

Letters from Ethelwyn Chase to Edith (Weekes) Leonard, from John Hencher's documents. If anyone has more information about Ethelwyn Chase, Edith Leonard or Ella McLean please contact: Christy at msknockleby@gmail.com

Dear Edith,

Greetings after so long a time. And over so many miles. You did not know, or did you, that some time ago I had left the effete and cultured East for the wild and wooly West, and that it has been my good fortune to follow again some of the trails that we covered together so many years ago. As to that foursome of classical adjectives above, the obvious interpretation of East and West seems to render them rather obsolete. At any rate the so-called wilderness character is passing from the West and culture is taking its place.

You will not have forgotten how strange all our surroundings seemed when you and I settled first at Wahstao. The muddled houses and farm buildings, not very pretentious in those days, the strange costumes, sheepskin coats, head shawls, and homespun clothing were scarcely more curious than the open prairie and parkland with copses of white poplar. But at least we were in our own country, as we occasionally remembered, and our Ukrainian neighbours, feeling their environment quite as strange as we did, were so far from their own homeland.

You were almost a pioneer, weren't you in your experiences at the Mission? Only Jessie Munro and Rette Edmonds had preceded you in its establishment. That was in 1904. But the health of neither of these proved equal to the strain, and after a few months each had reluctantly to retire from the field. Then came Caroline and later this poor left-over-from-China. Bless your heart! It was you who gave me the chance. If you had not written to the W.M.S. Board that you thought I might be strong enough to teach the little day-school at the Mission, I might never have got to my mission field at all.

Surely you remember your mid-winter trip to Lamont in away-below-zero weather, the drive of forty miles to Fort Saskatchewan and back for my run-away boxes, the kind hospitality of the Archers, who would not hear of us starting out again for Wahstao as long as the mercury stayed at 60 degrees below. When it rose to 30 they let us go.

So many friends came out to see us start. We were well wrapped in woolens and furs and finished the fifty mile drive before night and without being cold. We followed a winding trail not very well broken, for a recent heavy snow had fallen. Only twice in all that distance was there a fork in the road, so little danger of getting lost. Dinner was had at Wostok, and supper at Pagan where we crossed the North Saskatchewan River. Twisting around among the jack-pine in the Five Mile Woods I remember thinking "A sleigh may get through but a wagon in summer time impossible". From the blue-black sky, the bright stars looked down curiously through the snow-laden evergreens on the lone travelers, and did their best to light us home.

Well, Good-night to you! I hope we sleep as soundly as I did that very first night in Wahstao.

With love and gratitude for your active share in getting me to a mission field,

Ethelwyn.

Dear Edith,

I have been visiting Caroline lately and , of course, spoke of you. How glad we always were that after marrying she settled so near to Wahstao. She and Arthur have always made their home a real Rest Home to the Wahstao and later to the Vilna staff. How relieved she was that night when we turned up safe and sound (we were two or more days late). Mercury dropped again to 60 below Sunday morning! Would anyone come to Sunday School? Yes, there is Nicoli trudging over the brow of the hill, one faithful pupil. He was the chore-boy that winter. Remember? But he slept out.

That January proved really too cold for a young teen-ager to chop wood outside and you finally sent him home to stay, and with the maid's help did the barn chores yourself. Stenna was another faithful soul, willing to help the panyas, in every possible way, but mostly as maid and interpreter; an earnest Christian then and now, working for her Master according to her light.

Well, school began next morning for the Spring term. The schoolroom occupied the whole front of the Mission House and was heated by a great wood stove. The seats and desks came out of no factory ever known and must have been most uncomfortable. But the children knew nothing better than home-made benches, so there were no complaints. Teaching was very primary. To make the English language intelligible to the Ukrainian children required some unique tactics. A series of little stuffed animals which some knowing friend had tucked among my luggage proved invaluable. Pictures of all kinds illustrated reading lessons. "Where is the lesson today?" a little girl was asked. She turned the page of her Reader till she came to a picture of a fox. In her language a fox is a "less". The new teacher found it all very interesting and the children apt pupils. But spelling! Oh my! So few of these English words were spelled as they sounded.

The rest of the day after school closed was spent in the living-dining-room adjoining. Unless as sometimes during that first cold winter when you so often could not drive out to visit, the three of us floundered through the snow to what we called the "street-car corner." That was the nearest point to the Saddle Lake Trail. There were no cars of course, but there were telegraph poles and that single line of wire was the only link with the life we had previously lived. I, having been a city School-ma'am with perhaps a hundred contacts a day sometimes found this isolation very hard to bear. Oh, for some place to go! But there was no place - for the teacher. The only trip to the "outside" which you folks took to Pagan for the mail once a week. How I used to envy you that! Thursday was mail day and when you found out how I longed to go, you offered to teach for me on a Thursday when it was Caroline's turn to go. How I thanked you for that and with what eager joy prepared for the outing. It was cold and snowy but what of that? I would hear my own language spoken by someone other than you two, and maybe be invited to have dinner at the Doctor's, see new faces and have a long drive. Well, we started out gayly enough, made our way successfully as far as the "street car corner" but almost immediately ran into difficulties. In among the Poplar bluffs the trail was unbroken and our horse was soon floundering in snow up to the shafts. It was no use, we could go no further. For the first but not the last time in my life, I ran after a man. But running that morning was rather wading and struggling. Nearly exhausted I reached Nicoli Werenka's a half mile away. Back he came with me, a big shovel on his shoulder, and dug away the snow from around the horse. He unhitched her, and all together we got the cutter turned around. With old Maud again in the shafts we sadly headed for home. So ended my first expedition out!

