



*Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings with Willie.*

We have no neighbours as I can remember until the following year when a family by the name of Tatcher homesteaded just a mile northwest of us. They had the two girls, Dorothy, called Dolly, and Hilda, several years older than myself, and we became good friends. I was very nervous because of the isolation of the place, having lived in the city (Portage) and their coming meant so much not only to me but my parents also.

The weird call of the coyote at dusk was usual and we often saw their shining eyes peering through the bush piles. I can remember when I was older and cutting hay with the team a coyote or two would follow me around the meadow for the longest while.

The first year on the homestead we only had the two animals, a cow and our great pet, a St. Bernard dog, which we had brought with us and which disappeared shortly afterwards. We never did find out what happened to him and we youngsters grieved for a long time. Our cow had a thick leather strap around her neck to which a bell was attached, and put there so that we would hear the bell should she wander in the bush. The use of the bell was a common practice when new settlers came and had a number of cattle. The lead cow was always belled as there were few fences, perhaps just around the

*Mrs. Rawlings with left to right: Edith, Martha, Art, Reg.*



gardens and later on grain fields, so the cattle wandered at will and sometimes for miles. The owners learned to distinguish which were their cattle by the sound of the bell. I remember that first summer when our cow wandered. My Mother heard the bell at a distance in the bush and went after her. We children who were playing in the yard heard our Mother call and when we answered she wanted to know what we were doing away from the yard. We had quite a time convincing her that we were in our yard as she was mixed up in her directions. She had been trying to drive the cow away from home and the cow had refused to go. People often lost their directions in those days. I remember when an English family by the name of Lees settled a mile south of us and took over the Post Office. When they first came Mr. Lees got turned around in his directions a number of times and ended up at our place, usually after dark. My father had to take him practically all the way back to his place.

Getting groceries in those first few years meant travelling many miles as we had no store closer than Langruth, until just before World War I. Roads were impassable in wet weather. When our first neighbors came my father and Jack Tatcher took turns every third month getting the groceries for both families. I remember it was the month of May and Jack Tatcher had gone for the grocery supplies. It started raining that same day and continued raining several days more. It was almost two weeks before Jack Tatcher was able to get back because of the road conditions. We were all living on very slim rations by that time.

The first all-weather roads were built during World War I. A drainage ditch was dug and the dirt from it was piled along the side and then levelled which made an excellent all-weather road as any water ran off into the ditches. In the spring the fish would come up in the ditches to spawn from Lake Manitoba, which gave us many fish meals, some whitefish and suckers, but mostly jackfish.

We youngsters were very interested in watching the road building crew, especially the cook who often handed out goodies. He had huge pails of the pure maple syrup and when we gave him a three pound lard pail he would fill it for us with the syrup to take home.

Prior to these roads being built the only dependable road to travel were the two ridge roads - natural roads no doubt built by large waves when Lake Manitoba was much larger. They stretched from Amaranth to Kinosota with a break of a few miles between. The one problem at that time was getting on these ridge roads when going in their direction in wet weather. We often walked in bare feet along them to pick the many kinds of wild fruit which was abundant along the edges and in the bush. It was a real delight to feel the soft sand between our toes.