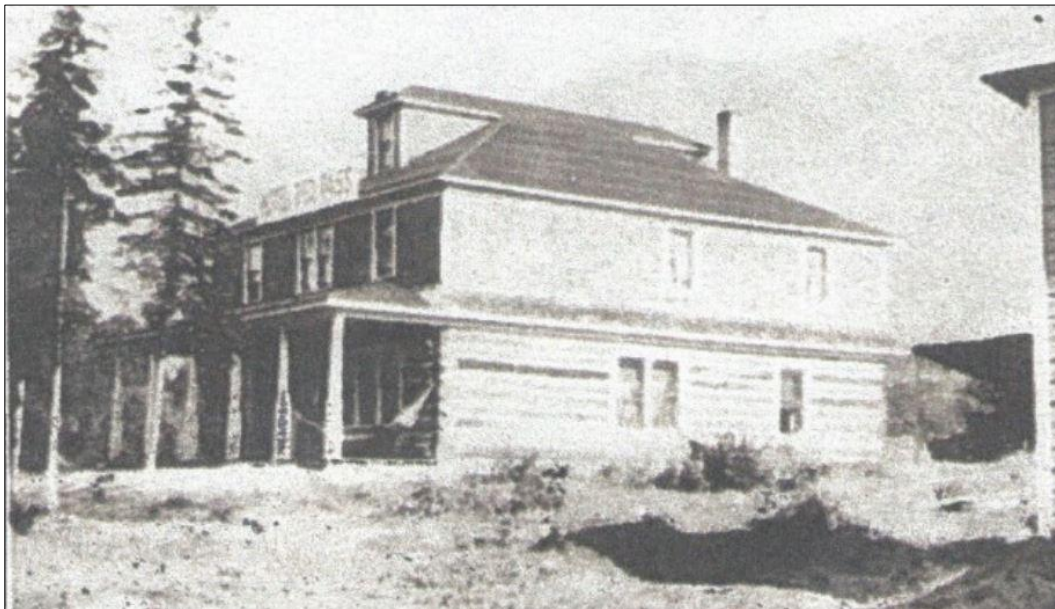
The railway station looked enormous, and in a state of total confusion. Somehow I found a ticket counter, showed my slip only to be told that I'd have to wait three hours before the train left. At last a chance to sit down and watch the real world go by and to figure out where I'd find a train by following the crowd to the platform. I had a ticket for an upper berth so a porter showed me the right car and the right berth. My wits were beginning to settle down so I sat and watched what everyone else did. Finally 'all aboard' was announced and I could really join the world going by.

Going to bed in an upper berth on a train has to be experienced to be believed. I crawled up the little ladder and found myself in a space adequate for a small dog but not a six foot 19 year old. Taking off your clothes while sitting on them presents certain difficulties I won't go into here – I even found the little net for my clothes! Who was in the berth below me, I knew not – except that he snored till I fell asleep and probably much longer.

Somewhere along the way I woke up to find there was enough daylight to see the mountains. I'd never seen real snow-capped mountains so close before, and for once I was amazed at their beauty. Pictures I'd seen didn't exaggerate a bit so I lay there and marvelled at the magnificence. Soon who should give me a shake but the porter who told me in no uncertain tones that I had twenty minutes to get dressed and prepare to leave the train. I'll leave you to image what I went through trying to find what I needed and stuff the rest into my valise. He who snored mumbled a few 'pleasantries' about people who made such a disturbance at 5.30am. I know now how he felt!

Somehow, I got things together, only to feel the brakes begin to scrape and finally bring things to a stop. As I made my way to the exist, the porter – bless his soul – pulled my arm and said, 'This is Red Pass Junction. The hotel won't open till 7:00 so you'll have to amuse yourself for an hour or so before breakfast'. I stepped off and found myself alone – all alone – on the station platform. The office was closed so all I could do was watch the last car disappear around a curve. For the first time I realized what being alone was really like and I decided right there that if this was teaching school in British Columbia, I'd try plumbing next year.

