

Bertha Bell Whitelaw

(1872-1964)



A DOCUMENTARY BIOGRAPHY WITH AN APPENDIX OF FAMILY DOCUMENTS

By
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INTRODUCTION

To Bertha's Great Grandchildren and Great Great Grandchildren:

One of the sayings of our ancestor, Bertha Bell Whitelaw, was: "When you have children you have a lot, but you don't have much else." Both parts of this statement were true for her. She was poor in material possessions all her life, but I think she would have felt rich in descendants, in whom she would recognize qualities she valued: productivity, self-awareness, self-sufficiency, and a sense of one's duty to help others and help the world.

Bertha lived through eventful times. When she was born in 1872, much of the Midwest was still available for homesteading, and her family lived a pioneer existence, moving to farms in Iowa, Colorado, Arkansas, and Missouri. She spent her early years living in simple cabins and attending small, one-room school houses. Her father was one of many Irish immigrants who came to the U.S. in the 1850s. He was a Union soldier in the Civil War, and lost three brothers in that conflict. Her mother had family roots that extended back into Colonial times; her ancestors, farmers and craftsmen, had migrated down the Appalachians into Georgia, and then, before the Civil War, had migrated north to Illinois. Bertha lived through and was affected by the settling of the Midwest and the growth of large cities with concurrent eclipse of small town life, and the upheavals caused by the Great Depression and World War II. She died in 1964, just at the dawning of that revolutionary moment known as "the 60s." I don't think she ever knew much about that, but she was proud of her grandchildren who had caught the spirit of the times and were trying to live out their ideals in the Peace Corps and in other ways.

Bertha's parents, along with being farmers, were also fairly well-educated and had high aspirations for the education of their children. Bertha graduated from college in 1895, with a major in Classics. She was valedictorian of her class and had an outstanding academic record. This achievement came at a time when college education was rare in America, and nearly non-existent for women. She benefited from a surge of interest in the U.S. following the Civil War in expanding public education. The college she attended was one of many founded by Protestant denominations to prepare both men and women to become teachers in the public schools.

She taught Greek and Latin in academies such as those she herself had attended, until her marriage to John Whitelaw in 1903, when she was 31 years old. He was a son of a large family which owned the local hardware store and lumber yard in Kidder, Missouri, where she taught school. Seven years later, she and John and their two children, Neill and Eleanor, left town life in Kidder and moved to a farm in Kansas. They soon had a third child, John, who was my father. They remained farmers living in or near small towns in Eastern Kansas for the rest of their lives.

Although outwardly uneventful, Bertha's life had periods of great emotional upheaval. The most stressful period of her life must have been from her mid twenties to her mid thirties. During this time she suffered a series of devastating losses. Her first love, one of her teachers at school, died unexpectedly. She wore the ring he gave her all her life. Then her mother died when she was 28, followed in the next few years by the equally sudden and unexpected deaths of her father and her brother, leaving her with only one sister as an immediate blood relative. Also during these years she lost her first child, a daughter who died soon after birth.

Bertha was deeply religious. She taught Sunday School all her adult life and was an assiduous church member. However, as she describes in a letter to her son John when she was in her 60s, religion for her did not require outward conformity to any particular faith. Rather it was the ability to hear – and to act upon the guidance of – the "still small voice within." Religion for her permitted, and probably encouraged, the full use of her intellectual and analytical faculties. She remained a tolerant, curious and critical thinker all her life.

Bertha was very sociable, and found meaning in the social interchange of small town Midwestern life. She belonged and gave leadership to several women's and church organizations, participating in the mundane as well as the more high-minded activities of these groups. A lively and accomplished writer, she began in her 50s to write weekly articles about the news of DeSoto, the small town where she lived, for two Kansas newspapers. She kept up this work for most of the rest of her life.

One aspect of Bertha's life which may strike the modern reader, was her self-sufficiency in regard to food. Today, as many people are attempting to return to a more locally connected way of eating, it is interesting to read in Bertha's letters how she simply takes for granted being a "locavore." She and her husband John ate the fruit, vegetables, dairy products and poultry that they grew and raised on their farm, and very little else. They did not buy many groceries. She also sewed her own clothes and quilted the family's bedding. For her, this self-sufficient way of life was not a conscious life-style choice, but simply the way it was.

A legacy of our grandmother for which we can all be grateful was her strong commitment to education. Her children believed that her encouragement and expectation that they would each take their education seriously accounted for their academic success. One son, Neill, earned a Ph.D. in physics and was a physics professor. Eleanor earned a Master's degree in Education, and John a Master's degree in Social Work. All three children set their goals to obtain not only a college education but also to do academic work beyond the bachelor's level, in spite of the lack of financial resources within the family. Their mother, Bertha Whitelaw, helped and encouraged them, and

started working part-time as a reporter in order to help finance their education.

Bertha Bell Whitelaw believed that self-deprivation was a virtue. There are many family stories about this. She ate frugally, to say the least: "I will not dig my grave with my teeth." My mother remembered the home-canned tomatoes which were fermenting, but which Grandma put on the table anyway because they couldn't be wasted. She churned butter from the milk of the family's cows, but unfortunately she always put the fresh butter at the back of the butter trough and took butter for the table from the front, which almost always had been sitting unrefrigerated long enough to taste tainted. So the family rarely got fresh tasting butter, even though it was available. She was indifferent to personal belongings. A set of Haviland china was stored for years on a rickety shelf in the hen house until the shelf finally fell off the wall, and the china was broken. Her daughter and daughter-in-law sent gifts of lingerie and night gowns, which she kept in a trunk in their original wrappings. They were "too good to use" so she made herself underwear from flour sacking. Her good friend Pansy Penner, in her Tribute to her, recounted how she would never accept gifts from anyone. Other examples of this self-depriving streak in her personality are to be found in the robin letters.

It is difficult to understand this extreme asceticism. To some extent, it was a rational coping strategy to a life that was very meager in material goods. She did not allow herself to have "champagne tastes on a beer pocketbook" - and so was saved the frustration of never having enough. Her high value on self-sufficiency made her fearful of ever being dependent, so she was frugal and saving. She worked hard into her seventies and eighties, milking cows, taking in boarders, babysitting, selling eggs and butter, all to have enough so that she wouldn't need help from her children. She seems to have been genuinely indifferent to much in the material world and never confused material possessions with personal worth. Her mind was on things other than taking care of belongings or personal comfort. She emptied coffee grounds under the shrubs and then, lost in thought, left the coffee pot outside. A coffee can was the pot for cooking oatmeal; she just added more meal and water each evening and let it simmer at the back of the stove all night. When the can got too crusty, she threw it away and started a new one. She was comfortable reading on the work bench in the basement, at least when all of her children and grandchildren were around, probably because she wanted the peace and quiet.

Some of her descendants may recognize this quality of self-denial in themselves. It has come down through the generations, though a little watered down. If you have the feeling that it is somehow better to have less, and that it is better not to enjoy too much what you do have, you share the family trait that is exemplified so vividly in the life of Bertha Bell Whitelaw.

As I have gathered materials for this biography, I have become more and more aware of what a good writer Bertha was. She wrote weekly letters to her children about her daily

life in DeSoto. The letters are vivid in detail, apt and precise in expression, witty, and just plain interesting. The writer is revealed as an able recorder of her own foibles as well as those of others, benevolent in outlook but also astute in understanding and judgment. She was a complicated person, and we see many of her aspects through these writings - her wide-ranging intellectual interests, her high value on independence and self-sufficiency, her love of family, her tolerance for the way her neighbors lived their lives along with the strict self-discipline with which she lived her own, her love of news and gossip, and her strong spiritual life. Enough of her writings remain that her descendants can come to know her directly, through her own words, without the interpretations and inevitable distortions of biographical intermediaries.

About this Book

This biography is organized into chapters, each covering a portion of Bertha's life. For each chapter, I have included letters and other writings by Bertha herself, contemporary letters by others, and written recollections of others who knew Bertha. My own contributions to the chapters consist mainly of brief introductory paragraphs.

The Robin

In putting together this book, I have been dependant on whatever papers happened to have been saved over the years. Very little in Bertha's own hand survives from her childhood and early years. For the last decades of her life, I am very grateful to have found some of the many letters she wrote to her children. The Whitelaw family maintained a Round Robin, in which every week each member would write a letter, enclose it with a packet of similar letters from other family members, and send it on to the next recipient in an endless cycle. The family started the robin when the children left home, in the 1930s, and continued it as long as Bertha lived. Most of the letters were discarded after being read. However, I have found in my family's papers a number of Bertha's letters which were kept. Her letters from the 1930s were written around the time of my parents' courtship and marriage; they kept all of their correspondence of this period. A few letters from the 1940s survive, when Bertha's children and grandchildren visited DeSoto after the end of World War II and my father's demobilization from the Navy. Some letters from the 1950s also survive, mainly those written during the time that my father was in Germany helping with post-war reconstruction of the social welfare system. He kept all the letters he received over there, his mother's robin letters among them.

I feel very lucky that some of the Robin letters are still around, since they reveal Bertha so fully in her own words. She must have written about fifteen hundred of these letters (one a week for about thirty years), so they are represented by only a small sample here. Still, there are enough to give the tenor and flavor of these weekly bulletins on rural life in the Midwest. I spent very little time with my grandmother - I only saw her a few times, during reunions in DeSoto, but I feel as if I

knew her quite well. I never understood this seeming paradox until I read these robin letters while preparing this volume and realized that I had first read them, and thus got to know my grandmother, during my growing up years in the 1940s and 1950s. Her personality shines through, and I again feel quite close to her.

Notes on Editing

The number of John Whitelaws in this book can be confusing. I have tried to use consistently the following nomenclature to differentiate them:

John Whitelaw (1835-1913) Bertha's father-in-law
John Whitelaw Jr. (1870-1961) Bertha's husband
John Moreland Whitelaw (1911-1974) Bertha's son, my father
John Moreland Whitelaw Jr. (1939-) Bertha's grandson.

But note that Bertha does not necessarily use this nomenclature in her letters and it is necessary to deduce who is meant from the context.

My additions within the text are bracketed []; Bertha uses parentheses (). I also use parentheses to indicate the source of cited and transcribed material.

I have chosen not to edit Bertha's robin letters but to include each letter in its entirety, including local Desoto news. The community updates provide a context for the news about the family. We see the current state of transportation, health care, employment, the farming economy, etc. and the social arrangements of the small town which was Bertha's home. Readers who find this material tedious can easily skip these paragraphs while reading.

Acknowledgements

I owe a huge debt to my aunt, Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford, for collecting and saving so many family history documents. Most of the material on the Bell family included in Appendix A comes from her collection, and also the letters in Appendix C. Her daughter, my cousin and good friend Mary Whitford Graves, has kept all her mother's material and has made it available to me over the years. I have enjoyed our get-togethers poring over boxes of old papers as we shared laughs and memories. Bill Whitford has been a source of encouragement, photos, information, and intelligent suggestions, and has helped to make this a better book than it otherwise would have been. My siblings, John and Nancy, and my cousins, Bill, Mary and Martha, have all sent photos for which I am very grateful.

Sara Tamburrino is a descendant of Bertha's sister Eudora. She has been an invaluable source of information on the Gordon ancestors, and on the descendants of Eudora's branch of the family.

My daughter Shelley has designed this book beautifully. Many thanks to her for her countless hours of work.

I have pulled this material together for all the current and future descendants of Bertha Bell Whitelaw, so that they can know something of this remarkable relative who has influenced their lives, as all our ancestors do. I hope that you enjoy reading it.

With love,
Bertha's granddaughter,
Susan Whitelaw

Rocky River, OH
2007

JOHN AND BERTHA BELL WHITELAW FAMILY



John Whitelaw, Jr.
B. Dec. 10, 1870 Kidder, MO
D. Jan. 15, 1961 DeSoto, KS
Buried DeSoto Cemetery



Bertha Bell Whitelaw
B. Feb. 1, 1872 Earlham, IA
D. Aug. 24, 1964 Gardner, KS
Buried DeSoto Cemetery

Married Jan. 21, 1903



Jean Whitelaw
B. Nov. 1904, Kidder, MO
D. Nov. 13, 1904, Kidder, MO
Buried: Kidder Cemetery



Neill Gordon Whitelaw
B. Jan. 29, 1906 Kidder, MO
Lived in Clinton, SC
D. July, 1968 Clinton, SC
Never Married, No Issue



Eleanor Bell Whitelaw
B. July 9, 1908 Kidder, MO
M. Albert Whitford Oct. 23, 1937
Lived in Wisconsin and California
D. Sept. 3, 1986 Santa Cruz, CA



John Moreland Whitelaw
B. June 4, 1911 Lawrence, KS
M. Alvis Love Sept. 2, 1938
Lived in Portland, OR
D. 17 Apr. 1974 Portland, OR

ALBERT AND ELEANOR BELL WHITELAW WHITFORD FAMILY



Eleanor Bell Whitelaw
B. July 9, 1908 Kidder, MO
D. Sept. 3, 1986 Santa Cruz, CA

Married Oct. 23, 1937

Albert Whitford
B. Oct. 22, 1905
D. Mar. 28, 2002



William Curtis Whitford
B. Jan. 16, 1940, Madison, WI
M. Lynn Seidl
Lives in Madison WI



Mary Eleanor Whitford
B. June 10, 1942 Boston, MA
M. Nicholas Graves
Lives in San Francisco, CA



Martha Neill Whitford
B. Feb. 19, 1945, Boston, MA
M. Peter Barss, divorced
Lives in Baltimore, MD

JOHN MORELAND AND ALVIS RUTH LOVE WHITELAW FAMILY



John Moreland Whitelaw
B. June 4, 1911 Lawrence, KS
M. Alvis Love Sept. 2, 1938
Lived in Portland, OR
D. 17 Apr. 1974 Portland, OR

Married Sep. 2, 1938

Alvis Ruth Love
B. Oct. 14, 1911
D. May 12, 1998



John Moreland Whitelaw, Jr.
B. Oct. 3, 1939 Portland, OR
M. Carol Keema
Lives in Sacramento, CA



Susan Love Whitelaw
B. Oct. 18, 1942 Portland, OR
M. (1) Glen Downs (2) Larry Ledebur
Lives in Rocky River, OH



Nancy Alvis Whitelaw
B. Dec. 16, 1947 Portland, OR
M. (1) John O'Brien (2) Jan Benson
Lives in Royal Oak, MI

WILLIAM CURTIS AND LYNN SEIDL WHITFORD FAMILY



William Curtis Whitford
B. Jan. 16, 1940, Madison, WI
Lives in Madison WI

Married

Lynn Seidl



Alfred Louis Whitford
B. 1968, Tanzania
M. Ellen Shur
Lives in Seattle, WA



Joshua David Whitford
B. 1970, Madison, WI
Lives in New York, NY



James Bryce Whitford
B. 1971, Madison, WI
M. Amber Stocks
Lives in Cincinnati, OH



Elizabeth Cecilia Whitford
B. 1975, Madison, WI
M. Cristina Acevedo
Lives in Spokane, WA



Olivia Anne Whitford
B. 2004



Nash Gary Whitford
B. 2006



William James "Liam" Whitford
B. 2007



Mateo Gabriel Acevedo
B. 2006

NICHOLAS AND MARY WHITFORD GRAVES FAMILY



Mary Eleanor Whitford
B. June 10, 1942 Boston, MA
Lives in San Francisco, CA

Married

Nicholas Graves



Eleanor Anne Graves
B. 1971, Mexico City
Lives in VA



Christina Currey Graves
B. 1973, Mexico City
Lives in New York, NY

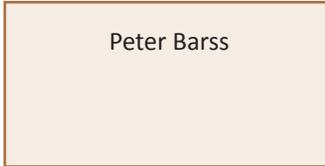
MARTHA NEILL WHITFORD FAMILY



Martha Neill Whitford
B. Feb. 19, 1945, Boston, MA
Lives in Baltimore, MD

Married

Peter Barss



Julia Clare Barss McColgan
B. 1973, Angola
M. Ashley McColgan
Lives in Ottawa, Canada



Celia Martha Barss
B. 1975, Newfoundland
Lives in Athens, Georgia



Sara Mairi Barss
B. 1980, New Guinea
Lives in Ottawa, Canada



Abigail Kathleen McColgan
B. 2005



Kaia Sophia McColgan
B. 2005

JOHN MORELAND AND CAROL KEEMA WHITELAW, JR. FAMILY



John Moreland Whitelaw, Jr.
B. Oct. 3, 1939 Portland, OR
Lives in Sacramento, CA

Married, 1962

Carol Keema



John Neill Whitelaw
B. 1964, Portland, OR
M. Jayne Whitelaw
Lives in Sacramento, CA



Jeffrey James Whitelaw
B. 1966, Fayetteville, NC
M. Tamara Whitelaw
Lives in Sacramento, CA



Kerrie Ruth Whitelaw Barry
B. 1968, San Francisco, CA
M. Adam Barry
Lives in Walnut Creek, CA



John James Whitelaw
B. 1994



Keema Whitelaw
B. 1996



Conor Whitelaw
B. 1999



Riley Whitelaw
B. 2003



Samantha Sierra Barry
B. 2002



Rory Barry
B. 2003

SUSAN LOVE WHITELAW FAMILY



Susan Love Whitelaw
 B. Oct. 18, 1942 Portland, OR
 Lives in Rocky River, OH

Married, 1997

Larry Ledebur

Married, 1967

Glen Downs



Guy Hershey Downs
 B. 1972, Portland, OR
 M. Shonnie Becker
 Lives in Ypsilanti, MI



Shelley Whitelaw Downs Brenner
 B. 1975, Portland, OR
 M. David Brenner
 Lives in Chelsea, MI



Gabriel Harmon-Becker Downs
 B. 2003



Amelia Ruth-Becker Downs
 B. 2006



Mia Vermilya Brenner
 B. 2005



Eva Whitelaw Brenner
 B. 2005

NANCY ALVIS WHITELAW FAMILY



Nancy Alvis Whitelaw
B. Dec. 16, 1947 Portland, OR
Lives in Royal Oak, MI

Married, 1983

Jan Benson

Married, 1968

John O'Brien



John Whitelaw O'Brien
B. 1977, Portland, OR
Lives in Brooklyn, NY



Michael Bertram O'Brien
B. 1979, Minneapolis, MN
Lives in Chicago, IL

MEMORIES OF GRANDMOTHER

“As I aged, I became aware that grandma was more than my girlish impression...”