You will not have forgotten what a kindly gentleman Mr. Werenka was, nor how motherly his wife. Our nearest neighbours, the path was kept green between our two houses. You told me once that Mrs. Werenka and Miss Munro used to walk that path, smile, and shake hands at the line fence, good friends, though they could not speak a word to each other.

You will remember the older children, John, who, with his cousin, John Fergerchuk, used to spend every Sunday evening at the Mission, is still, I believe, riding horses for a Ranch near Calgary. Elena, now Mrs. Harrison of North Vancouver, exchanges visits with me whenever I spend time in the Coast City. She is very happily married and has a maned daughter in Victoria. George, the next in line, lives with his wife on an orange ranch in California. George is one of the best. I shall never forget how he helped in the 'flu epidemic of 1918, when our Home became a Hospital. Everything that a young man could do, he did, and much that many a man would think he couldn't do. He was on call at any hour of the day or night to run errands on foot or with a disabled car, to give medicines or watch by a bedside, to give hypos or feed an infant, and all with such happy willingness and skill. The household chores were routine, and more than once, on his own, he did the washing. You will hear of George again if I ever get in my story as far as 1918.

To return to 1907, the snow was deep that winter. Nearly every afternoon when you or Caroline came home from your visiting you had a merry tale to tell of having a cutter upset on some hilly trail. Fortunate you were if you could keep the horse under control while books and robes and guitar and hot bricks were bundled back into the sleigh. After many a snowstorm no one ventured out to break the trail until the panyas had already done so.

Again a Good-night, Chacie

Dear Edith,

But those cold snowy days when driving out was impossible, were by no means lost time. You and Caroline settled down to language study. Stenna might soon be leaving. Another interpreter would be hard to find, and in any case, heart to heart contacts are so much easier to establish in a common language. So - to work! No special time was allowed for language study in this field and no teacher available. Nor were there any text-books except one or two that had come to hand, supplied for the purpose of teaching German to Ukrainians! But these circumstances were no deterrent to our determined Gold Medalist in moderns, and you dug in. In no time at all you came up with a M.S. grammar for beginners which became the basis of study for us others. It meant the mastering of script as well as print and really seemed at first to have nothing in common. We were glad to find that the Ukrainian was strictly phonetic and so quite easy to read; but alas for the inflections! Fourteen forms for every noun, twenty-eight for every adjective! And as for the verbs, regular and irregular, perfect and imperfect, they followed no rule ever heard of before. Prepositions might demand to be followed by any one of five or six cases and verb prefixes seemed each to be a law to itself. But Ukrainian, with all its difficulties proved to be a fascinating study, and we were always encouraged by the fact that the five-year-old children could speak it glibly. Why not we - in time? Bye and bye, a good German-Ukrainian dictionary came our way and proved to be a veritable gold-mine.

One engagement you had that cold winter was kept fairly regularly, your Sunday School in the Solowon home even if it was eight miles away. The two boys and two girls of the family were most eager pupils and worth going for even if no neighbours came in. Once in a while I went with you or instead of you, and later after Bavilla public school opened, we transferred the Sunday School there. Speaking of the Solowons - a few years ago now as I was passing through a store-door in Edmonton one day, I thought I heard my name spoken softly behind me. I turned to meet the smile of a little woman standing there. "Did you speak to me"? I asked.

"You are Miss Chase aren't you?" she replied. "Yes" I said, "but I'm afraid you will have to tell me who you are." "Do you remember Elena Solowon?"

"I should think I did!" There she was with a teen-age daughter and if she had seen me once, it was only once since Bavilla Sunday School days! Such a memory!

Do you remember how difficult it was to keep the little house from freezing up around us those bitter bitter nights? You used to fill the box stove with big wood at bed-time and close off all dampers then in the middle of the night down you came to find nothing but a few glowing coals, when you would fill it up again. So much for the main four rooms, but not for the lean-to kitchen. There frost had its way without let or hindrance. When our thermometer registered no more than 40 below we guessed at the lower temperature by the thickness of the hoar-frost that coated everything in the kitchen as soon as the morning kettle began to boil.

Burning so much poplar wood naturally caused soot encrustations in the stove-pipe and every so often they caught fire. We got to know the sound even before the pipe showed red, and each of us rushed for our favourite deterrent. Caroline separated the pipe from the stove and inserted a pie-plate of salt. You secured a pail of water and the only thing I could think of was the tin baking board - rather silly - but I had always a fear of a length of horizontal pipe falling. But one of our fire drills I never can forget for the scare we unintentionally gave Ella MacLean the first winter after she joined us. We were at the breakfast table when our experienced ears caught the ominous roaring in the stove pipes. We three exchanged startled glances but never a word. As one, we jumped up and dashed each for her individual specific while poor Ella sat startled and still, wondering if we had all gone crazy together. She had heard nothing of the menacing sound.