As I stood on the Red Pass Station platform and watched my train disappear, I suddenly realized I was surrounded by some of the finest mountain scenery on the continent. I'd seen pictures of it, of course, but do what we will with cameras, they somehow fail to move you like the real thing. I could feel the massive surroundings; trying to realize that here I was a young farm lad, all alone and trying to make myself realize this had really happened. There in front of me a magnificent lake with a background of snow, ice, peaks and forests such as I had never seen before. Suddenly I remembered one of our teachers at Normal School telling about that very lake – its name – Moose Lake. There must be dozens of them with that name across Canada but it stuck in my mind that this was one of the sources of the Fraser System. I've seen it many times since but it never fails to make the prickles stand up on my neck. It makes me proud of being a Canadian. Sounds silly I guess but there it is! I walked down the railroad track for half a mile or so – caught a glimpse of Mt. Robson and stood in wonder. If this is going teaching in British Columbia – I'll withdraw my thought of trying plumbing.



*The Red Pass Junction Hotel, where Bernard Gillie had breakfast.*

I found the hotel close to the station and read the notice saying that breakfast was served at 7:00 am. Come 7:00 and there I was on the doorstep trying the door which opened to a neat and inviting dining room. Someone showed me to a table and there I was the sole occupant. I enjoyed a good breakfast with one eye on my watch since the train for Prince Rupert was due shortly. I made my way back to the station complete with valise and still wondering if my trunk which I had shipped from Victoria would actually find its way to Hutton Mills. A train whistle in the distance and along with a few other passengers I climbed aboard. Luck was with me, for there was an empty seat alongside an attractive young lady who looked as lost as I was. We soon got into conversation and it turned out that the lady was also a teacher – a beginner – going to a place called Aleza Lake which

turned out to be two stations past Hutton. She too, was from Victoria so we had much in common and time flew by as the train headed west along the Upper Fraser River. Aleza Lake was another lumber town only larger than Hutton and I made several visits there during the winter. No – no romance – just a very pleasant friend in a land where friends for me were rare.

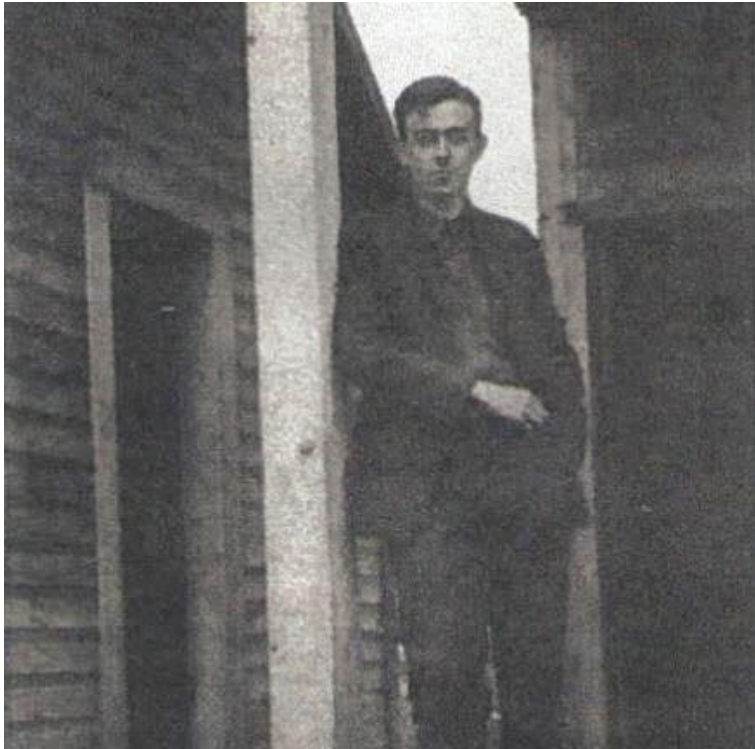
The trip along the Upper Fraser River was really pleasant – beautiful country-side and some animal life - moose and deer – and a few humans at each station that looked like normal samples that would be easy to like. As we got close to Hutton I gathered my things together, said good-bye to my companion and stood at the coach door waiting for the first glimpse of Hutton.