Mary Whitford Graves



Bertha Bell with grandsons, John Whitelaw and Bill Whitford

In this chapter I have put the memories of Bertha’s descendants. The first entry is a letter I wrote in 1982, eighteen years after Bertha’s death, describing a trip I made to DeSoto. My Aunt Eleanor, my mother, and my brother and sister all responded to the letter with memories of their own. Their contributions, along with more recently written memories from Eleanor’s children, complete the material included here.

**Letter from Susan Whitelaw to her Family
Reporting on her trip to DeSoto, Kansas
August 14, 1982**

Dear Family,

This weekend Glen and I took a sojourn to DeSoto! It was my first trip back since 1954. We spent most of Saturday afternoon there, revisiting important spots and getting reacquainted with the DeSoto atmosphere.

Growing up, I remember that DeSoto seemed unreal – dad’s vivid memories of how hard life had been made the place sound like a never-never land where character got built. We all had memories of hot Kansas summers, with little to do, the Sunday school where I, at any rate, felt out of place, of mother trying to cope with the heat and indifferent food, with wet wash cloths on her head to keep cool. The heat and discomfort came from many sources. For Oregon children, the bugs seemed huge and the thunderstorms cataclysmic. My most persistent memory is of sitting out on the front porch on hot evenings with grandpa, feeling so guilty that we had to leave, knowing that he left the finger prints our hands made in the dust on the furniture, to remind him of us.

DeSoto, according to the 1970 census, has a population of 1840. It is between Lawrence, a college town, and Kansas City. It is about ten miles from DeSoto to Lawrence, about 20 to Kansas City. The countryside has rolling hills, low deciduous trees, farms with wheat, corn and dairy cows, and is right on the Kansas River, which joins the Missouri River at Kansas City. The River is about half a mile across at DeSoto. The day we were there, the temperature was 71 degrees, and the countryside was green and fresh from rain.

The town is on a hill overlooking the Kansas River. I couldn’t find the house at first; we stopped and asked an old-timer, a Mrs. Large, who was out mowing her lawn, and she knew right where it was. It is about three blocks from the main street of town, down off to the west. It is at the bottom of a dead end street, which is a block long and graveled, no sidewalks. The house looks exactly like it did – stones cut into large bricks, the house two story and four square, the front porch built into one corner. The barn and the chicken coop etc. are gone from the back. Instead, the trees and foliage are quite near the house. The strangest thing about the house was realizing how close it was to the river – the backyard is not large, and then slopes down sharply to the river. When I used to visit there, I had no sense of the river. Did we never go down the bank? It seems that you must be able to see the river from the upstairs windows, but I have no memory of it.

“My most persistent memory is of sitting out on the front porch on hot evenings with grandpa, feeling so guilty that we had to leave, knowing that he left the finger prints our hands made in the dust on the furniture, to remind him of us.”



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We had lunch in town, at the restaurant in the corner building that used to house the grocery. Downtown is still about a block long, with old buildings on one side, mostly brick with false fronts, and on the other side, newer buildings, the bank and the grocery store.

From the main street we went to the Methodist Church, about a block down the hill off the main street. It is still small, white, plain. Caddy corner from the church is the junior high school which looked old and

may have been the high school that dad went to. There are now air conditioners in some of the windows. It has new extensions on each side.

From the high school we followed a main road southwest out of town to the cemetery. It is about three miles from the main street. The cemetery is on the plain below the town. It is quite large – the earliest graves are from the early 1800s. The cemetery is still in use. We had a hard time finding the graves – I had no idea where they were. At last I uncovered a plain rectangular piece of granite marked WHITELAW Bertha B. and John. It is in the new part of the cemetery, near a cornfield. Someone has planted a peony bush right beside it so that it gets decorated too, even though there are no relatives about – for this old couple, fate had their children all scatter and their grandchildren, too. I wished for a moment I had brought some flowers, but I left fingerprints on the granite instead.

We drove down the cemetery road a ways further to the site of the farm on which dad grew up – where the family lived before they moved closer in to town. The house itself was taken by a government road in the early 1940s, according to a neighbor. No wonder, if so, that I have no memory of it. I do remember being driven down a narrow country road and being shown an area out past a farm fence, and being told that was the place dad grew up. It is still farm land there – we saw horses, cows, and huge rolls of hay.

Before we left we dropped in on Mrs. Pansy Penner, who lives on the corner of the road with the cemetery and the old farm. She remembered grandpa and grandma well, wanted to know whose child I was, etc. She said I looked like a Whitelaw. She said that the Ladies Aid used to meet on Wednesday evenings and grandpa would drive grandma in to church for it. They would stop and pick up Mrs. Penner. She said that once she was complaining about the incessant milking and grandpa told her he never minded milking, it gave him time to think, he said. She thought that was funny, that a person would like milking because it gave him time to think. She said the whole family were great readers.

I looked up the road back to town and thought of dad walking it each day on his way to high school – the cardboard soles, the mush sandwiches, the chores before and after school – but also of the river close by, the trips to Lawrence and Olathe, the familiar faces all around. It was a relief, really, to see that DeSoto actually exists in space – an ordinary small town, where growing up must have been quite ordinary, too. The grandparents were extraordinary for that place, of course, which may be why DeSoto never seemed quite real when I was a child. Thoreau in the basement and daily devotions (remember The Upper Room?), prolonged dull poverty together with the conviction that the children would all become well educated. Standing by their grave marker, I felt that they were of this place and yet certainly had transcended it. Love, Susan

“I wished for a moment I had brought some flowers, but I left fingerprints on the granite instead.”

Nancy Alvis Whitelaw’s Letter, 1982

Dear Family,
Susan’s visit to DeSoto and the letter and pictures brought back many memories. The last time that I was in DeSoto was in 1972 for the Park College reunion. Dad and I made that trip, staying first at a dorm at Park College and then in K.C. We went out to DeSoto, saw the house and the graves and found the site of the old farm. It was quite a trip for Dad – I think he wanted to find something on that trip that wasn’t there. DeSoto had changed a great deal and it didn’t really seem like home to him anymore. I remember the peony bush by the grave now that I’ve seen the picture, but would have forgotten it otherwise.

Prior to the trip with Dad I was there in July, 1964, just a couple of months before Grandma Whitelaw died. She was in a nursing home – weighed about

“It was quite a trip for Dad – I think he wanted to find something on that trip that wasn’t there.”

80 pounds and was very sick. That visit is still vivid in my mind. I think that I stayed with the Longstreths but I'm not sure. Do you remember Mom? DeSoto didn't seem so changed then but of course being with old family friends and seeing Grandma Whitelaw I probably didn't notice. I have made a copy of the letter. It is a wonderful record of part of our history.

John Moreland Whitelaw Jr.'s Letter, 1982

Dear Family, The trip to DeSoto brought to my mind my last two visits there. The earliest of the two was the family trip of 1954 – I was just learning how to drive and Dad took me out to drive the old chev through the cantaloupe fields and across the one-way bridges.

I remember sitting for hours on the back porch with a .22 rifle trying to nail a gopher that was terrorizing grandpa's backyard. I shot a lot of shells but never came close.

Sue – you had no sense of the river because it was dry – not a drop. It dried up every summer – there was water in it when I was last there in 1960.

On the earlier trip I also remember the fresh milk – which separated so there was a layer of cream on top. It was never cold and I for one haven't liked milk since.

“I trembled in terror every Sunday for fear she would call on me for some comment and it would become instantly obvious to everyone that this maverick daughter-in-law of dear Mrs. Whitelaw did not know Peter from Paul.”

I remember sitting on the porch with grandpa marveling at how that old man with arthritic hands could swat flies – barehanded – and he never missed.

I went back at Christmas of 1960 when I was visiting a young lady from Missouri. She and I drove from Columbia to DeSoto one morning and spent a few hours with grandpa and grandma. They were very old then but we talked for some time and they were both quite alert as I remember. I was the last one of us to see grandpa alive wasn't I?

Alvis Love Whitelaw's Letter 1982

Dear Family, Nancy is right – the robin this time was especially special; your letter, Susan, along with the other contributions brought back a lot of memories! There is no question that the Whitelaw family was “different” – highly respected, and Mother Whitelaw was certainly recognized as the intellectual leader of the community; she was the local reporter for the DeSoto paper as well as the Lawrence paper, perpetual discussion leader of the Athenaeum Club, teacher of the adult Sunday School class (and if you felt out of place in Sunday school, Susan, consider my predicament; I trembled in terror every Sunday for fear she would call on me for some comment and it would become instantly obvious to everyone that this maverick daughter-in-law of dear Mrs. Whitelaw did not know Peter from Paul). Any woman in DeSoto who had graduated from college – with a magna cum laude – with a major in Latin, was bound to be noticeable.

Johnny, I think is right; the Kaw (Kansas) River that ran below the cliff behind the house was dry during the season we were there; also, do you

“I remember sitting on the porch with grandpa marveling at how that old man with arthritic hands could swat flies – barehanded – and he never missed.”

remember that at the very base of the cliff were the Santa Fe railroad tracks and trains roared by periodically each day and night. I also remember the milk; since we were never allowed to use the fresh of anything, the butter was always rancid and the milk slightly tainted – and warm. The only way I could get you kids to drink any of it was to douse it with chocolate syrup. I could add that if you all remember the house in DeSoto as lacking in creature comforts, you should have tried the house out on the farm, - kerosene lamps, wood cooking range, outdoor privy, no running water, small cramped little rooms.

Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford's Letter, 1982

Dear Susan and Glen, I enjoyed Susan's letter and Glen's pictures very much, and I'm happy that you wanted to revisit DeSoto, and that Glen was sufficiently interested to join you.

I think the population of DeSoto was probably less than half of the 1970 census figure you cite when we were in school there, and that it is considerably more than the 1970 figure now. I was last in DeSoto in 1970 – just stopped at the cemetery to plant some flowers on the graves.

There were several houses on the street near your grandparents' home when I was last there; the Beecrafts lived in an old house up toward the corner, and both the grandparents' house from Guy Longstreth after Mother was in the hospital. The Kansas river moved about some in my days there – floods usually changed the course. Your letter sounds as though the backyard is considerably smaller than I recall. I never went down the bank to the river – I don't know that it ever occurred to me to do so. There used to be a lot of brush, etc., and it would have been hard going. If that is gone, perhaps some of the bank eroded into the river. There were many easier ways to get to the river. People didn't play in or swim in it to my knowledge – always considered too dangerous.

The picture of the Junior High School is of the same building that was our high school, and the Methodist Church was moved from a nearby country neighborhood which joined the church in town. This happened after we were all away from home.

Whitelaw graves, many of them, are in the Kidder, Missouri cemetery including the first child of John and Bertha who lived only a few hours. The house which Grandpa built on the 160 acres was taken by the Hercules Co. or perhaps the government – together with 10 acres of so of the land to make a road running directly from Hercules to the Santa Fe railroad spur. Hercules manufactured munitions. Johnny and Bill were in the house when they were about 18 months old, I think. House was taken about 1942.

Your father had a good imagination; I have no memory of cardboard soles or mush sandwiches, but the sad part is that there is no one with whom I can discuss those years. When we first moved out to the farm past the cemetery, Neill was a high school senior, and drove us to town to school in the car. The next year when John was a freshman, he and I drove a horse and buggy to high school; that didn't last long because he and I couldn't agree on time to go home, so we each went his own way. It was two miles to town – but this was before "JOGGING."

“Your father had a good imagination; I have no memory of cardboard soles or mush sandwiches...”

Neill and I were born in Kidder, Missouri where Grandpa was born, grew up, and as an adult, was expected by his father to “take over” the hardware-lumber yard your great grandfather had built and operated. For several reasons our family moved in 1910 to a farm about 5 miles from Lawrence, near a neighborhood called Franklin. Kansas was a pivotal state in the years just before the Civil War began. A course in Kansas history which we all took in the last year of elementary school covers a number of towns that had a turn at being the territory's capital – emigrants from the East (northerners) and those favoring the South were pouring in, so the capital was changed depending on the population division. I think the capitals were all in eastern Kansas; Franklin was one – confederate center. You may remember that John Brown came from Osawatomie; Kansas was admitted to the Union as a “free” state; Missouri was with the South. Someday I'm going to reread *The Wall of Men* – have you read it?

John was born at Lawrence in 1911. At the conclusion of World War I farm prices were very high – especially land that grew wheat

– so the folks sold the Lawrence place and moved to DeSoto in order that Neill could live at home and attend high school. Otherwise he would have had to board and room in Lawrence. John was 9 and I 11 when that move was made. Two places were bought at DeSoto for the move: the 160 acres two miles from town, and 11 acres, near town, with another four-square two-story house, and considerable fruit plantings, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries, peach and plum trees and perhaps others. As I remember, 7 or 8 acres were in a woody pasture which Grandma prized; her family had moved to Springfield, Missouri and lived there during all of her college years at Drury College, and as long as her parents lived. The woody pasture reminded Grandma of the Springfield home. Your great grandmother and grandfather Bell are buried in a Springfield cemetery; many other relatives also.

I find it difficult to identify the house on the 11 acres for you. The Jewetts bought the place, and a son Elmer and wife Helen still live there, and raised their family. They were always family friends, and Helen and Elmer were my only DeSoto source of information of recent years. Helen died last spring.

The Longstreth house (really the Ashlock house, Dot's parents') was on a hill leading north from Main Street in the direction of your grandparents' house. It was quite a large house; both the Longstreths and the Ashlocks used to have teachers rent rooms in the house. You and Mary slept at the Longstreths on the last family reunion – do you remember? The Longstreths have been dead for some years, Guy first. Dot spent the rest of her life in a home in Topeka.

I don't know why Neill was buried in Clinton. Perhaps your father had information I never knew. It is true, surely, that Neill's close friends lived there, and Clinton was his home. He began teaching there in 1933 and never left. I feel that your grandparents chose to be buried in DeSoto because they lived there and it was home too.

Love, Eleanor

“I remember being fascinated by the chickens running around without their heads after Grandma had cut it off with an axe, preparatory to cooking it.”