We did not see over much of our neighbours that winter. The ambitious boys and girls came to Day-school more or less regularly, sometimes complaining that their fingers or their feet were frozen; the two Johns, Werenka and Forgerchuk, spent Sunday evenings at the Mission, but the older folks kept as much as possible in their own warm homes. But I do recall Alex Halitsky coming in one day to give us a big chunk of meat. He was so gracious too, in his way of bestowing it. He was a fine old gentleman. He, and his wife, remember raised a big family of daughters, but no sons. The three younger girls were faithful and studious at both day and Sunday school. Which reminds me of an illness of Alex's, years after you left us. For over a week I had been visiting and doing what I could for him, and he was certainly mending. Then came Sunday and I went to see him again. It was most interesting. All, or nearly all of the daughters, with their husbands had come to visit the sick father and with tear-wet eyes were sadly discussing his case. The old man, propped up on big pillows, was - I couldn't help thinking it - thoroughly enjoying their anxiety. Room was made for the visiting nurse (?) and solemnly I took his pulse and temperature. Results were quite reassuring, but: - "Don't you think he had better go to the hospital?" I was asked immediately.

Well, I did not see much need, but after all, I really did not know what the ailment had been. The old gentleman did not often get away from home, and the daughters and wife were all very solicitous, perhaps it would be wise to agree. "We have sent to Wasil for a better car (ten miles away) - there are only Fords around here and Fords are so rough".

To be quite fair to Mr. Ford, I should add that all this happened before "Henry made a lady out of Lizzie."

All things come to an end and the "hard winter" of '06 - 07" was no exception. Sometime in April the snow around the kitchen doorstep began to soften, then decrease, and at last on one sunny day, the moist black earth appeared. I still remember my thrill at the sight. At long last I was seeing Alberta! This was the real thing! So far I had seen only the snow that had blanketed it for so many months. And from then on, this swiftly wasted away. The winds must have made away with it for very few puddles were left on the ground. Very soon, furry little buds were noticed shooting up from the moist earth, then opening up into crocus-like blossoms - the prairie anemones. Soon the grass was thick with them. How we loved those first early flowers! They were the pioneers of a brilliant succession - Buffalo beans, gay handsfull yellow; Lady's slippers - also yellow; we could - and did - gather armsful; Norther bed-straw in delightful sprays of white; Canada lilies - the prairie flamed with them; and violets, violets, everywhere.

But I anticipate. Spring can lag slowly in Alberta. On May the fourth we took a walk to the river's edge and photographed huge blocks of ice left stranded by the swift spring current. Two weeks later a sudden snow gave us the chance to go tobogganing. It seemed to take the grass a long time to green up. Sometime that May, Caroline and I undertook to open a Sunday School at John Nikolichuk's. Remember? You had to have the horse and buggy to go to Solowons, so you could take us only as far as Gallyus' home. From there we must needs walk. But the way was unknown. You taught us how to ask Mrs. Gallyus to show us how to go, but unfortunately how to understand her directions. She showed us as well as (she) could by pointed finger, and I daresay, by pointed words, for they were many, but not of much use to us, and we started out. Our equipment was not heavy, only books, folding blackboard. a few slates and a mandolin, but after following cow-paths and buffalo trails up this valley and that for an hour or so, we wished we had less. The ground was wet with soft snow, which made walking no easier. The house we sought was still out of sight. We were as well and thoroughly lost as if we had been in the highlands of Scotland, when we met on a cross path three children, two boys and a girl. Hope at last!

"Where does Mr. Nikelichuk live?" we ventured, in English this time.

"There!" he pointed. "We go - to school."

Down into another valley and up another hill and the house at last appeared. An hour of English and Bible-teaching followed with the patient children, then with our impedimenta we set out for home. As the mission house sat high on a hill-top it was plainly visible and we set a straight course for it. Miles of valleys and hills intervened so the straight course was bent many times before the pair of us, bedraggled and weary, reached our very welcome door.

More difficulties beset that Sunday-school. The following Sunday was fine and the walking good but we reached the N, home to find it locked and deserted. It was a Holy Day. and the family were either at a different church or away visiting. As we sat on the doorstep to rest, Caroline turned to me with; "Do you really think the Lord wants us to have a Sunday school here, Chacie?"

On another Sunday our horse slipped through a bridge on Boggy Creek and we went no further. But even if you have forgotten that episode I'll not remind you now, for you will be tired of reading this long screed. More anon, Chacie.

My Dear Edith

I again take up my pen after keeping you waiting so long. How we wished for you this past Summer as Caroline and I together visited those of the old families still living around Wahstao. Four of the Halitsky sisters are near neighbours, not far from their childhood homes, but the Werenka connection is scattered far. I had a delightful visit with one of George's girls, Anyst, now Mrs. Stewart of Victoria B.C. A younger one, whom you would not know is Mrs. Warbuts of Lamont; her husband teaching there. The oldest, Mary, married Steve Repka and lives at the edge of the Big Pines, her husband being for years secretary of the Smoky Lake School Division, comprising sixty odd schools. Yes, so far has education developed since our puny efforts at Sunday School and week-day teaching of forty years ago. But I was going to tell you of that Sunday in '07 when our horse went through the bridge. You had other means that day of getting to Solowons' so Caroline and I drove. The trail lay along a pretty valley crossing the creek at a place where it cut low through steep banks to form the bridge. Logs had been placed across the creek and loose rails laid over them. The rails were wet from a recent shower and our careful steed had to pick her way over them very daintily. A misstep and down she went, a straddle of one of the cross logs. Caroline was quicker than I and loosed the traces, so that we could separate horse and buggy, and pushed the latter back on the trail. But to get poor Maud out of her predicament was beyond us. The nearest man lived a half mile away and the lush grass was very wet. But as fast as I could I rushed to call Mr. Bachul. He lay asleep on a bench just inside his open door, but roused to meet our need. To my appeal in broken Ukrainian, he muttered, "Bad bridge!", clapped his cap on his head and set off down the valley. Maud had worked herself off from her uncomfortable saddle and now stood helpless among the cross-pieces. Mr. B. Had to remove all the logs to allow her room to get out of the deep bed of the creek, when she patiently suffered us to hitch her to the buggy and make our way homeward. No school that day!

