

Whonnock's Aunt Hill



Margaret Gouinlock (Granny Benson) with her children William "Gouin" is sitting on the ground. Others from left to right: Frances "Frank", James "Barney", Winnifred, Granny Benson (holding a letter from Arthur, who is serving overseas) and Margaret "Tot." (Kelowna, Summer 1919?).

AS I'M WRITING this, an extended family is preparing for a reunion at Whonnock Lake Centre. I would like to share here some of what I have been able to find out about the past Whonnock ties of this family.

Margaret Gouinlock, generally known as Granny Benson, the widow of Sheriff Benson of Regina, moved to Whonnock with Margaret, one of her three daughters, and with her youngest son, Arthur. They settled in a house halfway up Byrnes Road. Making fun of herself as an "old

crow" in her black widow's dress, she named the house the "Crow's Nest."

No one knows why she decided to move to Whonnock. Family lore tells that her two older sons, Gouin and Barney, found Whonnock on a walking tour and the records show that in 1907 Granny Benson and Gouin owned land in Whonnock.

In 1908 another newcomer to Whonnock, Richard Sidney Whiting, who would soon be part of the family, became owner of the

general store and was appointed postmaster. The store burned down in 1916 and was never rebuilt—Sidney did not get much pleasure from running a store, but he immediately opened a small post office at its present site and continued serving the community as postmaster for more than 40 years.

Did Sidney and Granny Benson's daughter Margaret ("Tot" to the family) know each other before moving to Whonnock? It seems more likely that they met regularly at the old store, when Margaret bought groceries and picked up the mail. The two were married in 1910, and their children would grow up in Whonnock.

Arthur stayed with Granny Benson for a few years longer, doing odd jobs and farm work until war broke out in 1914, and he joined the army. After the war, Arthur was stationed for some time in India before returning to Whonnock. Waiting for him there was Lorna Pavey, a former governess of the daughter of his oldest sister Frances McDonald.

Upon the outbreak of the war in 1914 Lorna had hurried home to be with her family in England. She travelled on the ill-fated

Lusitania, which was sunk by a German submarine. About 260 people lost their lives in the disaster. An eyewitness tells she was in the dining room eating a grapefruit when the torpedo struck. As the story is told by her relatives, when the ship went down, she was sucked into one of the funnels but had the good luck to be expelled with a rush of water. She was later picked up by a passing ship. Our Whonnock old-timers often confused the *Lusitania* with the *Titanic* and added to the story that also Lorna's dog, Lobo, was saved from the disaster.

Granny Benson bought Arthur a farm on Crescent Island, and there Lorna and Arthur settled. Their surviving son Christopher (Kit) tells that the children were ferried to and from shore with a small boat to attend classes at the Whonnock school. Lorna, as an old-timer tells it, "livened up PTA meetings."

In the 1930s the two other of Granny Benson's daughters, Frances and Winifred, also came to stay in Whonnock.

The Crow's Nest burned down in an electric storm, but a new house, also called Crow's Nest, was built by Dick Whiting, the oldest son of Margaret and Sidney, as contractor. Frances, who was a professionally trained nurse,

lived there with her mother and probably took care of her in her last years. Granny Benson died in 1937 at the age of 98, a wonderful woman, loved by her family and all Whonnockians. A few years, later Frances would nurse Margaret Whiting until she died in 1943. Also this Margaret was remembered as a delightful person and a good friend by those who knew her.

In the 1930s Winifred Gordon moved to Whonnock, where she lived in a log cabin on Byrnes Road. A family member recalls that in the cabin, in front of a large fireplace, there was a real bear skin, which was actually worn when the whole family played charades.

The two neighbouring Byrnes homes, west of the post office, were constructed for Winnifred as speculative rental houses in 1931 and 1932 by contractors Ralph Daniels and Dick Whiting. These buildings are now part of Whonnock's heritage.

In the 1930s three Benson sisters lived on the slope behind the post office: Frances MacDonald in the Crow's Nest, a little further up Winnifred Gordon in the log cabin, and further yet was the house of the third sister, Margaret Whiting. It is at this time that the slope behind the post office became known as the "Aunt Hill."

It seems ironic that Granny Benson's two sons, Gouin and Barney, who are said to have discovered Whonnock for her, never lived there. Gouin soon sold the land he owned in Whonnock, in part to his sister Margaret.

Those of the family who lived in Whonnock for any time took an active part in its social life and contributed in no small way to the community's wellbeing.

Fred Braches



Margaret and Richard Sidney Whiting, 1942

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