Bill Whitford Memories, 2007

I have lots of memories of visiting DeSoto. The first memories are from 1946. Our family used to visit there annually during my childhood. It was always in the summer and Uncle Neill was always there. Uncle Neill taught me a lot of cards, including bridge. I always enjoyed the farm, helping Grandma collect the eggs, Grandpa milk the one cow.

I remember a number of times when I got into trouble -- e.g., chasing the chickens, forgetting to latch the gate to the pasture and the cow got out. I remember one time when I was milking the cow, or more accurately trying to milk the cow. I got up from the stool to turn the job over the Grandpa and managed to swing my foot over the pail with the milk. A fair amount of straw mixed with manure from the barn floor fell into the milk. Grandma poured the milk through cheesecloth to separate the milk from the manure. I'm not sure what was done with the milk thereafter.

Finally I remember being fascinated by the chickens running around without their heads after Grandma had cut it off with an axe, preparatory to cooking it. I remember the Longstreths, of course, and the three of you (John, Nancy and you) when you visited in the mid-50's. I believe that Mary, Martha and

I went to church, or at least Sunday school, several times. Grandpa never went because he never liked the pastor. I believed that story for many years.

My memories of Grandma, and of my mother's feelings about Grandma, are quite different from Alvis's. She was tight with the dollar, of course. She certainly regarded deprivation as a virtue. But my mother looked up to her mother tremendously. She certainly regarded her mother as the strong parent who had influenced her. And I think Neill felt similarly. Grandma was the reason, I was told, that all three kids graduated from college and achieved academically (at least my mother and Neill did). My mother appreci-

ated her mother's discipline and values.

Grandma was seen as not being a selfish person, but rather as very altruistic. When I visited DeSoto in 2001 and knocked on the door at the old house, the person who answered (Name forgotten) was someone who had lived at the head of the driveway. Apparently when Grandma left the house for the nursing home, she prevailed on her children (our parents) to sell the house to him and his wife for considerably below market value, which is all the buyers could afford. The fellow had a disabled wife (wheelchair bound) and Grandma regarded them as virtuous, or so I was told. When I heard the story, I thought it was in character -- consistent with what I had learned about my Grandma from my mother. Incidentally, this fellow, the one who got the house in 1964 and still lived there, tended to our Grandparents graves, as a sign of his respect.

Another story. Whenever we arrived in DeSoto when I was a child, I remember Grandma always telling my Father that he was her favorite son-in-law. I was very impressed, and proud of my father. It was only years later that I figured out that Grandma had only one son-in-law.

I last saw Grandma in July or August, 1964. I was traveling from California to D.C. to take up my first job after law school. I stopped in Kansas City and traveled out to Olathe to visit Grandma who was then in a nursing home. Neill was there. She was physically weak, but still had her mind about her. I had just become engaged to Lynn, and so there were certainly things to talk about. I believe that Grandma died not long after that.

Mary Whitford Graves Memories, 2007

My memories primarily date from childhood. I formed them when visiting my mother's parents in their later years of life in their home. They lived on a small property that they farmed on a reduced scale compared to farms they owned earlier in their lives. This small farm was located on land overlooking the Santa Fe RR tracks and the Kansas River locally called the "Kaw". A narrow gravel road led from the town of DeSoto, Kansas past a cornfield to the house, a traditional mid-west two story sandstone structure. At the foot of what I remember as a large pasture on the left side of the road sat Grandpa's barn. The right side was a corn field. Grandpa kept a Jersey cow that he milked twice a day, so the barn served to shelter him and the cow during milking. Grandpa also stored bales of hay there. Apart from tending to the cow, John usually passed the day on the front porch swing, often chewing tobacco and spitting into Grandma's petunia beds that surrounded the porch. Bertha didn't approve of tobacco and disliked this quality in her husband.

My mother was another source of my memories of Grandma. She often disciplined me when visiting in DeSoto by saying that Grandma wouldn't approve. Perhaps when I was older Mom made comments or talked about her mother in ways that added to my memories of Grandma. What and where my memories originated is difficult to know. Grandma did demonstrate that she was an active faithful Christian. I remember seeing her read the Bible when she had some time for herself. In the quiet of the evening she read in the kitchen in preparation for teaching Sunday school the following morning. During our visits to DeSoto we all went to Sunday school and Church with her. I remember feeling that the church service part was ok, but disliked going to my Sunday school class with all of the local kids. I was shy and became uncomfortable because I didn't know anyone and seldom understood what the class was about. Grandma, on the other hand, was very proud of her family and was pleased to have all of us dressed in our best attending church with her. At one point I also remember meeting Grandma's quilting bee, women who met at the church at least once an evening to sew on a patchwork quilt. Grandma had several on her beds, all well used. I remember the large frame the women used to quilt when they were sewing together.

Grandma had a broad Christian view of sin. I learned of Grandma's dislike of tobacco from my mother, Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford, and probably learned my other memories of Grandma's attitudes about sin from her, as well.

“I remember that while alcohol was never in view in Grandma's house, my Aunts and Uncles often drank upstairs in their bedrooms when visiting.”

Mom's comments became my "understandings" of Grandma's attitudes and values. Sometimes I learned about them in the moment that Mom hoped I would not cause her embarrassment or wished I entertained myself in another way. Mom wanted her mother to think well of me.

I was mystified by her attitude about cards. She didn't approve of playing cards and associated card-playing with gambling. Despite considering card playing a sin, we grandchildren, as well as her children, all played bridge fervently in her living room. As a young child when visiting the farm, we kids often entertained ourselves playing card games. Grandma also was an abolitionist and didn't approve of using alcohol of any sort. She also disliked tobacco. Despite Grandma's attitudes, she was quiet about them. Her children demonstrated more modern sensibilities when visiting her. I remember that while alcohol was never in view in Grandma's house, my Aunts and Uncles often drank upstairs in their bedrooms when visiting. I knew my mother smoked at various periods during her life as did my aunt, but I don't recall if they smoked in my Grandmother's presence.

Grandma was well educated prior to marrying John, her husband. My mom thought that she was a good deal smarter than her father. Mom thought her father lacked much business sense. He was never very successful as a farmer and made poor decisions during the economic depression of the 1930's. He had been prepared to take over his father's thriving hardware business in Kidder, Missouri when Grandma married him. In the end, however, the store sold out and my Grandfather turned to farming. Grandma was a farmer's wife thereafter, and lived through the depression in hardship. She and John left Kidder and established their farm near Lawrence, Kansas.

As I aged, I became aware that Grandma was more than my girlish impression of a gray-haired, skinny, and stooped old woman with hands abused from sun exposure, gardening, and other forms of physically demanding farm work. I remember how she cleaned her dirty fingernails with the point of a kitchen knife. Over time and having listened to Mom's comments about her mother, I became aware that Grandma had a fine mind. In fact she was very smart. Not only had she earned a college degree, she had taught at the Kidder Institute, a local college.

As an older married farming woman, her opportunity to engage in intellectual pursuits was limited. What she could pursue, however, were bible studies. She knew the bible and at one point attended a bible institute. Since Grandma had been a classics major, I gathered that bible studies was more than religion (although it was also that) to her. It afforded her some intellectual outlet in her hard life of farm poverty. Grandma had several pursuits that kept her mind alive. She wrote a weekly "item" or column about the

activities of many Desoto people. Grandma also filled in crossword puzzles. At the end of her long day she sat at the kitchen table working the newspaper puzzle. She did them daily and appeared to be successful in completing them. I remember her sitting at the oil cloth-covered kitchen table in the middle of a small room. It was surrounded by an old gas stove along one wall, a free-standing cupboard next to a window on another, and a hanging sink with water spigot along the wall with the back door. The fourth was a wide doorway into the dining room. Her light was a single hanging light bulb. In hindsight I now realize that the kitchen and its table were the only space in the house where Grandma really relaxed to do what interested her.



Bertha at her kitchen table

I learned from my mother what the depression was and how the difficult economic time affected her life at home on the farm. Grandma as home manager lived by denying herself first and foremost, since money was scarce. Grandmother scrimped not only for herself personally, but also with food and other items of daily life.

My mother, of course, learned how to "economize" in similar fashion. I, too, am affected by these influences of economy within the household. Several examples of her economizing stand out (we might call it recycling today). Items for daily use that we consider useful, inexpensive, and ubiquitous in kitchens weren't in Grandma's at all. I don't recall plastic bags being used, but if the bread came in one, I don't doubt she saved and reused it for a long time. She saved all newspapers. She saved buttons, string, rubber bands, safety pins, hat pins, bobby pins, old costume jewelry, a couple of gold rings (including her first engagement ring), and odd small pieces of personal property all jumbled together in a few small dishes in her dining room cupboard. Grandma didn't use paper napkins or towels, pasteurized store-bought milk, butter, or eggs. She didn't have a carrot peeler. She had only one paring knife and one long knife for kitchen use. I remember being asked to help prepare vegetables for dinner. To do so meant that my sister and I, as well as my mother and Grandmother, all shared one small knife. It was always hard

to find a working space. We summer helpers (my sister and me) often sat on the back porch with the un- prepared vegetables in one container and the prepared ones in another.

More than anything, however, Grandma's household practices point to one of her major achievements in her life as a farmer's wife (and the stories are legend today): all three of her children attended and graduated from a four year college. They attended Park College, a small liberal arts school in eastern Kansas, at the height of the depression. I don't know many details of how she accomplished this goal. I know Mom's older brother, Neill, helped her younger brother, John, pay for the education, for instance. I imagine that they all earned small scholarships as well. The important understanding I gained from this aspect of Grandma's life, however, is that she highly valued higher education as did all members of the extended family. She, however, was able to manage scrimping enough from a family farm income to enable her children to become college educated and well prepared to make their way in the world.

I remember activities of both my grandparents as they went about chores on the farm.

Grandma kept chickens and sold eggs to various neighbors in DeSoto. Sometimes I joined Grandma in the chicken coop to gather eggs. She showed me how to put my hand under the laying hen to collect the egg. My hand was hesitant whereas Grandma's was assured and fast. I always thought the hen knew Grandma's hand was ok and mine wasn't to be allowed because the hen squawked and pecked at my skin. I was scared and quickly withdrew my hand as a result. The other reaction the hens displayed while I tried to gather eggs, was to stand up with great offense, fluttering their wings and squawking, often flapping off the nest entirely. I was scared by that reaction too. On another occasion I watched Grandma kill a chicken for Sunday dinner. Mother said that it always pained Grandma to behead one of her chickens so I should let her alone. She had an old tree stump in the back yard she used as a chopping block. One day I watched from the back porch. Grandma took her large kitchen knife and laid the chicken across the chicken block, neck stretched out. With one quick downward arm blow, the chicken was beheaded. The head fell to the ground and the chicken was released to run around the yard headless until it dropped dead. I was amazed, of course, but watching that beheading was how I learned where chicken meat comes from. Someway I missed the plucking process or at least I don't remember it. I do remember eating the chicken for Sunday dinner, all of us family members gathered around the midday meal after church.

Grandma's meal table always entailed long political discussions among the adults, sometimes they were very passionate. I asked mother once why Grandma never spoke at these discussions. She said Grandma hated politics; that she had grown up immediately following the Civil War in Missouri. Her family had ties in the south. They differed on the issue of slavery, and were divided by the War. As a result she hated the strong feelings and the arguments.

Grandma always drank the fresh cow milk, strained the rich cream to make butter and use on the daily portion of morning oatmeal. I disliked fresh milk. I refused to drink it. Mom intervened on the milk and allowed us to buy pasteurized milk in the store. I remember the butter always being "different" from what I was used to, but I did eat it on my toast. Since Grandma's refrigerator was quite small, it was very full of the daily supply of fresh milk, quarts prepared for selling to neighbors. Therefore we kids walked to downtown De Soto (a main street with a small grocery store among a few other shops) to buy one quart of milk every day. We also picked up the mail at the post office.

I remember one other story about Grandma from my mother. She planted an annual vegetable garden. It was another of her economizing household practices. She and Grandpa ate the vegetables (and we did too depending on the time of year we visited), augmenting them with a few items from the store as many farm people did. Mom said that during one economically difficult period, Grandma kept herself alive eating only Swiss chard all season long over the course of several years. Whether that was during the depression or at the end of her life when she worried about running out of money, I don't know. But the story demonstrates a female characteristic that has been passed onto me: denial of worthiness such that one does nothing for oneself or indulges oneself last when money is scarce

“Mom said that during one economically difficult period, Grandma kept herself alive eating only Swiss chard all season long over the course of several years.”

Martha Whitford Barss Memories, 2007

In the summer we usually spent a week (or more?) in DeSoto when I was young. Uncle Neill lived there also in the summer and I remember that Grandma helped him shave and wash in the morning. She always cooked a big breakfast – very creamy porridge with fresh cow’s milk (which we did not like) bacon and eggs, as I recall. We sometimes helped Grandpa and Grandma with chores – milking “Bossy” the cow, collecting eggs. I remember being fond of the barn cats but they were hard to get close to. I was afraid to get the hens off the eggs, so I guess I didn’t get many. I remember that we slept upstairs near Miss Balance’s apartment. She was away sometimes because it was summer vacation – I think she was a teacher. Grandma spent part of her day typing, as I recall – perhaps the weekly column for the newspaper. On Sunday, Grandma wanted us to go to Sunday School – and we did sometimes. She was an important person in that church. Grandpa “didn’t like the preacher” we were told. He didn’t go. Thinking back, I really can’t remember Grandma sitting down much – always working. Uncle Neill taught us bridge but I don’t think Grandma approved. We played outside a lot – got chigger bites – they itched. One year Grandpa rented the pasture to someone with goats. Mary and I climbed into the pasture and I remember getting out quickly as the goats tried to eat our clothes.

I don’t remember if Grandma ever visited us – though I think they came to Wisconsin once. I do remember that she told me in her later years that she had not been east of Niagara Falls nor west of Colorado. She never saw the ocean.

When I was going to college in Minnesota from California in 1963 I stopped to visit Grandma at the nursing home where she stayed her last year. I remember sitting on her bed – she was having a “bad” day she said and had to stay in bed. This made her sad she said because her goal was to make other people happy and she needed to get up and go visiting. She had a way of focusing on others, rather than herself, it seems. In fact, I think this was to the extreme –and to her detriment.

Another memory I have of Grandma in her later years was when I got a birthday present from her. Usually we got money – a small amount, as I recall. In the year I remember, I got a pair of rabbit lined leather gloves – what a surprise! When I told my mom she said those must be the gloves she (my mom) gave Grandma for Christmas.

“Thinking back, I really can’t remember Grandma sitting down much – always working.”



Whitelaw Family Reunion, Oysterville, Washington, 2006, The Six Grandchildren of John and Bertha Bell Whitelaw: Left to right: Nancy, John and Susan Whitelaw, Mary Whitford Graves, Martha Whitford Barss, Bill Whitford

PIONEER GIRL

1872 - 1895

“I liked the sound of that word, ‘graduated.’”



Bertha at the time of her graduation from Drury College in 1895

In the year before she died, 1963, Bertha Bell Whitelaw dictated this account of her earliest days:

Feb. 1, 1872 was my birthday, Bertha Elizabeth Bell, fourth child, 2nd daughter of Alexander Bell and 2nd daughter of Martha Ann Gordon Bell. Elizabeth for my grandmother Gordon – maiden name Elizabeth Ferguson – who knitted me a pair of white stockings with blue stripes. Born on a farm 3 ½ miles south of Earlham, Madison County, Iowa. Baptized at an early age in the Union United Presbyterian Church 7 miles distant.

Started to school at 5 years, walking two miles. Once lagged behind the older children and returned home. Repeated this and was returned to school by an irate mother.



The Bell family about 1898. From Left to right: Bertha, her father Alexander, her sister Eudora with daughter Ione, her mother Martha, and her brother Robert Gordon

Later my sister and two brothers were taught by a neighbor young lady and a farm helper – and still later attended another school – also 2 miles away. Neighbors were distant and playmates few. Occasional visits to relatives, church and Sabbath school were our recreations. Reading aloud at home and a magic lantern pleased us. Also games.

This memoir, brief though it is, sets key themes of Bertha Bell Whitelaw's life: challenging physical environments, and a strong emphasis on education and on religion.