A yell and a shriek! Maud's in the creek!  
Who put her in? Rails wet and thin!  
Who got her out? A neighbour thereabout.

That was a beautiful summer. You would not remember perhaps, how one day you and I were driving through the Big Woods, the wild roses were in abundant bloom along the trail and so beautiful, that again and again we remarked on them. At last one of us said, "Let's see if we can keep quiet about those roses for at least five minutes." Silence fell - for one minute - then a fresh spray of beauty brought out another burst of admiration. We gave it up.

But the mosquitoes! They came so suddenly and in such throngs! One day - none whatever - the next - millions. C. and I, that afternoon set out for the Bilar home, and had to fight our way across the fields. Soon, everyone was wearing mosquito-nets, and carrying pails of smudge-fire on even the shortest walks. Our two Johns invited us one day to a row on Sunshine Lake. We took lunch for the first picnic, but eating under a net, and shooing off hungry mosquitoes from its outer side at the same time, made

picnicking a stressful business. "A whole summer of this!", I cried. "When will it end?" and an old-timer answered, "About the tenth of September."

Well it did and they were as bad again. There were other and more pleasant discoveries that summer. Wild fruit, and in such abundance. I found my first wild strawberry on the path home from George Werenka's. In great glee I was about to eat it when I remembered that we had a visitor, who too, would enjoy the first strawberry. So I saved it for her, and she popped it into her little boy's mouth! Later came raspberries, blueberries, and the dear little cranberries, the best of all. What delight to lie on a dry mossy bank among the pines on a sunny September day and gather up those little red globes of succulent tartness! And we bought bushels of them, for they kept well all winter, even uncooked.

Another discovery was the freedom of the way that lay before a horse and buggy in the western parkland. One never need follow a trail, but drive hither and yon over the hills and plains as one fancied, sloughs and creeks permitting. Clumps of willows might prove a barrier but only if they refused to bend under the front axle.

"But the gopher holes! What if Maud puts her foot in one?"

"She has three more feet to stand on."

But the summer soon passed. In September the leaves began to change. The Poplars turned a beautiful yellow and the sunlight filtering through those yellow Poplars has a glory all its own. But not only the poplars; the splendors of a hundred brilliant sunsets spilled all over the hills and valleys 'til the whole country-side was aflame. The wild turf held all the hues ever seen on ripe apples and shared in the beauty of the trees.

Then it all faded. The first hard frost reduced all the glory to a dull tawinness, to await the first snow. Another winter was at hand.

It was then that the first germ that was to grow into a boarding-school work developed. We were asked to take two children into our home that they might learn the English language and Canadian ways more quickly. Paulina Ewanchuk and Kost Himko became our first boarders. They were good children, very interesting, and very interested students.

Christmas was drawing near, and your friend M. Danard was coming for the holidays. Will you ever forget your trip to Lamont to get her? We had been told that to cross the Saskatchewan on the ice at a point quite near would be a much shorter route than crossing at the ferry either east or west of us. So you decided to try it. The following is your account of the day.

I started to go to Lamont,  
But not by Pakan as of old,  
So I crossed at Bidnyk  
To find a new track  
Well wrapped `gainst the wind and the cold.

"What Panya wants at Lamont?"

Asked the first questioner, told

"I go for a friend

And am hoping the end  
Of my journey soon to behold."

"Then go on your way to Lamont  
The route is as short as you're told  
Nine miles to the church  
But you'll be left in the lurch  
If you think the way plain to behold."

I pursued my way to Lamont  
Hour after hour in the cold,  
"Nine miles to the church!"  
Twice that I've traversed,  
Ere Hunka indeed did behold.

At last I came to Lamont  
The sun in a great sea of gold  
Had sunk in the west

I And now I'll be blest  
If it isn't the best  
To stick to the way known of old.

That first Christmas stands out clearly in my memory. On the evening before we had all driven the dozen miles to Pagan in a farm wagon, springless naturally, and taken part in a local concert at our neighbour Mission. You hoped to find there a bale which might hold something for Christmas gifts for the children of Wahstao Sunday-school, but no bale had come. Reaching home again after midnight with one more guest, the student preacher at Pagan, you and I saw our visitors all stowed away for the rest of the night, then went to work on our Christmas tree. The store-room was unheated addition to the kitchen lean-to, but there we spent hours ransacking its contents, if perchance we could find anything among the old clothes etc., that would possibly serve as a gift for twenty-odd kiddies. I don't remember what we found, but I do know that about five a.m. all was in readiness and we lay down on the living-room floor to try to catch an hour's sleep.