*Hutton Mills Station.*

To be quite honest, I was feeling weak in the knees as the train ground to a halt. Off I got to find an almost deserted platform – a large building – obviously the ‘mill’ – and one of the largest lumber yards I’d ever seen. There was a station agent waiting to get a look at the new teacher and the company storekeeper whose job it was to take me to the ‘Staff House’. They were both very pleasant and seemed anxious to make me welcome. I was delighted to see my teacher trunk standing nearby and was told it had come the day before. The storekeeper picked up my bag and said he’d show me my room. Now that made me feel greatly relieved. I was a member of the ‘staff’ and my room was already assigned! We walked along the track about 100 yards to a building which had never seen a paint brush – let alone paint. In fact as I walked along I noticed that not one building in the whole place had ever been painted. I decided that the United Grain Growers didn’t believe in wasting money on fancy frills like paint.

The mill was running and there seemed to be plenty of activity – even to workmen running around on the logs floating in the mill pond. I asked about the huge piles of lumber and found that the saw mill had burned down a year ago and only the planer mill was still operating. My companion told me that they had cut almost all their timber limits so were busy running the cut lumber – about 15 million board feet – through the planer and when that was done the whole place would be closed. Obviously my teaching job was not going to last very long. I just hoped it would keep the place busy for another ten months. The storeman assured me it would, so at least I'd get a year of teaching and salary before they folded.



*Bernard Gillie at the Hutton Mills Staff House, 1926.*

The 'staff house' was anything but impressive but I kept my mouth shut. Inside it turned out to be two storeys and while far from fancy it was clean and tidy. We walked down a corridor on the ground floor, came to a closed door and my guide opened it saying 'This is your room'. Furnishings were sparse – one cot, one small table and one chair. Bed neat and clean, three hooks on the wall, period. This was to be home for at least 10 months.

As a parting shot, the chap who was showing me around said, 'By the way, some of the fellows who sleep in this staff house, claim there are bed-bugs at large!'. I'd often heard about such things but hadn't given it much thought. What does a bed bug look like? Do they bite? Are they poisonous? What do you use to get rid of them? etc. etc. I could never tell my mother of this development. She would order me home at once, and take the whole matter up with the Minister of Education – and presto – guess who would be out of a job? Discretion was better

than valour, I was sure, and my escort had only said that ‘some people say there are bed-bugs in the Staff House’. Maybe it was just gossip! I’ll see what happens when I go to bed. Maybe they don’t like people from Victoria and will leave me alone.

It was getting toward supper time and here comes my escort. He tells me that I’m to get all my meals in the Company Cook House with the rest of the workmen; that the meals are excellent and it will cost me 35 dollars a month. Maybe this is just another rumour like you know what. As we talked someone came out of the Cook House and started to beat a big heavy triangle with a steel bar. ‘That’s the call for supper’, I’m told, ‘I’ll take you over and introduce you to the cook and tell him you are the new teacher for the school’.

Off we went to the open door that said ‘Cook House’. On looking in I could see very little, except two or three very dim light bulbs and a sea of bodies at every long table. My friend pointed to a very small space and said ‘That’s where you are to sit’. The only thing to do was to force my way between the two bodies in the space. Lo and behold – they shifted a bit and I was able to find room to sit down. I realized there was a buzz of conversation, but not in English. I tried that and all I got was a smile and an empty plate. I expected someone to put something on the plate, but it didn’t happen. I realized that all the food was on a raised shelf down the middle of the table. If you wanted something and had a long reach, you were lucky. So I waded in, found some meat dish that looked really good, and loaded my plate. Presto! It was good and I decided that my luck was improving. I found that no one – but no one – passed anything. If you couldn’t reach it, you went without. But everything looked excellent even in the dim light and I soon found my appetite.

I tried making conversation but all I got was a blank stare and I realized that no one within hearing understood English. In fact no one was even talking, so I kept my mouth shut except to load in the food and wonder how I’d feel after ten months of this three times a day.