Bertha's parents, Martha and Alexander Bell, were farmers in Penn Township, Winterset, Iowa. Alexander had immigrated to the U.S. from Ireland as a young man, and had joined the Union Army during the Civil War. He had been married once before, to Sabina Rankin, of Illinois, with whom he had two sons. She died soon after the birth of the second son, and her parents took over the care of the children. Alexander then moved with his deceased wife's brother to Iowa, where they owned a farm.

There Alexander met Martha Gordon, a young school teacher. The Gordon family, originally from Georgia, had immigrated to Illinois and then to Iowa before the Civil War. They also were farmers. See the Appendix for documents on the family back-

grounds of Alexander Bell and Martha Gordon Bell.

Alexander and Martha were married in Iowa in 1869. They were members of the Union Presbyterian Church. Alexander was an Elder in the Church and a trustee of the township. A Bell cousin, Alexander Flack, described the Bells:

He was an upright citizen as was his wife, Martha Bell, both staunch United Presbyterians; he a Republican and she a Democrat. For many years before his death at Chetopa, Kansas, he voted the Prohibition National ticket. He was a spare man, 5 feet, 10 inches tall, pleasant and easy to get along with. Martha Bell was a woman of very strong convictions, about 5 feet 4 inches; very energetic. Had curly hair and was very good looking. (Alexander Flack genealogy, no date. See appendix.)

In about 1882, when Bertha was 10 years old, the family left Iowa and moved first to Loveland, Colorado, and then to Oxford, Nebraska. In Oxford they homesteaded 200 acres, on a farm about a mile from town. Their first home was a sod house, later replaced with a frame one. Two years after they arrived in Nebraska, their youngest son, Norman, was killed in

Alexander and Martha Bell had five children, all born in Iowa:

Eudora, born Jan 1, 1870.

Bertha Elizabeth, born Feb. 1, 1872

Robert Gordon, born March 1, 1874

Ralph Alwin, born Feb. 3, 1876

Norman Osmond, born March 30, 1877

a farm accident. He fell under the wheels of a hay wagon his father was driving. Soon after this, Ralph developed an illness, thought to be Addison's disease, which finally caused his death in 1887. So, Bertha lost two of her brothers while she was in her teens.

Hastings Academy and Drury College: 1888-1895

Bertha and her siblings attended school in Oxford, Nebraska. However, their parents had higher educational aspirations for their children, and they sent both Eudora and Bertha to Hastings Academy, located in Hastings, Nebraska, about 100 miles away. Hastings Academy was a new school; it was founded in 1882 as a co-educational, Presbyterian, liberal arts college, modeled after those in the East. Bertha and her sister Eudora took a "classical course" including Greek and Latin, comprising the equivalent of the junior and senior years of high school. Bertha graduated sometime around 1891, when she was nineteen. At Hastings, her sister Eudora met her future husband Russell Jones, who became a Presbyterian minister.

While their daughters were at Hastings, Alexander and Martha Bell once again decided to relocate, after six unsatisfactory years on the Nebraska farm. They went first to Arkansas, but in 1890 they settled permanently in Springfield, Missouri, on a farm near town.

After graduating from Hastings, Bertha joined her parents in Springfield, and soon she and Eudora enrolled in Drury College, also located in Springfield. Like Hastings, Drury College was a young institution. Congregationalists founded the College in 1873, with a special emphasis on preparing teachers for the public schools. Bertha majored in Latin and classics, a course of study which prepared her to teach in institutes and academies, the equivalent of today's high schools and community colleges. She graduated in 1895 as class valedictorian, with an outstanding academic record. Years later, Bertha recollected:

"It wasn't hard to get into college in those days because not many persons wanted to attend college. I had just grown up with the idea that I would attend college. I heard my mother talking to a young woman when I was quite young. They were talking about the woman's having recently graduated from college. I liked the sound of that word 'graduated' and decided I wanted to do it too." (Enthusiasm for Life Keeps

90Year Old DeSoto Resident Active. The Daily News, Feb. 24, 1962, page 5.)

Memoirs of Bertha's Son, John Moreland Whitelaw

In 1972, Bertha's son, John, dictated some family history. The following are his memories of his mother's family origins and her girlhood.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to give some history about my parents and their background. My mother was born on a farm in Iowa, on February 1, 1872. Her mother was born in Georgia, and I remember my brother saying that her ancestors were undoubtedly part of that early migration of Scots-Irish people, primarily, who followed the line of the Appalachians from Western Pennsylvania down through West Virginia, the Carolinas, down into Georgia. She was from a farm background, too, that is my grandmother on my mother's side.

I am not entirely clear on just how she and my grandfather Bell met. She was his second wife because his first wife had died. They were farmers all of their married life. She was a woman, I gather, of considerable spirit and maintained a really firm discipline, I think, as far as her family and her children were concerned.

Grandfather Bell had come over from Ulster, Northern Ireland in, it seems to me, 1854. He came over on a sailing vessel and as I remember my mother telling it, it took six weeks to make the trip and he was seasick everyday of the trip. He had some relatives, maybe older brothers or possibly an uncle, who had come over earlier and probably settled in Illinois because that was where, as I recall, grandfather Bell went first.

But the family had moved to Iowa before my mother was born and they lived on a farm there, over 500 acres, excellent farm land. It would grow some of the best corn in the United States. My brother Neill is one given to bemoaning other people's mistakes, particularly those in family and close relatives where their mistakes adversely affected the amount of money they accumulated. Grandfather Bell sold his farm in Iowa, I don't know just when, maybe 1885 or something like that, and Neill never got over what a great mistake it was to get rid of that fine Iowa farmland, considering what he paid for it and what it would be worth at modern prices. It really did represent the loss of a fortune.

Well, in Grandpa and Grandma Bell's family, there were two boys by the first marriage, Will and Alexander. Then there were three more children by Grandpa Bell's second mar-

riage – Aunt Dora, the oldest, then my mother, whose name was Bertha Bell, and then the youngest, a boy named Gordon Bell. Well they moved about a good deal. They moved from Iowa out to Colorado, moved by railroad. It doesn't seem to me they stayed very long in Colorado. I have the impression that Grandpa Bell didn't do a very good job of selecting the farm or the land that they had out there and also some of the livestock got sick, whether it was the water or what I can't really remember. But I have the feeling that it was kind of a disaster, the move to Colorado. I think after a year or two there, the whole family moved again and this time to Arkansas. [Ed. note: They moved first to Oxford, Neb. And then to Arkansas] There again I have the impression that they didn't stay very long, always farming, but not a very successful venture, I gathered.

But then they did make a move from Arkansas to the area around Springfield, Missouri. That is in Southwestern Missouri, about 200 miles from Kansas City. Then they settled down. They farmed again, of course, and a good deal of dairying. Grandma Bell died while they were living on that farm. Grandfather Bell did, too, I think died on that farm although my memory is that he had more or less retired. Mother always speaks very fondly of a trip that she took with her father and her brother Gordon. They went all the way back from Missouri to Buffalo, New York. I think that is the farthest east my mother ever got.

Well, while they were living on the farm outside of [Oxford, Nebraska] mother and her sister Dora both graduated from the institute or the high school that was there and both of them went on and graduated from Drury College. Drury has always been recognized as a good school. Of course it was mostly classical education at the time that mother attended. She majored in Greek and Latin. Both she and Dora were very good students. I think Aunt Dora graduated cum laude and I think mother graduated summa cum laude.

Of course they studied very hard. Mother especially was a diligent student. They drove four or five miles, I think it was, with horse and buggy every day to school, to Drury College. It was either in her junior or senior year that mother had been staying up so late at night studying, getting up early in the morning because the girls always had chores to do, and one day mother fainted when she was standing by the stove and fell on the stove. She was burned rather se-

verely about her legs and I can remember seeing the scar tissue. She had it all her life, big areas of her legs were healed over, but with scar tissue. The family insisted that she get more rest and even, I've heard her say, that her professors told her, "Bertha, you just must not drive yourself so hard, you will ruin your health. Don't worry about your grades, you are going to make fine grades. We will see to that."

“...one day mother fainted when she was standing by the stove and fell on the stove.”

Another event of great interest while mother was in college was that she fell in love with a young professor who had come out from the East to teach at Drury College. I gather that it was entirely reciprocal with him. He gave her an engagement ring which Mother wore all her life. They planned to be married, I presume, perhaps when Mother finished college.

Then he died very suddenly. I know that was a great hurt to Mother. She used to talk about it with us sometimes; it undoubtedly was the greatest romance in her life.

Memoirs of Bertha's Nieces and Nephew

In 1945, Bertha's nieces and nephew wrote a family history on the occasion of their parents' 50th wedding anniversary. Their mother, Eudora Bell Jones, was Bertha's elder sister. This memoir covers the same ground as the one by John Moreland Whitelaw, but adds new details about the life of the Bell family.

... We must return to Ireland once more to learn about the ... beginning of our story. This time we stop in County Cavin at a town called Baillie-borough where on May 1, 1837 Alexander Bell was born. He was of a large family of children whose parents might be termed middle class people. This family came to America, one might say, one at a time, and Alexander arrived when he was about 17 years of age. He stopped in New York City, where he worked for a time, then traveled on to Michigan, and later spent some time with a sister in Ohio. His desire to learn more about the country then led him to Illinois where he married Selma (Sabina?) Rankin, the daughter of a farmer. Three children were born to them. Will and a twin sister who died at birth, and Rankin, whose birth the mother did not survive. Mr. Bell was left with two small children. Fortunately the Rankin family were glad to care for them and they remained with their grandparents for seven years, until Mr. Bell's marriage to Martha Gordon.

Martha was ... born in Covington, Georgia. The date of her

birth is uncertain, since the family Bible, in which the births were recorded, was destroyed by fire, and it was difficult to remember the dates of a large family. Martha had three sisters and two brothers, but her parents also reared four nieces and nephews, who had been orphaned by a plague of Black diphtheria, which in many cases took the adults and left the children. The Gordon family lived in Georgia only a short time after Martha's birth, and then moved to Tennessee, near Knoxville. Mr. Gordon never owned slaves, because he never could think it right.

When Martha was 7 years old, the family moved from Tennessee to Illinois. Later they settled in Iowa, where it is thought they took a claim near Winterset in Madison County. Martha was always a studious person, and read everything she could lay her hands on. So it is not surprising that we find her as a young woman, teaching school, usually in a district near her home, but occasionally getting as far away as Red Oak, Iowa. However, during those days as well as now, teaching lost its glamour when romance stepped in, and we find her giving up her profession to become the wife of the prosperous young farmer, Alexander Bell.

At this time, Mr. Bell was in partnership with his brother, Henry Bell, and with Henry Rankin, the brother of his first wife. They were operating a farm, and raising cattle, and doing a thriving business. Mr. Rankin remained in Illinois, but made frequent trips back to assist with the planning of the work.

Mr. Bell's son, Will, came to make his home with his father and his new mother, but Rankin remained with his grandparents until their death when he was 14. One by one new faces made their appearance in this little family until the children in the new family numbered five, Eudora, born Jan. 1, 1870, and Bertha Elizabeth were the girls, and Robert Gordon, Ralph Alvin, and Norman Osmond were the boys.

The work on this large farm proved strenuous for both husband and wife, and since they had an urge to get acquainted with other parts of the country, they rented their farm and moved their family to Loveland, Colo. They were able to

purchase an acre and a half suburban place for \$450.00, but their stay here was short. The altitude was too great for Mrs. Bell's health, so after a year, they moved to Oxford, Nebraska.

Once again they were on a large farm, for they had a homestead of 200 acres, three-fourths of a mile from town. They were able to prove up on this homestead a little sooner than the usual time because they were given a day for every day of Mr. Bell's service in the army. At first they lived in a Sod House, but it was not very comfortable, so they were glad to be able to build a frame house.

“Although the building was furnace heated, the system was not efficient, and the girls often found ice in their pitchers of water as they were cleaning up for breakfast”.

Two years after they arrived in Nebraska, a great sorrow came to the family in the sudden death of the youngest child, Norman. He ran out to meet his father who was returning home with a load of hay. In trying to climb onto the load he fell under the wheels of the wagon and was run over. He

died almost immediately. Soon after this, Ralph developed an illness which did not seem serious at first, but gradually grew worse. It was thought to be Addison's disease, and it finally caused his death in 1887. Both boys were buried in a little plot on the home farm and when the family became permanently settled the bodies were moved to a cemetery in Springfield, Mo.

Although the children attended school in town (Oxford, Neb.) the advantages there were little different from those in the country schools. The Bells were determined that their children should have a higher education, so Dora was sent to Hastings College in Hastings, Nebr., less than a hundred miles away. Here she entered the academy, and took up what would now be considered third year high school work. A year later her sister Bertha also entered the same school. They lived in the girls' dormitory under strict supervision of the lady Principal. Although the building was furnace heated, the system was not efficient, and the girls often found ice in their pitchers of water as they were cleaning up for breakfast.

The family suffered many hardships during their stay in Nebraska, due to prolonged dry weather. Wild plums were almost the only fruit they could get, and the gardens were never good. After struggling for six years to have a good

home in Oxford, they decided to seek a more favorable location. Mr. Bell scanned the papers to learn of a more pleasant climate, and was impressed with descriptions he found of the community around Morrilton, Arkansas. A letter to the postmaster there brought an answer giving the name of a man who could tell them all the virtues of the country, and a lively correspondence developed. So it was that the Bells set out for Arkansas in 1889 with high hopes of finding a pleasant new home and as good farm. They took their stock with them and the move was made by railroad. The family was invited to be the guests of their new friend who had urged them to move, until they could find a place to their liking. Continuous rain made it hard to find a suitable farm, and by the end of three months the Bells were sure they did not care to remain in Arkansas.

In the meantime Mr. Bell had read of the wonderful advantages and fine climate to be found around Springfield, Mo. He was particularly impressed with the fact that livestock could be pastured here the year around. Once more they set out with renewed hope, and this time they were not disappointed. They first lived on a farm about three miles from the edge of Springfield, east of the railroad crossing of the Memphis Branch and Cherry Street Road. Later they purchased a farm on East Division Street where they lived for many years. The Bell girls enjoyed life at Hastings College and had many friends there. Soon after arrival, Eudora chanced to notice one of her upper classmen who was often seated near her in one of the classes. She was properly introduced to him at one of the College Social functions, but did not see him often outside of the class. One day she noticed that he stopped after the class, and bought two tickets for a certain lecture that was to be given at the College. He was waiting at the door for her when she left the building, and she soon found that the second ticket was for her. This was the beginning of their romance that brought about their marriage on June 19, 1895, fifty years ago today (June 1, 1945).

When the Bells were finally established near Springfield, the girls entered Drury College and both were graduated from the College.

LATIN TEACHER AND WIFE

1895 - 1910

“I know by experience now something of a winning and winsome little one.”



Bertha as a young woman, about 1900

Teaching: 1895-1903

After graduating from Drury College in 1895, Bertha accepted a teaching post at Iberia Academy, in Iberia, Missouri, about 100 miles north west of Springfield. This Academy was established in 1890 to provide a liberal education to young people of the town and surrounding areas. It was in the same tradition of religiously affiliated educational institutions as the two schools Bertha had attended as a student, Hastings Academy and Drury College. She remained at Iberia Academy for four years.

Bertha left Iberia and began teaching at Kidder Institute, in Kidder, Missouri, about 200 miles from her home in Springfield, in the fall of 1899. Affiliated with the Congregational Church, it provided a secondary education for boarding and day students, both young men and women, and had a particular emphasis

on preparing students for the teaching profession. She taught Latin and Classics, subjects she had studied at Drury College.

It was the common practice of the time for teachers to lodge with local families, and Bertha lived with four other young women, also probably teachers or students at the Institute, in the home of a young couple, the Angerts (1900 Federal Census).

There is a family story of Bertha as a teacher. One day she called on a large boy at the back of the class. He said he hadn't prepared the lesson because this was his last day of school. Bertha responded, "All the more reason to study now." This story highlights the family view that Bertha believed in the intrinsic value of learning.