The youngsters came early  
"Invited for ten, but here let me state  
Waiting was dull as they got there at eight."  
They went home happy and all's well that ends well

After noon dinner, our guests were bright for fun, when what the hostess craved above all else was a good sleep. I think in the end the visitors set about amusing themselves.

And that's what I'm leaving you to do right now, while I go to keep an eye on Caroline's youngest grand-daughter.

For auld lang syne, Chacie

Dear Old Friend,

More than forty Christmases have passed over our heads since the one about which I was writing you last, and what changes have come over the old neighbourhood. Nobody travels in farm wagons any more: trucks, tractors and cars raise the dust now on the well made roads. The old mudded log houses have long given way to pretty bungalows with up-to-date furnishings and white enameled kitchens. Some of the younger generation of the old families remain on the farm, but more have scattered. Some of our earliest school pupils I have found in Vancouver, B.C. and Hamilton, Ontario, while others I know are in Chicago and California. God has been good to us that our first trio, you, Caroline and I can still get together once in a while, as at your home not long ago. Caroline and I are now at her younger daughter, Mary's, who a few years ago married a Wahstao boy, Bill Repka, now a High School Principal. Baby-sitting with her and her youngest grand-daughter, ends my latest letter to you. You two are running a close race in Grand-children. But I am ahead of you. It was in 1918 the "flu" year that Mary Bilar-Repka's little two-year old started calling me "Baba" so became my first "grand-child". Now Emilian has two little girls of her own, whose pictures came my way at Christmas time, for are they not my great grand-children?

The spring of 1908 saw the opening of Prosvischenia, the first public school for miles around. In view of this our mission day-school closed and the teachers took a part in the evangelical work outside. Well do I recall my first Women's Meeting in what became known later as the Bavilla district. Eight or ten women gathered at a farm house about 10 a.m. to patch a quilt, each for herself, the mission supplying the patches. For me it was a first attempt to give a bible reading in Ukrainian. We sewed until between three and four, then work was put away and the tired women settled themselves patiently for the worship service. Singing and reading passed off very well then an interruption occurred. From a dark corner, made darker with a heavy grey blanket, a hen walked out. She was quite inoffensive, just tired of close confinement. But she evidently had not been alone under the blanket, and the ray of light that she had let in deceived her male companions into thinking that the dawn had come., You know what roosters do in the dawn. Well they did it. They may have been seven of them or seventeen; it sounded more like seventy. Their raucous crowing filled all the air. Every Ukrainian word that I had memorized so carefully fled from me, and I broke into violent perspiration as I looked in vain to the women for some interest and inspiration. They looked as if they cared not a whit whether they heard me or the roosters and I had to hurry along the service in the deepest embarrassment. My next meeting was prepared for in fear and trembling, but fortunately that day was less cold and the poultry were out where they belonged. My message met good attention and I drove home happy. How we longed to give those dear women the comfort and hope that we had caught even when children from the wonderful gospel of Jesus. Their lives were so lonely and I'm sure homesickness for the land of their fathers must have often nearly overcome them. And their inner resources seemed so meager when reading books was beyond them. We tried to overcome that handicap in the case of their children and the children were surely quick to respond. But Caroline and I are going over to see the new and modern school in which her son-in-law, Bill, is Principal, so Boodte adorova!

Ethelwyn,

Dear Edith,

Well, the country schools and all others have changed somewhat since Prosvischenia was first opened away back in 1908. That was used too, for only six months of the year from May to October. How could children go to school in the winter through deep snow in "forty below" weather? It never seemed to occur to anyone that fathers might bring them. Perhaps it would not have been practical since horses were rare, and oxen can be very slow. In May the kiddies could come on their own which they did and I went back to my old trade. Not all came that should that first summer for compulsory attendance was not yet written into the laws of Alberta. I should like to call the roll again and see appear the Osachies, Mary, Kate, and John Bilar, the Kopchenkos, the Halitsky girls, Andre and Anetsa Czerniwczan, Junic and Metro Zacharuk, Lena and Steve Repka, Annie and George Werenka, or was Annie too grown-up already? From the north I'm afraid to try to name them for fear I leave out someone, but I am sure of Mary and Kate Werenka, whose little baby brother has recently died. Their cousins from John Werenka's and Metro and Catherine Fergerchuk should be included. What a wonderful talk-fest we should have together, recounting the stories of the forty intervening years. But I think I can tell you where most of them are now. The Osachies center in Edmonton; Mary Bilar is in Owen Sound, Ontario, but her husband spends the winters with their daughter in California. John and Kate are still in Alberta, the former in Thorsby and Kate in Vegreville. I have lost track of the Kopchenko girls but the Halitckys all live near or at Wahstao still.

The Czerniwczare at Bellis, the Zacharuks at Vilna, Annie Werenka lives in North Vancouver, and George in California, Mary, I have located before or have I? She married Steve Shapka and they still live near Wahstao, Steve and Lena were also in Procvischenia school and the latter in now in Vancouver. Tsea Weremka I missed to my regret when I was at Wahstao in 1948. Neither could I find Kate in Edmonton as I was told I should. Metro Fergerchuk, I hear, lives near St. Paul. Catherine is in Hollywood, not an actress but a nurse, when rather poor health permits. She also writes and had the distinction of having one of her poems printed in the Anthology of American Poetry of 1940. How I have enjoyed meeting so many of these young folks again on this trip! Back in 1908 even my imagination did not run this far afield.

