

STORIES HOUSES TELL

By
**LILLIAN
GIBBONS**



Senator Sutherland's Home, East Kildonan

ITTLE now remains of this landmark of Old Kildonan: Senator Sutherland's house at the foot of Helmsdale Ave., on the east side of the river. In August men were beginning to tear it down. Old and weather beaten, it offered little resistance.

This picture of the house as it was in 1891 was supplied by a grand-daughter of the Senator, Mrs. John Gunn, of Springfield, Man. The photograph was a Christmas present that year. "See the veranda, going all around the house, with its 'lace' trimming at the tops of the posts. Grandma is sitting down; beside her are two grandchildren, Mary and Janet. The woman with the baby in her arms is their mother, Mrs. Hector Sutherland. At the extreme right of the picture you can just see the old-fashioned baby carriage, with an oval swing-hood, like an umbrella, with long fringe hanging down."

When the old home was built Mrs. Gunn could not say. But John Sutherland and Janet McBeth were married January 21, 1847, and it was probably begun soon after that. The logs, Mrs. Gunn knew, were from the old house of Alexander Sutherland, his father, who alone of the Selkirk Settlers lived on Point Douglas. Floated down the river, the logs helped to build the son's house.

Catharine's Bible

Thus a link was preserved between the old and the new, for Alexander had come out in 1813, chosen a narrow Red River lot removed from his friends, farther north, and settled down with his young wife, Catharine McPherson. Mrs. Gunn has Catharine's Bible, inscribed on the fly leaf, 1812, "It was given her by a girl chum when she left Scotland . . . See, here's a bookmark she embroidered for her." The text, done in cross-stitch on punched parchment, was, "Lord, teach us to pray." Catharine probably prayed instinctively when the winds blew in Hudson's Straits and the party of settlers wondered if they would ever see the Red River beside which they were to begin a new life.

The house made of old logs and new timber remembered the "trouble" of 1869: John Sutherland's second son, John Hugh, 21, riding on a

mission of peace, to say that Major Boulton's men were to be freed by Riel, was killed while carrying the message. "Grandpa and his sons were at breakfast and whichever was finished first was to take the joyful news," related Mrs. Gunn. "John Hugh said to Donald, who was 22, I'll take your pony . . . He did, and never came back. This is the glove he wore riding." Out of a box came a fine deerskin glove, well tanned, with the thumb ripped off where the bullet went. The magenta flannel lining was so bright and youthful: and its wearer was cut down at 21.

Mrs. John Sutherland's Bonnet

A pleasanter memento treasured by Mrs. Gunn is Mrs. John Sutherland's bonnet that she wore in Ottawa when she went to the Capital as the wife of Manitoba's first Senator. Shirred and tucked, the fine cream mull had rows of lace to frame the face of the wearer.

The weather-buffed old home had stood vacant for several years before it was finally demolished. At the foot of the street, it was almost hidden by trees from the new houses—that regarded it as a blot on the community. The boys pulling it down found wooden screws five inches long; a penny; lonely coathangers in the chimney cupboards. Faded wallpaper with yellow roses and mauve ribbon bows still clung to the upstairs walls. The attic promised treasure—in vain. A musty air clung about the handwren lumber: "anything can happen here," the house-finder decided at once. An old paper on the floor, turned right side up, proved to be "An Act to incorporate the town of Ingersoll." Not even an old love letter!

Forty Could Dine Here

The dining-room, Mrs. Gunn recalls, "was a great big place where 40 could dine." The parlor stands out in her memory "for its huge pictures with the wide, deep frames." One of them was a golden wedding feast, which took place May 24, 1897, out of doors, on long tressel tables. (January 21 was too shivery a date for a party.) . . . Now the Senator Sutherland house is gone, but the Kildonanites will still see it in their mind's eye when they walk to the foot of Helmsdale.

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