Marriage to John Whitelaw, Jr. 1903

While in Kidder, Bertha met the Whitelaws, a prominent local family with eight children. John Whitelaw owned a hardware and implement store and a lumber yard, and the family were members of the Congregational Church. Most of their children had attended Kidder Institute. As a young, single woman, new in town, Bertha was no doubt naturally drawn to the large, hospitable Whitelaw family. They became very fond of her, and were probably impressed with her academic talents, her religious convictions, and habits of hard work. In their letters, they also remark on her kindness and generosity: "She is so good to us all. . . . Bertha was elected to Sunday School superintendent last evening." (Letter from Maggie Whitelaw to her sister Ruth Williams, 1903.) Bertha's connection with this family resulted in a romance with one of the sons, John Jr.. She married him in January, 1903, a month before her 31st birthday.



Bertha's son, John Moreland Whitelaw, recalled the circumstances of his parents' courtship and marriage as follows:

After she finished college she got a job teaching at a town in south central Missouri, Iberia; she taught there two or three years, maybe longer. But somewhere along the line she must have heard of an opening at Kidder Institute, there at Kidder, Missouri, because the next teaching assignment that she had was at Kidder Institute. Of course, she got to know all the Whitelaws very soon, Kidder was not a very big town, probably 500 people at that time. I am sure that she attended the Congregational Church which the Whitelaws had helped establish and where all of them went. Of course, it was there that she and my father began their courtship that culminated in their marriage in January of 1903.



Bertha Bell and John Whitelaw, at about the time of their marriage in 1903.

[M]y father [John Whitelaw, Jr.], was born in 1870 and educationally, my dad had a kind of a checkered career. I know he probably got through grade school with no difficulty and he went some to Kidder Institute. But he also enrolled for a period of time as a special student at Drury College where Mother had graduated. Dad was there about a year, as I recall. He took mathematics and mechanical drawing. He was always very good in mathematics. He always read a great deal, not only newspaper and farm journals, but he also read books.

But I don't think he and mother met while he was at Drury. Dad began helping at the hardware and implement store at a fairly early age, but he also used to do a lot of farm work with various farmers round that area, particularly at harvest time and so on. I've heard him tell about it. I'm not sure but what Grandpa didn't have some patches of land around that the boys helped farm. I know he was working in the hardware and implement store from 1903 when he and Mother were married until 1910 when they moved to Kansas. (John Moreland Whitelaw Memoirs, 1972-73).

For more information on the family background of John Whitelaw, Jr., Bertha's husband, see my biographies of his parents, John Whitelaw and Mary Neil Whitelaw.

Deaths of Bertha's Father, Mother, Daughter, and Brother: 1900-1906

Starting in 1900, Bertha suffered a prolonged series of deaths in her family. In 1900 her mother died unexpectedly of "uremic poisoning" at the family home in Springfield, Missouri. She was 62 years old (her obituary mistakenly gives her age as 60). Bertha was 28 years old when her mother died. In June, 1904, the year after her marriage, her father died, also unexpectedly, of a disease diagnosed as "flux," while visiting his son in Chetopa, Kansas.

Bertha had another great loss in 1904. About five months after her father died, she gave birth to her first child, Jean. This daughter died a few hours after birth in November, 1904. Bertha's sister-in-law, Maggie Whitelaw, who also lived in Kidder, wrote about the circumstances of this sad event to her sister, Ruth, in Wisconsin.

Nov. 28, 1904 Dear Sister,

Two weeks ago this morning we put little baby away, she lies to the left side of the drive way as you enter the cemetery from the west gate (there was no vacant lot near father's lot that John could get, though he would have preferred one there). I like the spot very much, it is on the west slope and will be very pretty with care. . . Little baby was so sweet looking. We thought much like Bertha, her hair would have been red. At least - they say if a baby has red hair at first it will always be so and hers was.

“...John said to me Sunday morning, ‘O Margaret – we did want her to live,’ with a sob and sigh that was so deep and hard I felt like I would burst...”

She was such a welcome child I cannot understand why she could not stay but they have a treasure in heaven and the promise is “where your treasure is there will your heart

be also.” But when John said to me Sunday morning, “O Margaret – we did want her to live,” with a sob and sigh that was so deep and hard I felt like I would burst and could only say “Mabel give Uncle John a big hug and kiss” and the dear girl comforted him all she could. John was very brave about Bertha and she bore up bravely too but they see sad lonely hours because of the disappointment. . . . Love to you all, your sister, Maggie

In what must have seemed to be an unbelievable series of tragic losses, Bertha's only living brother, Robert, died in January, 1906. Robert Gordon Bell was only 32 years old and recently married, when he died suddenly and unexpectedly of complications from tonsillitis. He was the last of her family remaining in Springfield, and managed the family rental properties there.



Robert Gordon Bell

He was solicitous of Bertha, and managed the upkeep and rental of properties she had inherited from her parents. In the course of six years, Bertha lost almost her entire family of origin, and her baby daughter. Her only remaining blood relative was her older sister, Eudora.

Births of Neill Gordon Whitelaw and Eleanor Bell Whitelaw: 1906-1908

Eight days after her brother Robert Gordon Bell's death, Bertha delivered a son, Neill Gordon Whitelaw, born on January 29, 1906. This had been a difficult pregnancy, according to a letter from her sister-in-law, Maggie, written to her sister Ruth. That letter is reproduced below, along with others to Ruth written by Bertha and Maggie. They describe Neill's growth and development.

Dec. 4, 1905

Dear Ruth, Bertha has to lie in bed a good deal nowadays the doctor thinks if she rests that way for this month she will be stronger after that time. She was going to have us all for thanksgiving dinner but had to give it up so we all eat in our own homes and are just as well off. She feels worst about it but if John and she get through their job they will be happy people and we will all be glad for them. . . . Maggie

In the following letter, Bertha congratulates her sister-in-law Ruth on the birth of her daughter Mary, who was born a few months after Bertha's son Gordon.

May 3, 1906

Dear Ruth: Mr. Williams' telegram gave us the best of news – a dear little daughter! What could be dearer – already having a son of [unreadable word] sure you all are most happy that this little guest is a girl. You will find her so dear and sweet and lovable. Your happiest days in many ways are close at hand. I know by experience now something of a winning and winsome little one is, especially when one is privileged to be the constant companion of such a one. We shall be glad to know all details of weight, height color of hair and eyes and in fact everything about her. I like her name too – I don't care for fancy modern names, so Mary Elizabeth just suits me.

Neill Gordon is well – we think his teeth are beginning to trouble him a bit. He weighed six and three quarters pounds when he was born and last Sabbath when he was three months old he had gained seven pounds. His new hair



Neill Gordon Whitelaw - 10 months

is coming in pretty well – it is light – but not just white. His eyes are still blue and will remain so.

Our garden grows nicely – we have peas, onions, cucumbers, salsify, radishes and corn up. Now for the hoeing! In the way of flowers we have nasturtiums, sweet peas and pansies up. Neill Gordon lies asleep on my knee. John joins me in much love and heartiest congratulations to you both. I hope Mary Elizabeth will be well and that you may all be just real well. Very lovingly, Bertha

Jan. 2, 1908

Dear Ruth: . . . I am sure you heard we have long wanted a picture of Mary Elizabeth, and Neill Gordon's little red mittens exactly harmonize with an outdoor outfit of red he has. We had an even

more enjoyable Christmas than usual this year and the tree was beautiful – the one at your Father's I mean – but we had a pretty one at the church too. Santa Claus was liberal to us – Neill Gordon is rich with two teddy bears – one so large as himself – three linen books – a mug, a pair of evacesises [?] and various other small articles and toys. I am very happy over a pair of gale hat pins from John, a blue silk waist slip and hand painted plate – two dresser scarfs, two aprons, one gingham, a knife and fork case, a hair pin holder, a set of grass mats, a calendar, a handkerchief and many pretty cards and postals. . . . Neill Gordon is still into everything. With love, Bertha

On July 9, 1908, Bertha gave birth to a daughter, Eleanor Bell Whitelaw. Below are two letters concerning this event: the first is one that Bertha wrote years later to her daughter describing the days before her birth; the second, from Bertha's sister-in-law Maggie to her sister Ruth, describes the difficult delivery.

July 6, 1954

From Bertha Bell Whitelaw to Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford

Dear Daughter, The Fourth of July always brings thoughts of your coming to us very visibly to my mind. For one thing, your father, still very fond of fire works, entertained his class of young Sunday school boys at our house with a fire works display. John Allen and John Shaw were two of the boys. This was on Sat-



Neill Gordon Whitelaw

urday night and the next Thursday morning you came. That was a very warm time too. The evening before I had sat out in the yard embroidering on a baby dress that I was hoping would clothe a baby girl – too pretty for a boy I thought – maybe you recall something about the dress – we had it around for a number of years.

July 17 [1908]

From Maggie Whitelaw to Ruth Williams
 Dear Sister – Bertha still gains, and compared with a week ago is wonderfully improved. She seemed as well as could be expected after the baby came July 9 – until toward evening her stomach gave some trouble, they had the Dr. there some time about 11 o'clock. He was just leaving the house at one o'clock when she had a convulsion. They continued every 1 ½ hours for 3 times, then 1 ¼ hours 2 times and after ward a slight one. She lay unconscious all day and when she regained consciousness had forgotten all about the baby, but slowly all things have come to her. Her right arm and limb were partly paralyzed, the arm is still so weak she can not use it, but can lift it and feels sensible, there is a little numbness in the limb but



Eleanor Bell Whitelaw

that will leave. Some of the places where the poisonous medicines were injected are sore, one may break but they are being watched. Her sister was telegraphed for Fri. morning. She came but could not stay – went back Wed. a.m. Had to leave the four girls with their father, the oldest is nearly twelve.

The nurse has been very efficient and agreeable, and all has been done to help her get better than John could do. Mrs. Jones (Bertha's sister) seemed appreciative of it. The baby is so good and well. The nurse thinks it was a little premature, but Mother did not think so. Any way she seems well and strong. Father and mother have kept around but it was very hard for them and I feel we can now thank God

as we ought for all the wonderful blessings he has given us these past months in keeping our dear ones through such severe times of illness and the two dear little ones who have come to us. . . Lovingly, Maggie



The Whitelaw family home in Kidder, MO. Balcony: Mary, Maggie, Henry, Ralph. Porch: John, James, John Sr., Mary, Aunt Janet, Will, Ruth

FARMER AND MOTHER

1910 - 1919

“Here we are - full-fledged farmer folks now.”



Bertha's three children at Franklin School, 1916. Middle row: Eleanor is second from left; Neill is third from left. Front row: John is seated, far left

In 1910 John and Bertha Whitelaw, age 40 and 38 respectively, and their two children, Neill, age four, and Eleanor age one, moved from Kidder, Missouri to a farm near Lawrence, Kansas, a distance of about 100 miles.

“Here we are – full fledged farmer folks now,” Bertha wrote to her sister-in-law Ruth soon after arriving in Lawrence. “It was hard to part from Fathers and Neill Gordon misses

Grandma very much. Everyone was so kind to help us get packed up. Our goods came through in perfect condition almost.”

One reason for the change was the need for John Whitelaw to have new employment. He had worked all his adult life in his father’s hardware and implement store. However, his father, who retired in 1909, sold the store to a firm in Kansas City. It is not entirely clear why John didn’t take over the store as planned. It is possible that the family saw that Kidder was not going to prosper, and that John could have a better future elsewhere.

John and Bertha’s daughter Eleanor gave this account of the move:

Neill and I were born in Kidder, Missouri where Grandpa [Eleanor’s father, John Whitelaw, Jr.] was born, grew up, and as an adult, was expected by his father to “take over” the hardware-lumber yard your great grandfather had built and operated. For several reasons our family moved in 1910 to a farm about 5 miles from Lawrence, near a neighborhood called Franklin. (Letter to Susan Whitelaw, 1982)



Neill and Eleanor

John and Bertha’s son, John Moreland Whitelaw, gave a somewhat different account:

My parents moved to this farm in Kansas in March of 1910 from Kidder, Missouri. My father had been in the hardware and implement business in Kidder, Missouri, with his father and part of the time with another brother, James. Actually, though, he had had a good deal of experience in farming and worked on farms and, of course, knew a great deal about farm machinery from the implement business, so it was really not a strange venture for him to go to farming in 1910. Part of the motivation for moving to Kansas and away from Kidder, Missouri, came from my mother. She was greatly perturbed by some of my father’s drinking and since Kansas was a dry state and Missouri was a wet state, she thought it would be a great

improvement to come to Kansas and also to get my father away from some of his cronies in Missouri (John Moreland Whitelaw Memoirs, 1972-73).

A letter from John’s sister Maggie Whitelaw to her sister Ruth, written March 6, 1910, describes the events of the move:

John’s folks left Thurs. a.m. they would reach Lawrence by noon. Tis only about 100 miles from here but their car did not get there till after midnight. Bertha wrote a card saying the horses were jammed some but not seriously. The car of household goods would be [illegible words] about 1 mile from the farm but the car of horses and wagons had to be left in Lawrence as there was no [illegible word] at the switch station.

Mr. Pile who had been on one of father’s farms here went with them. They have a family, and John thinks one of the boys can help Bertha some about her work. There are two houses on the farm. They went away well but I wished Bertha had

some one to help her get settled.

[Mother] told me then “It was awful hard to see them go even though it was done for the best.” Neill Gordon was very fond of Grandma and was lots of company to her.

Bertha wrote a card telling of meeting a man whom Father knows who told them he did not know of a better layout than that farm properly worked. John had 10 horses and kept implements when they sold. Father wants to go to see the farm as soon as possible. There has been snow so much of the time this winter or he and John would have gone. Some of the ground is in alfalfa. There is 240 acres about 4 miles from Lawrence. They will go to town for church.

“There are only 5 rooms in the house they go to – a cottage – no cellar or pantry and but one closet.”

I hope it will be a success for them, for father and they still seem to think it was best to close up the business. So much

With the birth of John in 1911, the Whitelaw family was complete. Neill Whitelaw, the oldest son, wrote a bit of doggerel about the family at this time (date of composition not known).

The Whitelaw Family

In the year 1903

**This Whitelaw family began to be.
Mother's maiden name was Bell
And as a mother she's sure swell.**

**"Popper" is absolutely hot
Altho he's constantly on the spot!
Father & Mother began at Kidder
Where were born both "bug" & sidder.**

**But in 1910 they decided to farm
Which action should have been received with
alarm.**

**For since that time we've all been broke.
Without a cent of dough to soak.**

In the year 1911

**A priceless gift was sent from Heaven.
He proved to be the second son
And Neill's work was then begun.**

collecting to be done. The new man (Mr. Smith) has raised prices considerably, there is complaint but maybe he prefers less business and larger profit. Our folks always worked to hold the trade.

John sold his place for 2,000.00 got $\frac{3}{4}$ of it cash down note for balance. There are only 5 rooms in the house they go to – a cottage – no cellar or pantry and but one closet. They will not have so much room and it was pretty hard to leave their house here... [rest of letter is missing].

Birth of John Moreland Whitelaw

The year after the move a third child was born to John and Bertha Whitelaw. John Moreland Whitelaw recounts this event in his memoir:

"I was born on a 240 acre farm five miles southeast of Lawrence, Kansas, early in the morning, my mother says, when the sun was

just coming up. And I was born in the farm house on June 4, 1911. I was the youngest member of a three-child family. . . Mother used to tell me that something that she always was impressed by and remembered, that when I was just six or eight weeks old, Grandfather Whitelaw came over to visit and to see his newest grandchild. And he looked at me, looked real deep into my eyes, Mother says, and told her, 'Bertha, if you didn't have another thing in the world and you have him, you would be a rich woman.'" (John Moreland Whitelaw Memoirs, 1972-73)

Life on the Farm in Lawrence, Kansas: 1910-1919

The Whitelaw family lived on the farm in Lawrence from 1910 to 1919. Their son, John Moreland Whitelaw, described the farm and house:

As farms went at that time, I think this was a pretty good farm that Dad had settled on. Wheat was the major crop although we always had corn, oats, alfalfa, Timothy hay. Dad used to keep as many as eight or ten horses and mules. We often had little colts in the springtime, often little mule colts. This ground was bottom land, really, off the Waka-rusa River, and it was called black gumbo. It took a lot of horsepower to plow that land. Mules were pretty good for that. We also kept hogs most of the time that we were on that farm.