That year was memorable for much else. Bavilla School too was opened and Ella MacLean of blessed memory taught there that first summer. What a bright little woman she was! She infused new life and gayety into a staid Wahstao where she spent week-ends at least. How often she trudged those eight miles between, because her steed, famous Jimmy, refused to be caught. Caroline's sister visited us that summer too, as your sister-in-law had done the year before. My mother spent part of July with us, and wanted, I remember, to explore every trail of which she caught sight. This was her first experience of hearing a foreign language commonly used and she had the feeling that anyone could understand English if only one spoke clearly enough. When she tried out her theory on one of the bashful boys and found it did not work, her dismay was rather comical. Caroline went East for her vacation taking with her Catherine Fergerchuk, then a child of seven or so who had recently come to stay at the Mission. And most memorable of all, a site was chosen for a second mission and building begun. How we tried to find a Ukrainian word to match our Cree word "Wah-stao" which means a reflector of light, or as an old half-breed put it, somethin' shinin'," We tried "Sveetlo" -light - also "Sveetello", with the same meaning. But alas! The latter also meant coal-oil which would hardly do. Then you thought of "Kolalcreeka" or "beside the creek" which was at once euphonious and true. Later on, when the railroad came through, the town of Smoky Lake was built nearby, and now the mission goes by that name. Wahstao was made a Post

Office in the year of which I write, and though, after a few months, the office was transferred to William Shopka's the name still holds.

You will not have forgotten our maid of that and succeeding summers ---- dear Tsea Zacharuk. When Stenna left us for greener pastures and wider experiences, she sent her young sister to take her place. And how well she filled it! Till Nicoli Bidniak persuaded her that keeping house for him would be a still happier job. But not long did she enjoy it. A young mother still in her teens, the Lord took her home a very few years later.

Bill is taking us for a drive. I must be off.

Chacie

Dear Edith, Do you still bake bread? You were expert at it forty years ago and very busy at it in 1908. Were there not two builders eighteen miles to the west, working at the new mission, who could not bake bread and had to be supplied. This last was never proven as I remember and I am still doubtful. What I am certain of is that at least one of them enjoyed not only your bread but also your weekly visit to take it over. The rest of us took the trip semi-occasionally only. All's well that ends well and your happy married life which began in 1910 is still a matter for congratulations. Are you going to invite Caroline and me to your fortieth anniversary?

By the end of the year Kolakreeka was finished and wasn't it on December 31st that you and Ella moved over? I know that the plaster on the walls was still damp and the outside temperature very low but when the time came to go you went. That was your way, and Ella's too and so ended the second year of my western experiences. Caroline and I missed you two very much after our happy summer all together but we were feeling more at home among our neighbours and depending on them more for friendship. Day-school, Sunday-schools, and night classes occupied my time, while she visited the people, helping and advising and often prescribing for ailments. This yam of mine seems to be concerning itself with everything else than our real work but that went on all through the months and the years.

It is surely time to bring another personage into these reminiscences who has escaped mention so far but who had interest in Wahstao from the beginning. He figures in the Wahstao diaries of the period as X. Early in 1909 he persuaded Caroline to break off her connection with the W.M.S. Board and connect with him instead. So in the summer of 1909 she resigned and went east to prepare for her marriage.

Her successor Miss Sandford from Nova Scotia who remained for the next three years. You might not remember her since our visits to Kolakreeka were not as frequent after our first quartette of friends was broken up. We spent Thanksgiving Day of 1909 with you, taking with us Minnie Danard and Evelyn. "X", Arthur Hencher drove us with his ox-team. Fortunately we started the day before, for the trip occupied six hours - from three to nine p.m. and weren't we hungry, on arrival! December saw Caroline return and her wedding was planned for Christmas Eve,

What fun we had in preparing for it! Wahstao's first wedding! Gladly we would have invited the whole neighbourhood to the gala event but how could that be? And how invite some of the more intimate friends without inviting all? That would never do. So very reluctantly the party was limited to a very small "family" group, you and Ella, Minnie and Evelyn, Arthur's brother, one of his neighbours and Dr. Lawford to officiate. A small "parlor" was screened off the school-room and decorated in evergreens and white tissue. The dining room was in evergreen and red. The day was bright and crisp followed by a

moonlit night when we all accompanied the bridal couple to their home in Irondale. Halley's comet added its brilliance to the sparkling snow. That four miles of trail was never lovelier.

And during the forty years that have frosted the hair of all of us since, what friendliness and good cheer, what comfort and strength, what leadership in all good causes have emanated from the home that was established that winter night! It is no wonder that last year the friends gathered at this home for a fortieth anniversary party perhaps you've not heard - and gave this beloved couple a very happy time.

The months that followed seem to my memory to have been uneventful until your own wedding in October, 1910. You will remember the details of that even more clearly than I so I need not record them here. Your serenity did not fail you when the groom failed to turn up till the eleventh hour. The pictured group on the Kolakreeka verandah are widely scattered now but the happy couple are still a couple and still happy at Delhi, Ontario. Don't forget my hint as to your fortieth anniversary.

Till then, in love,

Chacie.