However, my guardian angel was waiting at the door as I left – if men are every angels! A young man well dressed and, I discovered, well spoken, was waiting. He introduced himself – said his name was ‘Smitty’ – worked in the Company office. I detected an English (old country) accent and couldn’t help but warm to his smile. He asked me how I liked the cookhouse meal, and I said the food was excellent but the company was short on communication. He laughed and said he knew I was the teacher and was probably feeling lost. He said that three of the office staff had their meals in a private home and wondered if I might like to join them – the cost was the same as the ‘cook house’ and the home surroundings were very pleasant. It took me about five seconds to say I’d like the idea. So Smitty invited me to go with him to meet the family – a husband and wife and two small

children – and if they were agreeable, I could start with breakfast the next morning. I was delighted. The family name was Grogan, the husband was a lineman for the telegraph company and their home was in Pittsburgh. From there on life took on a different appearance and I spent the next ten months as a boarder at ‘The Grogans’. The house was about 30 yards from the school and they had a gramophone with a fine collection of Red Seal Recordings which I came to admire. As someone said long ago – ‘You can’t lose them all’. I knew my Mother would be relieved to know I had a good home and a family to look after me. That night – my first in the staff house – kept me in a ‘stew’ expecting to be bitten by you know what! Spent a restful time once I was sure the ‘creepy crawlies’ didn’t attack me. In the morning – a Sunday before Labour Day and two days to get ready for the first day in my first school.



*The School at Hutton Mills.*

Some young lads, about age 12 or so, came looking for me – they’d heard the new teacher had arrived – and offered to show me the school. Like everything else in Hutton Mills, it wasn’t far away. There it was – weather stained, no paint – and door unlocked. In we went, and this time, I was sure I’d made a horrible mistake. The boys explained that the school was also the village hall – there had been a dance on Friday night and the janitor hadn’t got around to it yet. If you know what a dance was like in a saw mill town in the British Columbia bush, I don’t need to explain it. If you don’t, you wouldn’t believe it and I really can’t describe it. I knew it was a school because there were some desks among the chaos. At this point my young friends won my heart – even if they were a bit dismayed – but not daunted.

‘We’ll help you clean up, Mr. Gillie’ they said; and with the courage of desperation we set to. About 30 hours later – 3:00 o’clock on Labour Day to be exact, we had turned the place into a classroom with desks, books, supplies and a heavy deposit of dust to make it look real. Without going into the depressing

details, somehow on Tuesday morning at 9:00 am, I rang the hand bell and 28 youngsters crowded through the doors and I was able to start my first school. As was always the case, every classroom in British Columbia had a teacher – every teacher asked the youngsters to stand – and we all recited the Lord’s Prayer. He must have heard us, for from that moment on, I was a ‘teacher’ – something I really didn’t believe was possible. And further more, I’ve never regretted it over all these years.

P.S. Yes there were many ‘bugs’ referred to above, but never once did I find one in my room – which says something – though I’m not sure what!



*Bernard Gillie’s beginners class at Hutton Mills school.*

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*Biographical note: Bernard Gillie taught in several schools, then returned to university, was very active in teachers organizations becoming President of the British Columbia Teachers Federation in 1944-45. From 1962 to ‘72 he worked in the Northwest Territories, first as a Superintendent of Schools then Director of Education. He is now happily retired in Victoria.*

*British Columbia Historical News, Spring 1996.*

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## 13. Postscript

*The following postscript is an email sent by Margaret Gillie, Bernard Gillie's daughter in 2021 to Alex Reid, the editor of the Lives Retold website.*

It was SO important to my father that people understand that the Gillies were Scottish.... I think he never really understood (or chose to deny) that Berwick-upon-Tweed is not actually in Scotland! When I was old enough to actually look at a map and question him on it, he would say "Well.... that border area was always disputed. The English like to think it belongs to them, but my grandfather always claimed...." etc. etc. Never let fact impede a good story!





I'm also attaching a photo for your amusement. It's the hand embroidered laundry bag that my grandmother sent with my father when he went on that first teaching job in Hutton. It's just so sweet and pink and flowery...that I have to laugh. I can't imagine what the mill workers said when he hung it up...complete with a pocket for dirty "kerchiefs". It's a miracle he survived the first day! He kept it all those years.

I've never been in Hutton, BC. We passed that way several time on vacations as children, but I don't think there's anything remaining of the mill town now. After the job in Hutton Mills, he taught for a few years in another mining town called Britannia Beach...closer to the west coast of BC. I know Dad drove back there, when he must have been in his late 80's, and said there was no trace of the settlement. The rain forest is so dense there that after 50 years all signs of habitation are covered by vegetation.

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