Dad and Mother did a lot of milking on that farm. Part of the land was in pasture. I can remember at a pretty early age going out to the cow barn in the evening when they were milking and enjoyed standing around watching the cows. Dad used to ship whole milk into Kansas City, and everyday he would have to get up and drive the spring wagon with two or three 10 gallon milk cans in it a little over a mile down to the railroad station so it could be picked up on the train and taken into Kansas City.

But later, we were separating the milk and selling the cream and using most of the other milk for skim milk to feed the hogs or let it clabber and then mother would feed it to chickens and one thing or another. I remember perhaps at the age of four, once or twice a week somebody would have to drive into Lawrence and take the cream can into the dairy, especially in the sum-



John Moreland Whitelaw



Eleanor, Neill, and John

merit because you wanted to keep it fresh. These trips into Lawrence on the spring wagon, oftentimes Mother would take Eleanor and me with her. When we would get to the creamery to deliver the cream, she would frequently buy us an ice cream cone. That was kind of a high spot of the day to get to that creamery and taste the ice cream cone.

The house seemed good sized to me when I was a small boy, but actually it wasn't so very big. There was a storeroom, as we called it, because I remember that is where we had the separator, too. Then there was a fair-sized kitchen, but we always ate in the dining room which I guess was just an average sized room. It seemed like a good-sized room to me. But there was a couch in there and my mother and father always slept on that couch. I guess the reason was pretty obvious, there wasn't really – they could have slept actually in what we always called the spare bedroom –but there was quite a tendency in those days to think you ought to have a spare bedroom in case somebody came along.

Then there was another bedroom that was large enough for a double bed and a single bed and all three of us children slept in there. I slept with my sister until I think Mother thought it was probably time to separate the boys from the girls. By that time Neill was sleeping in the spare bedroom

with Uncle Ralph, because when he came to stay with us, why, I remember the folks allocated that spare bedroom to Uncle Ralph as his room. But Neill slept in there with him a good deal of the time so as our bedroom wouldn't be quite so crowded. (Memoirs of John Moreland Whitelaw, 1972-73)

Family Visits

For several years, the Whitelaws returned to Kidder once or twice a year, especially at Christmas, when many of the family would gather. Visiting was difficult for the adults, who had a hard time getting away from the farm, as John wrote in a letter at Christmas, 1915: “[Mary, John’s sister] wanted us to come over Xmas but we have some 50 odd head of stock here to feed and care for beside milking some and the fellows we have generally gotten to look after our chores when away are going to take Xmas themselves this year and so seemed impossible for us to get away.”

In fact, it was difficult for the Whitelaws to get away from the farm at any time, and they did not travel very much until their retirement in the late 1940s, when they were in their 70's.

John’s sisters and brothers made occasional visits to the farm in Kansas. Ralph came periodically and helped with the farm work. Maggie made annual visits and Ruth and Mary, and their children, came as well. John and Bertha’s niece, Mary Elizabeth Williams, wrote about a visit she and her sisters made to the Kansas farm in the summer of 1917. She and her sisters and the Whitelaw cousins they visited ranged in age from about 6 to 13.

“That was kind of the high spot of the day to get to that creamery and taste the ice cream cone.”

“We took the five o’clock train for Lawrence, Kansas to visit Uncle John’s family who lived near there. The scenery was



cousins on a horse

beautiful and we saw the Missouri and Kansas rivers. They had not finished threshing out there and we slid down the straw stack. We also climbed to the top of the silo. Uncle Ralph let us ride on King, their gentle old horse. The next morning a wagon load of [words missing] rode over to the "little yellow house" as it was called where the wheat was kept. We took off our shoes and stockings and played in the grain while Uncle John and Uncle Ralph worked around the house. That afternoon we started on our journey home."

The School

All three of the Whitelaw children attended Franklin School, the nearby rural school while living in Lawrence, Kansas. "Neill Gordon and Eleanor are doing well in their school work, we think, and it doesn't take a great deal of encouragement to keep them at it. They have a mile to go and Neill Gordon hasn't missed a day so far in the 4 years he's gone. If he goes every day this year he's going to get a Gold Button." (Letter from John Whitelaw to his sister Ruth Williams, Dec. 21, 1915) The hazards of getting to and from school in the days before cars and busses is illustrated in this letter: "Eleanor got an ear frozen during the very cold weather one morning when John was taking them to school, he seemed to feel very sorry about it, and said he did not think of such a thing and she did not complain." (Letter from Maggie Whitelaw to Ruth Williams, Jan. 24, 1916)

John Moreland Whitelaw described Franklin School:

I started in the first grade when I was five years old [1916] because my mother felt that I would be so lonesome if I waited until the next year. . . . We had all eight grades in the same room. It was a one-room school house, some steps up the front and belfry with a school bell. As I recall, sort of one entrance for boys on one side and one entrance for girls, where you could keep your lunch and hang up your coat in the wintertime, take off your overshoes and stuff like that. There was a big old stove that somebody had to always go out and get the wood or get the coal in order to keep the fire going in the wintertime. I always liked school pretty well. Eleanor was in the third grade when I started, I guess, and Neill was in the sixth grade. (John Moreland Whitelaw Memoirs, 1972-73)

We have very little information about Bertha herself during these years in Lawrence. One postcard survives, which suggests that Bertha was connected with the young people in the area, possibly as their Sunday School teacher. It is from a young soldier in World War I, addressed to Mrs. John Whitelaw, Lawrence, Kansas.

Aug. 30, 1918 Dear Friend, How are you and the rest of the neighborhood. I am feeling fine now since my knee is better. How is the Franklin S.S [Sunday School]? I am coming to Lawrence if I can get a pass soon. I like army life fine. Write soon. Joseph B. Michael, Co 3, 164 D.B., Camp Lewiston, Kan.



DESOTO YEARS

The 1920's

“My first thought was to add to the family coffers by reporting.”



The family home in DeSoto, Knasas

In 1919 the Whitelaw family sold the farm in Lawrence and moved to DeSoto, Kansas, where John and Bertha lived for the rest of their lives. DeSoto was a small farming community between Lawrence and Kansas City, Kansas. Bertha's daughter, Eleanor, explained the move from Lawrence to DeSoto:

At the conclusion of World War I farm prices were very high – especially land that grew wheat – so the folks sold the Law-

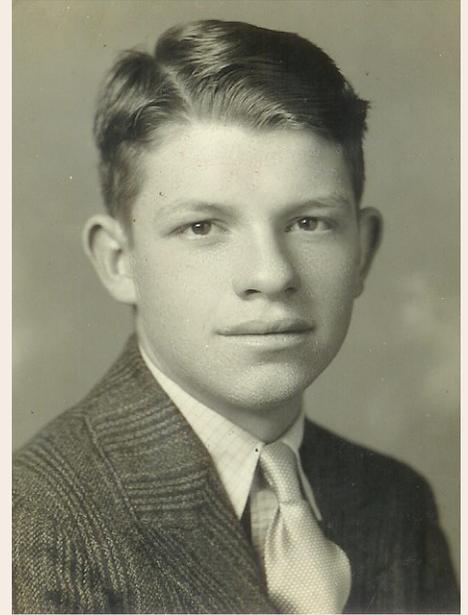
High School Photographs



Neill



Eleanor



John

All the Whitelaw children achieved exemplary academic records in high school. Neill was second in his class and both Eleanor and John were class valedictorians.

rence place and moved to DeSoto in order that Neill could live at home and attend high school. Otherwise he would have had to board and room in Lawrence. John was 9 and I 11 when that move was made. Two places were bought at DeSoto for the move: the 160 acres two miles from town, and 11 acres, near town, with a . . . two-story house, and considerable fruit plantings, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries, peach and plum trees and perhaps others. As I remember, 7 or 8 acres were in a woodsy pasture which Grandma prized; her family had moved to Springfield, Missouri and lived there during all of her college years at Drury College, and as long as her parents lived. The woodsy pasture reminded Grandma of the Springfield home. (Letter from Eleanor Whitford to Susan Whitelaw, 1982)

During the 1920s all the Whitelaw children finished grade school and high school and left home for college. John and Bertha Whitelaw were in their 50s. In 1923 the family moved from the house in town to the 160 acre farm they owned, about two miles away. This move reflected, and was perhaps prompted by, the hard economic times the family experienced during this decade.

When the family first moved to the farm, they lived in the granary, in quite primitive conditions. I believe that this is the period that John Moreland Whitelaw (my father) recalled as characterized by privation; he said that his mother fed the family mainly oatmeal because she believed that the money they had was not their own as long as they held a mortgage. His

sister Eleanor thought that John exaggerated. She commented: "Your father had a good imagination: I have no memory of cardboard soles or mush sandwiches." (Eleanor Whitford to Susan Whitelaw, 1982)

During the 1920s, John Whitelaw built a house on the farm. Although the house was a big improvement over the granary, it was not luxurious. It was heated with kerosene lamps, had no indoor plumbing, a wood stove for cooking, and rather small rooms. John and Bertha Whitelaw remained in the house until 1942, when they retired from farming and moved into the town of DeSoto. The house was bought by the U.S. military during World War II and torn down to make a road from a munitions factory directly to the railroad.

Financing College

John and especially Betha were determined that in spite of the family's poverty the children would all go to college. One way that she achieved this was to start working part time as a reporter for the Journal-World, a newspaper in Lawrence, providing weekly articles on DeSoto news.

It was 1923, . . . our children were off to college and, as any parent knows, that always means extra cash from the parents. We had lived near Lawrence, near Noria in Franklin community, before moving to DeSoto in 1919. We had read

the Journal-World since 1910 and my first thought was to add to the family coffers by reporting. (DeSoto Writer Has Record in Her Job, unknown newspaper, April 27, 1958. See Chapter 8 for the full article).

Neill, Eleanor, and John all attended Park College, located in Park, Missouri, about 175 miles away from DeSoto. Park University was founded in 1875, as an alternative to many expensive Ivy League colleges on the East coast. There was no tuition at Park; students worked on campus either growing crops, constructing buildings or any number of various jobs to maintain the campus. (Wikipedia, Park College). Thus, it provided an affordable higher education to Midwestern students from families of modest means.

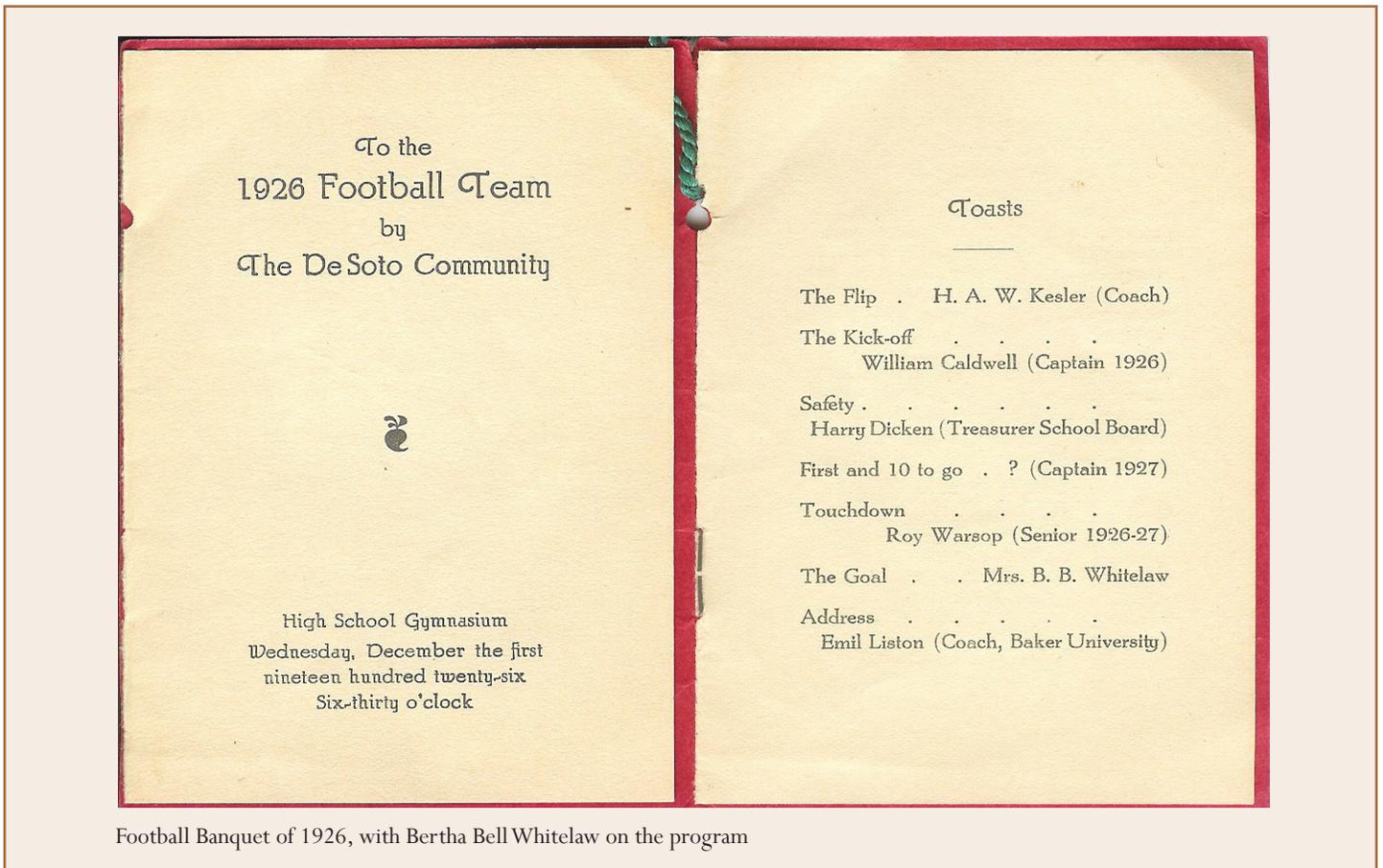
“The trouble is there is so much to school here these days besides books – and with Football which has to be attended Basket Ball which must be played besides banquets and other school activities it makes a good many trips.”

Bertha in the Community

Bertha could write weekly news articles on DeSoto because she was very involved in the community and knew everything that was going on. She belonged to women’s clubs and was very active in the Sunday School at the Methodist Church.

She was very involved with the schools, and monitored her children’s education closely. She was also interested in the education of other children. There is a family story that neighborhood children would come to the house for tutoring. According to a publication of DeSoto history, she also volunteered to teach Latin at the high school for free, but the offer was turned down.

Over the years, Bertha became a well-known and beloved figure in DeSoto. I have included all the various articles written about her community involvement in the last chapter of this biography.



Football Banquet of 1926, with Bertha Bell Whitelaw on the program

Chronicle of Hard Times: Letters, 1920-1929

There is little question that the 1920s were particularly difficult for the Whitelaws, and for other farming families of the area. Letters to John's sister, Ruth Williams, describe the hardships they faced.

There has been a good deal of small pox here this spring and about the time we got your letter thought the town was going to be quarantined. Also scarlet fever, measles, mumps and etc. Well the small pox is not entirely gone yet but about the time it got safe to invite anyone to come to town Neill Gordon came down with the mumps. . . . He was swelled much worse than either of the other two. I guess this place is so close to K.C. that all the diseases that come there get out here. (John Whitelaw, Jr. to Ruth Williams, May 16, 1920)



[I] appreciated your interest in Bertha's illness. Altogether it has thrown my building operations pretty late and I'm as busy as I can well be – we're living in our granary and we had a cold snap this week that made us realize that winter is coming. However we may have a lot of fine weather when this spell passes. Our crops are only fair this year – a hot dry spell just after we came back from Kidder hurt our corn considerably – ripened it prematurely – Neill is at school of course and the other two go to high school every day (John Whitelaw, Jr. to Ruth Williams, Oct. 11, 1923)



It's been pretty cool down here and we have been hustling for winter clothing. We found a good use for the yellow sweater and yarn you sent. We dyed a dress of Eleanor's – that was sort of a honeydew shade and made it purple – Both she and I have purple hats. John is playing foot ball this fall – and likes it. . . . Our high school teachers are not as good as last year I think. Fruit is very scarce here and butter, potatoes and

“Fruit is very scarce here and butter, potatoes and apples are higher than I've ever seen them in Peace times.”

apples are higher than I've ever seen them in Peace times. (Bertha Whitelaw to Ruth Williams, Oct. 11, 1923)



Eleanor's eyes are not a bit strong – even glasses do not give all the help she needs. Maybe it is a good thing she is so ardently fond of playing basket ball – that is not hard on the eyes fortunately. (Bertha Whitelaw to Ruth Williams, Dec. 6, 1923)



Well you of course have heard we sold the small place down by town and have been living the fall season up here on the farm. It's a very unpleasant change for Bertha and the children. Of course it makes 2 miles for them to go to school but they are large enough now that they ought to be able to make it. The trouble is there is so much to school here these days besides books – and with Football which has to be attended Basket Ball which must be played besides banquets and other school activities it makes a good many trips.