Dear Edith, My story is nearly done. I left Wahstao on furlough in July 1911, when the Hencher's first-born, John, was a few days old. He has outgrown his first cot, a bureau drawer, long ago and is now himself a father de famine in Hamilton, Ontario, as you know. His two sisters, one my namesake, both married school-teachers in Alberta and have done something towards providing pupils for the schools.

I saw Wahstao only occasionally till 1917 when it had grown into a boarding school and was considerably increased in size. My duty now was the general supervision of the School Home, and the care, outside of school hours, of the numerous family. And happy work it was! The children were so responsive and biddable that usually everything went on very smoothly. If anything disagreeable happened I noticed that it never was during the first week of the month, and later I found that that was the week when our turn came up on the Prayer List of the Woman's Missionary Society. So that explained it. We were a staff of three or four, in more prosperous times, and we divided up our duties to satisfy each one as much as possible.

The first year was uneventful, but in October, 1918, occurred that dreadful plague of influenza. In that part of the country were no crowded gatherings, and miles and miles of fresh air, so there was at first reason for hope that the dread disease would pass by. When in Lamont one day I was given by kindly Dr. Rush, a small bottle of aromatic ammonia and a few other medicines which might help if any odd cases of the 'flu should arise. Later on when we had quarts of aromatic, this tiny allowance became a grim joke. I had also remarked to a few of our neighbours that if any took sick we should be glad to take them into the mission. The offer was accepted only too soon.

It was on a Sunday, late in October that Miss Ferguson, "Fergie" to you, brought in John Bilar, the first patient. His brother, Wasil, looked sick enough then, but he "had to butcher the next day, no time to go to bed". By next night he gave up and joined John. On Tuesday Steve Repka's threshing, engine whistle failed to sound out. "Steve's got it," our chore-boy remarked, then Steve came. Fortunately the school children had not yet come in for the winter-term and our dormitories were empty. John Derpak, the chore-boy, went down the next day as did Rena, the maid. She had been at her own home a couple of days and now sent us a wistful note to please come and get her. Fergie remarked that she was doing was running an ambulance. John Bilar got better toward the end of the week, but his sister Kate took his

place along with little Wasilana. Then Fergie went down, and poor Martha Wang, the P.S. teacher, who on the day she got word to close the school heard also that her father in Newfoundland had died very suddenly. On Thursday Miss Ida Duke appeared at our front door with a suit-case. "No I'm not afraid of the 'flu. May I come in and help?" Might she? Was anyone ever more welcome? On Saturday Lena Repka also to help, but at the same time announced, "Mary and Nicoli are coming here tonight." I was dismayed at the prospect of four more patients and replied that I simply could not take them. Maybe you did not know that Nicoli Repka had married Mary Bilar and set up a store in Bellis on the railroad, seven miles north. Miss Duke spent all of Saturday afternoon at G. Werenka's phone, trying to get the attention of a Doctor for our sick. At last she returned with the joyful news that Dr. Archer would come to us in the morning. He had just that day come back from Ontario and did not need to drive fifty miles to find sick people. However his promise brought great cheer to our little hospital. About dark, sure enough, came Nikoli and his family in their Ford.

"I'm so sorry," I greeted them at the gate, "but I simply cannot take you in."

Silence settled on the little party. It was what they least expected at Wahstao and brought utter dismay. But Mary's home was one mile east and Nick's, one mile west. Why couldn't they go to one or the other?

My resolution smashed into a thousand pieces. I ran back to the house.

"Miss Duke, they're my oldest friends and my best friends. What can I do?"

"Oh, take them in," was here reassuring answer, for which I'll thank her to my dying day. "Dr. Archer's coming in the morning."

They came in, father, mother, and two children, all sick together. John B., turning up at the right minute, put his brother-in-law to bed, while I made Mary and the kiddies as comfortable as possible. Nick's temperature, as soon as I got a minute to see him, was 104.

Later I got the story of their illness. For five days they had been ill with a young man friend as nurse. On Wednesday Mr. Bilar had told me of their plight but all I could do then was to send them some medicine. On Friday, a neighbour had told Nick that if the steering-gear on the car could be fixed, he would drive the family to Wahstao. Nick got up, spent Saturday trying to fix the steering-gear, gathered quilts and pillows, if they might have to sleep on the floor, put his cash from the till into a salt-bag and dropped it into his pocket, got his family out of bed and with the kind neighbour at the wheel, started for Wahstao. Hardly a half-mile had been covered when the steering-gear failed again and the car was ditched. Nick had to take the wheel himself and drive the nine dark and rough miles to Wahstao. Two flats occurred by the way but he drove on. Do you wonder that I am eternally grateful to Ida Duke for not letting me turn them away from their Door of Hope?

True to his promise, Dr. Archer appeared next morning and never could he have been more welcome anywhere. He prescribed most carefully for each patient, "These are the two most serious cases," he said indicating Nick and his brother-in-law, Wasil. The latter had been a cause of special anxiety for many hours, especially during the night, and indeed the Doctor was scarcely away when the clouds that had lifted so brightly at his coming began to lower again. It was an anxious day. It was early in the morning before I could leave the care of the sick to Nick's friend, Frank, and seek a few hours rest. Nick was tossing in delirium most of the time. In a conscious moment he asked, "Miss Chace, aren't you going to lie down?" "If you could lie quiet perhaps I will but I can't while you are tossing and moaning so."