I don't know how long we'll stay here. Farming is as I expect you know rather an unremunerative proposition at the present any way. I have a lot of hogs on hand but I hardly know whether they will pay for the corn they've eaten or not. I'm hoping the market will be better after the first of the year.

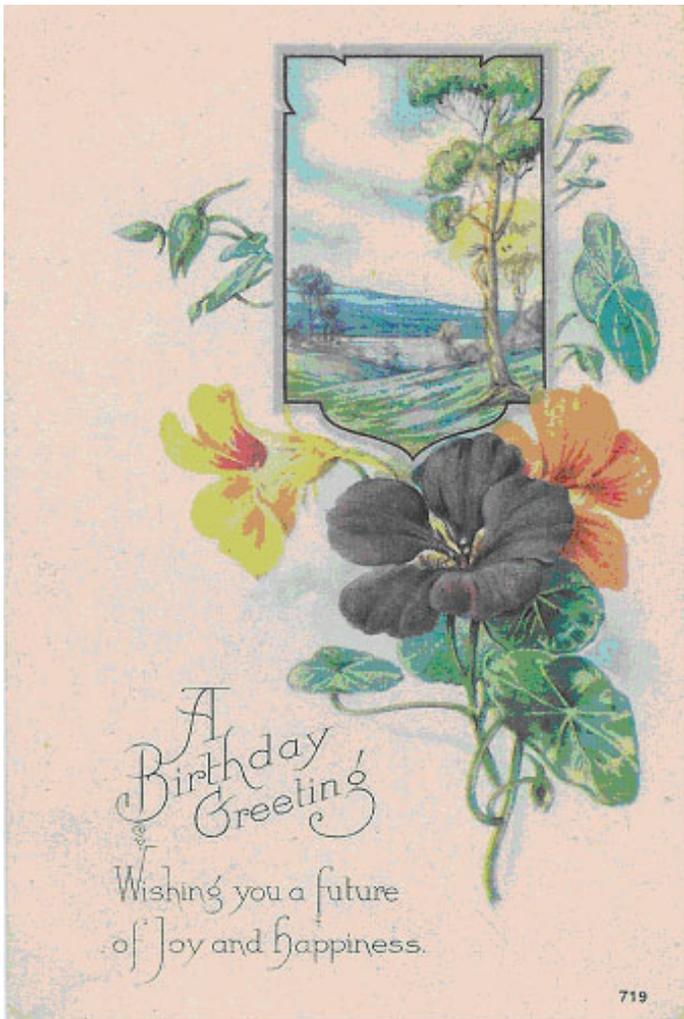
“Eleanor's eyes are not a bit strong – even glasses do not give all the help she needs. Maybe it is a good thing she is so ardently fond of playing basket ball...”

I've been doing some building up here this summer and fall in fact am not thro yet. Got a car load of lumber from the Army Barracks that was at Camp Lewiston, this State, and with a little others have built me a barn 30 x 32 x 16 feet high with 4 ft. of basement – a granary with garage attached 26x 20 and am building a chicken house now 10 x 32. We had no improvements here as you know

and the house is very small, but we're all alive and well so I guess we ought to be thankful. The children are doing well in school and I know yours are too. (John Whitelaw, Jr. to Ruth Williams, Dec. 6, 1923)



We work at our job here as we can but it keeps us busy – We tried to get a better deal out of our milk business but we don't know how things are coming out yet. The dairies are terribly obstinate – of course in Kansas City they've all had it their own way – setting the price – doing the weighing and testing – and we were about to be crowded out of any returns – I sold 3000 lbs. of milk the first half of Sept. for 50.00 and the dairies sold it for \$182.00 and it looks like the spread was too wide. We may have to hold our milk again before we win our point – but we've got to win. . . . [O]ur boys don't want any farming in theirs [future] and I guess it would be unwise to encourage them that way. Our co-ops down this way were ordinary the past year. Our hay did very well but the dry spell in July and August along with a late wet spring made our grain crops both short in quantity and poor in quality. Our stock is largely cows and chickens so we get along with a minimum of grain I guess. We all keep well and are thankful for I don't know what we'd do if any of us should have a lingering illness. (John Whitelaw, Jr. to Ruth Williams, Dec. 27, c. 1924-1929)



1924 Postcard from John Whitelaw Jr. to his sister, Ruth Williams

We've not been very prosperous this year and feel rather out of luck. I don't know but if we can get rid of this small place I'll try something else. The farming game is a pretty short one and has been so with me for the past 3 years. My work has kept me pretty close and I've been unable to get to Lawrence or K.C. and looking into what is to be in this small berg. (John Whitelaw, Jr. to Ruth Williams, Dec. c. 1928)



Our crops were fair thro here, however I have little in that line to sell for 25 head of cattle consume a good deal. We are still milking which is of course a confining job but with the rough pasture land I have here seems to be the best thing I can do. Especially as I have the big end myself these days and could not raise large grain crops to market without hiring a good deal. The boys like their time thro vacation to earn for themselves – They are both in the K.C. P.O now and we haven't seen either of them since their schools closed and won't I suppose until Christmas Eve. Eleanor came home a week ago last Thursday – Park was closed early on account of the flu. The epidemic has been quite prevalent here but not very serious. However, some 4 or 5 old people in their 80s have died. (John Whitelaw, Jr. to Ruth Williams, Dec. 22, c. 1928-1929)

DESOTO YEARS

The 1930's

“I'd rather they were away and wishing to be back, than to be here and wishing they were away.”



TheWhitelaws outside the family home - 1937

During the 1930s, John and Bertha Whitelaw entered their 60s and began to talk of retirement. They still lived in the house John had built in 1923, on the farm outside Desoto. Their children all graduated from college and graduate school and developed independent lives.

As they got older, the question of retiring from farm life arose with increasing urgency. The following letter, written by a niece

of Bertha and John Whitelaw, describes farm accidents that befell this elderly couple.

April 30, 1937

Eleanor . . . said both Aunt Bertha and Uncle John had had accidents. Aunt B. was milking when the cow slipped and knocked her over the stool and under another while another one stepped on her head and chest. Not badly hurt but bruised a little. Then they had the vet in to test the cows for TB and all the animals were in the barn at once. Those that were used to using the same stanchion separately headed for it at once and pinned Uncle John against the wall. He wouldn't go to the doctor but they thot he had some broken or cracked ribs. E says they're too old to be on the farm anyway. Love, Ruth

Two Letters from Bertha to Her Son, John

Bertha wrote the following two letters to her son, John, age 26, in 1937, soon after he left the Midwest to settle 1,500 miles away in Oregon, where he began his career as a social worker. These letters, unlike most of those in this volume, are quite personal and introspective. They show her trying to continue to guide and encourage her child, who was still quite young though he had moved far away. The second letter gives her thoughts on marriage (she gives it a conditional approval) and provides the best statement we have on her religious beliefs.

Undated: late summer, 1937

Dear John; Your eyes have been resting on new scenes for the past 24 hours at least we guess; hope all is well with you and the car. I had meant to send you only a card at this time but in the mail yesterday were these cards and while I doubt their great interest to you still I thought that you might like to have them and I am always seeking an excuse to write you so here goes for a little time – it is too near mail time for it to be strung out at any great length. We were happy to have the enclosed letter from Eleanor, too. I send it on and if you send your RR [Round Robin] to Neill you can enclose it. I am writing him and Eleanor cards since I've no enclosures for them. In view of the delay Eleanor suffered on her journey it is too bad we made the hurried trip from Kidder; doubtless either of the later trains would or did arrive in Chicago ahead of the one she rode.

Neill left us Tuesday morning and I felt desolate indeed. He along with you and Eleanor is a grand individual and it breaks me up – tho' I should be more brave – to part from you. That morning Dad got a letter from the Co. treasurer and learned that there were some details to be cleared up about the car title – so he drove over to Olathe. He got back just as I was taking the milk out; imagine all the tortures I suffered meantime! All needless tho for his trouble merely was that the carburetor had some dirt in it that checked the gas flow and he had no tools – not even a screw driver or wrench and had to wait from about three o'clock until

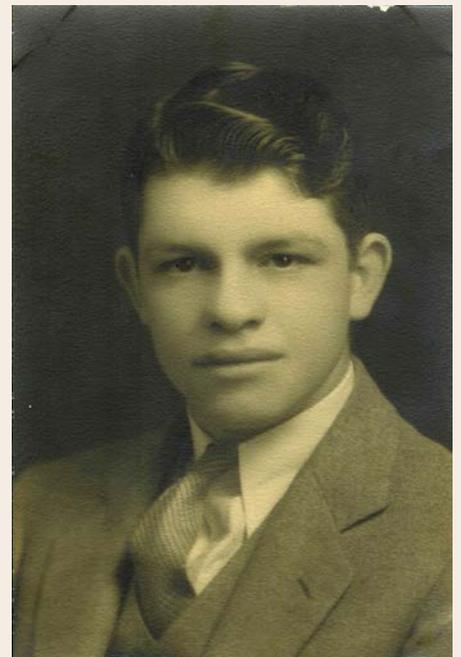
College Graduates



Neill



Eleanor



John

someone helped him out; he had telephoned the Curtis garage but they misunderstood where he was and missed him. Had he had the foresight to take along some tools or had heeded the warning he had by the car stuttering when he reached Olathe and gone to a garage there – much time and anxious thought would have been saved – well, we live and learn. I was and still am deeply grateful no great disaster had occurred.

No change in the weather so far but we have the promise of possible showers. The peaches on the Hale tree are ripening fast and I've been canning them and tomatoes and working on the apples – so have been very busy. Hope to see Margaret soon and think we'll see if we can partially adopt her since we're so alone and she is so a little too. It is Myrtle Roe who is to stay with her – Charlie Roe's daughter – Mrs. Stuchberry's niece.

Likely I'll think of more I'll wish I'd said but must stop now with a very great deal of love. Remember to read your Upper Room [a devotional periodical] and the Bible passage and to pray to God who has promised that you can do ALL things thro his supporting strength – if God be for us, who can be against us? And whenever in pain, difficulty, confusion or trouble of any kind think of Him and the way will be made clearer. I surely tried that in my anxiety in the cow barn the other night and I felt that I could bear – with God's help – whatever might be in store for me. Your most loving mother who is endlessly proud of her richly endowed son, John Moreland. Mother

February 15, 1938

Dear John: You did not hurt me at all by your belated remembrance of my birthday; your analysis of why you did not think of it is just what I had supposed was the case – you are very busy not only in office hours but out of hours trying to devise better ways of attacking your various jobs. But I am very happy you could and did write me the letter you did and gave me your confidence on problems near to your heart and brought up topics that we love to think over and talk over. I don't know that I can clarify any of the problems about marriage for you; I believe you have talked and thought them thru with some of your sweet-hearts, Eleanor, men friends and me also – until we've not much new to offer. I am still of the opinion that marriage can be a very

happy state and I do not think your being alone is the best way of living. And yet one doesn't want to make a mistake – well, we just must do the best we can. It's risky getting married but no doubt it's also risky staying single. I fully agree with you as to the desirability of marrying someone who is an inspiration to one.

“I am still of the opinion that marriage can be a very happy state and I do not think your being alone is the best way of living. And yet one doesn't want to make a mistake – well, we just must do the best we can.”

I am interested in what you tell me of your talks with Mrs. Sanborn; it is fine to have a landlady of such high ideals; I don't know too much about the real Christian Science doctrines but many of their adherents are certainly people of fine character. So are many people in the so-called orthodox churches. I, too, am strong for this personal rehabilitation – to call it by that term. I do think there

is no such thing as mass betterment – really; we must come one by one into a better state – as we are born and die singly – or alone. And no one can do this job for us – we can be helped in achieving our dominant desire – this is what shapes our destiny irrevocably isn't – can't (stet) we but we must come to want to be helped before help can avail; even God can't help us unless we open the way for Him to do so – it seems to me. And I find it something for which I must work to be able to so dispose myself that there is no reserve about me which prevents God from co-operating with me in helping me to be and to do what I believe is the best for me and will help me to fully fit into my real possibilities. You yourself know how it is in trying to help some of your clients – do they not very generally have some attitude that prevents you from giving them the very help you so clearly see they need and that you are eager to give them? Perhaps it is not a defiant attitude but a seeming lack of a grasp of the co-operation they must offer. What other way of salvation is there for the world unless we become Christlike in character? Can we achieve brotherhood so well in any other way as by really believing in the actual fatherhood of God and then the deduction must follow that despite any color barrier or other seeming difference WE ARE brothers. The ordinary Protestant church has doubtless made many errors but it has preserved Christ's teachings for the world and it is I am fully persuaded waking to new life and is not the traditional church many who have not worked with its forward thinking leaders are still considering it to be. I base this conclusion largely on these new religious books I have been reading and from listening to such speakers as E. Stanley Jones – the author of the pamphlet I sent you, Dr. Fosdick, Ralph

W. Soxman, Norman Peale and others. You see by writing as you did you gave me a chance to say these things—seeing they were along the lines you were thinking and that is an illustration of the point I am making that even God needs an opening. Much as I want to talk to Eleanor and Neill in this way I have not had quite the opportunity you have given me. It is not a question of “being Good” but rather a question of whether one is seizing and improving all of his possible opportunities; you see I am nearly mad with pondering on the desperate needs of this world of ours. Such discouragement, sorrow, despair, indifference, selfishness, even terror when God offers us PEACE and all of the good gifts that flow from a heart at peace with God and man.

You are a great joy to me and I daily thank God for you and pray for your continued growth in usefulness. It saddens me considerably to think of Will and James and their sons [brothers of Bertha’s husband, John] and to see how destitute they are of most of the good things they might have laid hold of— including even material things in the way of financial resources, positions of usefulness, and the means of self-support; with all of their natural endowments and capabilities and the money Father and Mother Whitelaw so painfully accumulated for them— one can but feel that it appears that they have shamefully wasted their patrimony— and they failed to follow the example of their parents in going up to the house of God regularly too. I know that the church going habit is not necessarily a test but one often finds it associated with a victorious life.

May 8 - Wed.

Dear John -

Your air mail letter was one of Monday's very pleasant events - and now that we are all gathered under one roof we do feel that your absence leaves a big gap in our happiness. I am writing this pretty early in the morning - Mill's arthritis keeps him from receiving but he insisted on getting (Altho' H. (whose work he had been interrupted by his duties in the Cuban hotel) to receive us last during the 3 nights - & two days Eleanor is here - before the week we up seems to me an excellent time to "do a few things" and hence I am at it - Hope to get this off today but you might have for God before this arrives. It has been so the for the present at least it might have been well for you to stay at Salem - To go back to Mill - He came Fri eve at supper time - in spite of all he had written about his arthritis we had not thought of its being so serious and possibly long lasting as seems to be the case - One knee and the ankle on the other leg is affected - stiff and swollen - He limps in both feet - like

A letter from Bertha to her son, John

Well I hope dear son John (for whom I am so very homesick) that I have not said anything that has closed a door between us. You've been very patient with me. With all my love, Mother

Neill Whitelaw's Robin Letters, Summer 1938

Neill Whitelaw was home for the summer of 1938 and described his parents' situation in his Robin letters. They were beginning to lose physical strength, as they were in their 60s, but they could not afford to retire from farming.

July 28, 1938

Dad is half heartedly trying to sell a couple of the cows that have just freshened as it looks best for them to cease milking much this fall because of the new regulations for milk houses and toilets going into effect. I have been whooping it up but Dad is about to weaken and wants to continue to milk; Mother of course, wants to stop as she realizes that it is beyond her strength to milk 6-7 cows twice a day as she does now albeit some don't give much. I frankly don't see how she does it. I do a little around the house and considerable toward getting breakfast and supper but she simply has a very heavy and long day for an old lady. The poor price for wheat this year makes Dad sort of strapped and he complains that he can't see how to make taxes and interest without milking but I urge him to stop anyhow. If they weren't in debt, I believe that they could eke it out but it is difficult to raise \$200 cash off of this place every year besides having a little to eat. Living is elegant this summer because of the fine gardens due to the rain.