"I'll be quiet," and for a few minutes, he would. Then the scene would be repeated in very similar words. Another lasting memory, his last expressed thought was for his nurse's comfort, not his own.

About two, I crept away for a couple of hours rest, but for the first time in that tragic week I did not waken when I intended to. It was 5 a.m. and medicines were to be given at four. Wasil could not take his - he was just passing.

An hour or two later Mary jumped up and ran to the window on hearing men and horses outside, to see if she could, who was being carried out. It was her brother - her husband lingered till evening.

Talk of Blue Monday. That was Black Monday - easily the blackest day I ever knew. Miss Duke had her hands full with Nicoli. Lena had gone home, for Kate, coming from Bellis with the others, had brought the sickness. The cow complained bitterly that she was not milked, and we needed the milk so much too. There were the fires to keep up, medicines to dispense, soup to make and whatever else was cooking, and ten patients to serve. To speak to the Doctor meant a run of over a mile to the phone and back, but it had to be done. Every-thing got behind and I went about the kitchen in desperation, praying aloud: "Oh Lord, send some help!" - Help came too. Mr. Hencher and Metro Czerniwczan were at the back door.

"Something we can do?" "Oh yes, do milk the cow and fill the water-tank." Which they did.---- Another bustle at the door and there stood Isobel Purschke. She was the teacher six miles west and just up from a sick bed herself. Having heard of our plight she got a buggy ride over and before one could turn around has started making sense out of that neglected kitchen. Of course she had a relapse in a day or two but by that time Fergie had recovered. But to go back to that Black Monday, Miss Duke came down and begged me to go to Nicoli. She was sure he was nearing the end and he was. I spent his last hour with him but whether he was conscious I could not be sure. His dear little wife suffered her second bereavement that day. Her two children were improving but Mary was still very ill. Next morning the sky lightened, George Werenka, Nicoli's son, dropped in. "Wherever did yo come from?" I asked. "From Vegreville. I came home to see if my people were living or dead."

"And can you stay?"

"I'll stay if you want me," he replied.

"We do want you, need you badly." So he hung up his cap and stayed. I mentioned before his willing and capable service. He drained and repaired Nick's Ford that had never yet been taken from our front gate, and ran many errands with it. He made visits on sick neighbours and took temperatures. He has a mechanical turn of mind and giving hypos was right up his alley. To milk, tend fires, and bring in wood and water were just routine. My own brother could have been no more helpful. Here is another person to whom I owe ceaseless gratitude.

"Who is going to wash?" he enquired one day, seeing a boiler-fill of clothes on the stove. "I've no idea," I answered, "but I thought I'd boil the sheets anyway."

He waited until boiling had begun, then picked up the whole business and descended with it to the laundry. Later, by lantern light I saw him hanging sheets on the clothes line.

We were grateful that Mary's life was spared, and still more so when, during the next spring, a little daughter was born to her. The other two children recovered as well; the little girl, as I told you before, becoming my first grandchild, by adopting me as "Baba". Some time later, to finish her story, Mary was

happily married to Nicoli Boychuk who matched her three children with his two sons. Other daughters brought their family up to seven, of whom six are now on careers of their own. Young Mrs. Boychuk is the happiest grandma ever.

On Tuesday evening Dr. Archer paid us another visit, which robbed him of a needed night's rest. Returning by Shandro, he found the ferry stuck on a sand-bar, half way across the river. He and his chauffeur added their strength to that of the ferryman, but all in vain. In the car again they headed back and after giving the chauffeur directions for getting to the next ferry at Pakan, the Doctor tried to make up a little on sleep. Waking an hour or two later he found the chauffeur to be hopelessly lost. On enquiry of sleepy farmers they discovered that they were only about ten miles on their way, facing north, and evidently among the sand hills leading up to Low-Level, on the Moskalyk road. I had heard this story before, but only this summer from the Doctor himself.

"But how," I asked, amazed, "How could you be facing north on that road?"

"I can't say," the Doctor laughed, "I was asleep."

Yes, it was one evening this past summer that our good Doctor friend was driving a party of us through the beautiful ups and downs of Elk Island Park, and we were sharing memories of the past years which all of us had spent in this vicinity. This grim night of 1918 was now only a mellowed joke, mellowed still in the Doctor's telling. We had such a happy evening! How thankful I am now for the memory. I never again saw our friends alive. My first experience in Lamont was his hospitality, my latest and probably last, the grief, the triumph, of his funeral day. The "Western Hands" that were "sure" were quiet now, having earned their rest, but the noble spirit who dominated them is doubtless still serving his Master in other works of salvation in regions beyond.

To return once more and for the last time to the Wahstao of 1918. Two more of our patients passed out, of whom you may remember Mrs. Simaki from down by the river. She came to us as a last resort and lived only a few hours.

All was not sorrow and tragedy however. In the midst of the epidemic came news of the end of the war, and George put the Hallelujah Chorus on the gramophone by way of celebration. Then some funny things happened, as, for instance, the wild rumour that Mrs. Comrie of Irondale, whose illness was of special concern had had a relapse with temperature of 104. 104! It turned out that her nurse had rinsed the thermometer in hot water and had forgotten to shake it down!

Now cometh the end and it is surely time. Not that Wahstao's story is ended or the tale fully told. Only eternity will reveal that. And Wahstao will ever be a delightful memory in the hearts of all who ever loved her.

Such are you and I.

Chacie.