Aug. 18, 1938

Our big project this week has been the W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration, a New Deal program] privy which is just completed this evening except for the second coat of paint. They were able to salvage considerable of the old shack so the expense will be only about \$10 and there is no doubt but that it is an improvement.

Aug. 25, 1938

This country is really hard up and will be able to use good crops and high prices next season. The milk checks are about all that keeps most families off relief as wheat was such a washout, potatoes were worse, and melons are just so-so. Early batches sold for a cent a pound but now they are down to ½ cent unless they can find private markets.

Bertha's Letters to the Round Robin, 1938

In this decade we have more records of Bertha in her own voice, through the family Round Robin [referred to as the R.R.]. The Robin, a Whitelaw family institution, was started in the early 1930s when the children all left home and continued until Bertha's death in 1964. Bertha's letters are vivid, lively, full of news, and expressive of her love of her children.

Bertha wrote the following letters during the summer of 1938. A few letters were to Eleanor or John separately, but most were for the family Robin. The letters here describe primarily the visits of son Neill and daughter Eleanor, with her new husband, Albert Whitford, to the family home. Along with family news, the letters present a full picture of rural life. The family grew or raised almost everything they ate: fruit, vegetables from the garden, chicken and eggs, and milk from the dairy cows. They grew grain: oats, alfalfa, and wheat, as cash crops. They also sold milk, eggs, and chickens. Bertha pieced quilts, made her own clothes, milked 13 cows twice a day with grandpa, listened to the radio, and read newspapers, magazines, and books.

The Whitelaws traveled sometimes to Kidder or Lawrence, but otherwise stayed home. They had a car but didn't use it for recreation. They stayed in touch with other family members mainly through letters; they never telephoned and couldn't leave the farm to visit friends and relatives who lived out of town.

The summer of 1938 was an eventful time for the Whitelaw children. Neill had graduated with a Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Wisconsin, and was teaching physics at Presbyterian College in South Carolina. The year before these letters begin, he had been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, which had affected his joints profoundly. He was home for the summer partly to recuperate and see if rest could improve his condition.

Eleanor had graduated from Park College in 1930 and obtained a Master's degree in Education from the University of Chicago. In 1937 she married Albert Whitford, Ph.D. an astronomer teaching at the University of Wisconsin, and a friend of Neill's. John graduated from the University of Wisconsin

“...she simply has a very heavy and long day for an old lady.”

in 1933 and obtained a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Chicago in 1937. He moved immediately after graduation to work for the public welfare agency in Oregon, and fell in love with Alvis Love, a co-worker, whom he later married.

May 26, 1938

Dear John,

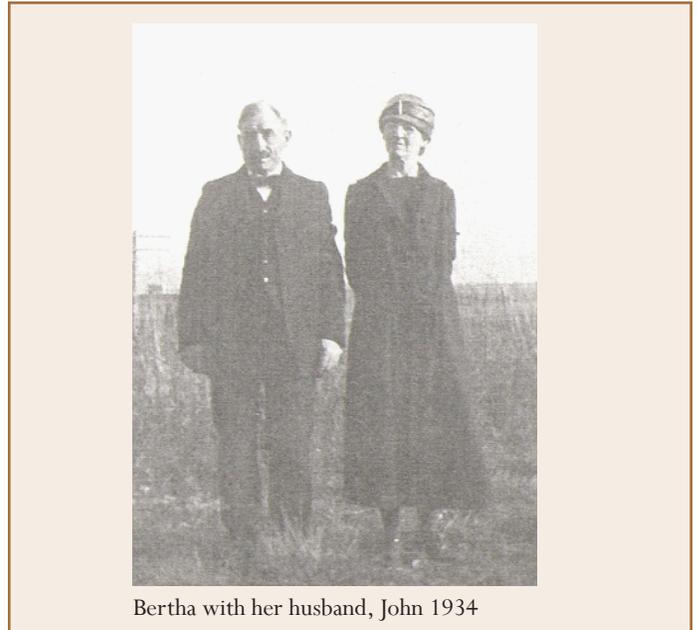
This is the correct salutation, I believe, since you naturally will not enclose our letters since we shall already have told the other children a good deal of this orally by this time. This is Thursday morning, May 26, and a delightful morning with the roadsides full of wild roses shading from deep rose until almost white and of the deep blue wild irises which contrast so effectively with the shades of the roses – the air is heavy in some places from the roses. Then almost all of the ground is seeded to small grain, green fields are everywhere – and since we have had so much rain all in the early hours (when we take the milk out) are heavily laden with dew drops – all filling one with an intense sense of beauty. Then my Paul's Scarlet rose is still a Wonder - as every one, even men who come on business, begin exclaiming on its beauty as soon as they stop their motors.

I should be glad to see you have more flesh than you had when you went to Oregon last fall – and more color; the latter you have doubtless not yet achieved; I recall what Uncle Henry said about the pallor of the Oregonians during the rainy season. As to having a caddy – how easy it is for all of us to take on a luxury!

Last night I went to the grade school commencement – I was specially interested because Dorothy Beaver was graduating; she means to come on to high school. Florence graduates next year; maybe if the letter doesn't look too full I'll enclose the program and you can see how many names you will recognize. The Moll twins are members of the class – this generation of Molls seems quite bright and studious. There was a large crowd out and for the high school commencement Monday night there was not an empty seat I think.

We shall be exceedingly happy to have the other children with us next week altho it will be hard for me to see Eleanor leave so very soon, there would be the advantage of a visit with her and Albert if we could come back with them this fall – but at all events I do not see how we could stay that late unless we should do the unheard of thing of selling off our stock. (Just a digression here – Lewie Hays has a jack and wonder of wonders, Dad is planning to breed our mares). Maybe Neill can help us to see what is the wise course to take about our possible trip; I think too we might as well state the conditions to you as fully as one can on paper. We are milking nine cows – no eight – two of them will be dry presently but one, Brownie and Beauty (now dry) will be fresh by early in August – all of these other six will still be giving milk and two others on which we now have calves will be milking too – a total of 12. All good cows with no blemishes or faults. But only two fresh – so apparently not a good time to get much for them. The Hills will probably be too busy with melons to help out any. Would you feel that Orville and Trula Welch or Harry Hiddlestons would be safe, reliable, and etc. to turn loose here? Ford is still at home. Frankly, I have uncomfortable doubts. Maybe we couldn't get them. But I have thought that perhaps if Forest Allen is at Tony's and also Robert that one might risk two of that group milking here and the others milking at home. It seems as though we should make desperate efforts to husband all of our resources and look toward supporting ourselves to the greatest possible degree; would we really any of us enjoy doing anything else?

The trip would be a bit of Heaven – but I can't comfortably face the expense it would cause you. If we could prevail on Dad to go – logical because he has the relative there to visit, I believe I could get help enough to manage here alone. If the suggestion for him to go would come from one of you children he might consider it. Then perhaps I could go some other year.



Bertha with her husband, John 1934

“ I recall what Uncle Henry said about the pallor of the Oregonians during the rainy season.”

I am working on a new dress – has a background of deep red – sounds pretty gay, doesn't it? Of course I am still working on the quilt. Dad is doing most of the work on the garden; I am happy to think we will have peas while the children are here and beans galore during Neill's stay. The Halls also have some chickens big enough to fry so can treat our elder son to fried chicken while we are waiting for ours to grow to that estate.

No doubt the rhododendrons will be even more beautiful than one has fancied them. Perhaps you have had little opportunity to observe the birds in your locality; it is the subject of considerable remark here that with the very wet weather the birds have come back; last night I saw a blue jay sitting on the garden fence – the first one I've seen in a year or so.

We've had it very cool here so far – up to the 80s a time or so but actually the other morning we saw on the barn roof what appeared to be frost – of course there was no damage. But crops especially melons are suffering for heat. Many are still busy replanting melons. We shall have very little fruit – not strawberries enough of the home grown for any to be on the market and except for a fair crop of cherries not any scarcely of the others. And there was such a wealth of bloom; it is said there was poor pollenization.

Mabel Shaw[a neice] is on a trip with the Garners (Hugh's folks) to Mississippi to meet Hugh's sister who teaches there. Don't hear of any employment for Mabel but glad that she can at least have the trip. As you think of the rest of us being together remember that there is indeed a big and aching void in all of our hearts because we haven't you with us, dear son. Much love, Mother

I muddled the address of the last letter. I have the address you gave me but couldn't lay my hands on it in a hurry (I'm saving your letters of course) and now with the post once more at hand I'm in the same fix!

June 1, 1938

My Very Dear Son,

June 1 reminds us that your 27 (can it be) birth anniversary is this Saturday; naturally we want this letter to be in your hands at that time if possible; the R.R. did not come today – maybe because the bungled address I used on the letter of two weeks ago today was thereby held up. I am much distressed if an error of mine caused the delay. We'd like to have it before sending this on yet don't want this to be late – we'll have to see what can be done about it. Then too we are eager to speed any communications from the other children to you. Will there be anyone at hand to make the day be a birthday? At any rate we hope for every possible joy for you! Not just physical ones but the high ones also of mind and soul! This may easily be an eventful year for you and may wisdom as well as success attend all of your ways. To me you are a precious individual whose activities and possibilities are of tremendous interest and concern. Your family agree that we may see and that we expect great or at least worthwhile achievements made by you. It is not less than a Cross that none of us can be with you – nor even close enough to call up long distance! May God direct your ways is my prayer – every day.

We will soon be expecting Neill to drive in the yard any minute and I judge we may see Albert and Eleanor Monday night – I am rather disquieted by how I shall feed Albert – since he is on pretty much of a diet. Hope to have plenty of new peas by that time and trust he can eat them. I bought a package of Soft As Silk cake flour today so as to practice up on sponge cake – since I am pretty sure I'd better not risk Angel food. I'm going to buy some frying chicks for Neill but I guess I'll have to feed Albert chicken cooked some other

“ I am happy to think we will have peas while the children are here and beans galore during Neill's stay.”



Bertha with daughter Eleanor and son-in-law Albert

way. Nor can I give him fresh cherry pie which is a possible delicacy here now.

How about telling you some DeSoto town talk. Herbert Sheldon has been quite ill for some days – maybe typhoid fever; Orville Crawford is in a Kansas City hospital with an abscess in the region of the appendix; it is thought that he can be brought home soon without an operation. Mrs. Ashlock and Dot, Ralph Bowling's little girl and C.G. Bowling, all of whom have been very ill are getting along. Lawrence Warsops have a baby boy. Fred Warsop's coupe was struck near the P.O. the other day by a speeding car as he was turning around – a narrow escape but no harm done – the speedster was a Topeka car; two companions of Doc Mitchell's were

“...her car was
knocked into 15 ft of
water; she could not
get out and a man
dived 9 times for
her before she was
brought up...”

injured severally Sunday when out riding with Mitchell on Sunday who as well as the other men were drunk. Did you hear of the article in Scribner's on Ghost Writing in college? It was written by Robert Greenlees Pearson of K.U. whose mother and her family we used to know at Lawrence Plymouth Congregational Church. He was given \$100 for the article but was denied a phi beta kappa pin for his dishonesty in doing such writing for college students. Laura Lee Andrew and Holly Note are to be married the 10 of June; I am invited to a shower at the home of Mrs. Loren Ball – he is a highway patrol man and they live where Charlie Cooper's used to – for next Tuesday – that will be my busy day – I am expecting Eleanor and Albert will be here then - club will be likely to be held that day so Edith Search can be present – it's at her mother's – as she is going to summer school, maybe in California, then too, our S.S. meeting comes that evening. Something will get squeezed out surely!

It's grand that they are getting so much rain out near Dighton – I saw in the paper today that Ness City had over 10 in. during the spring. They had a bad hail storm in Lane Co. a few days ago unfortunately.

Mrs. Clara Harness was in a serious accident near Pleasanton recently; her car was knocked into 15 ft of water; she could not get out and a man dived 9 times for her before she was brought up; artificial respiration restored her after a long time and she has since been critically ill from pneumonia and swallowing so much silt – has had some transfusions but is now getting better. The Wiards are going to celebrate their golden wedding at the church June 12; Dad says that is one place where he won't have to go. It is open house so all are invited.

Have you read “Man in Chains” by Dr. Henry Clink in the Sat. Eve. Post of about a month ago? It is a chapter in a new book – it takes up some social service angles. And I wondered how much of it you would agree with?

Neill's wish to see some mud in Kansas is pretty certain to be granted if he arrives within the next few days; particularly if we make an excursion to either the west bottoms or the Cedar bottoms. If Dad makes a full weather and crop report he will write quite a lengthy letter. I nearly forgot to say that Dr. and Mrs. Everett Baker were in town Monday; I am told that Ariel is now on friendly terms with her children; has Lawrence mentioned her to you in recent years?

Probably Dad will touch on the new milk requirements that make us think of maybe giving up shipping to Aines and taking just what we can get from the cheese factory. June was home Sunday and Monday with her fiancé – Henry Bieser – and his mother; Mrs. Bower told me today that Robert and Forest were well impressed with him. June returned with them to their home not far from St. Louis, Ill., but is to arrive here tomorrow to spend a two weeks vacation – just why she did not plan to stay while she was here her mother did not know before she came and I have not talked with her since. Orlena and Rob are expected next week also. Pauline has bought a good mattress and a gasoline washer and engine recently – on payments as the car, a day bed, the radio, some aluminum ware etc. etc.

The R.R. came this morning and the delay is explained by Eleanor; no further word from Neill so we shall look for a flashing Plymouth to drive in the yard at any time. We are deeply interested in your immediate future just now – that is the possibility of your being put in charge at Salem. Congratulations on being considered. And more if you receive the appointment. In the meantime you are really being able to pay up debts, accumulate for a car and etc. I'm sure that income sounds good to any and all of us. There was a very severe hail and wind storm at Dighton a few days ago – affecting the whole county – wheat suffered a great deal but it is grand

to think of the rains they've had there anyway. May see Hazel and Ad soon and learn more particulars then. There is a damaging flood at Ellsworth – serious – and also at Emporia and considerable flooding near Chetopa and other places.

I see Eleanor is not to be here Tuesday so maybe I'll make it to the shower for Laurie Lee if club is not advanced. Wonder if Eleanor will be willing to go to Aid in the afternoon Wed. and club Thursday. I missed Aid and club last month when I went to Chetopa and club meets no more after this month until September so I'd like to go.

If the scenery in Oregon is one half as magnificent as these booklets on that state indicate you must have your mind filled with scenes of grandeur much of the time. Of course we'd love to have you show it to us. Dearest love my very dear son. Mother

June 8, 1938 [original letter mistakenly dated May 8]

Dear John,

Your air mail letter was one of Mondays very pleasant events – and now that we are all gathered under one roof we do feel that your absence leaves a large gap in our happiness. I am writing this pretty early in the morning – Neill's arthritis keeps him from milking but he insisted on getting Ottis H (whose work has been interrupted by his duties in the melon patch) to milk at least during the

three nights and two days Eleanor's are here. Before the others are up seems to me to be an excellent time to "do a few things" and hence I am at it. Hope to get this off today lest you should leave for [illegible] before this arrives. It does seem to be for the present as best it might have been well for you to stay at Salem.



Neill having contracted arthritis

To go back to Neill – he came Fri. evening at supper time – in spite of all he had written about his arthritis we had not thought of its being as serious and possibly long lasting as seems to be the case. One knee and the ankle on the other leg is affected – stiff and swollen. He limps on both feet – like Mephibosheth of old. His physicians prescribe rest (staying off his feet – and heat – so he walks almost not at all) – then pitifully haltingly and some days not further than the mail box – and we use hot water compresses 20-30 minutes a day. Since classes are over he finds he's better – less swelling. He has an elastic bandage to wear when he walks.

Eleanor and Albert seem well but were tired last night – seem very happy and loverlike assuredly. I had hoped we could manage to accept your invitation but so far Dad assures N he must stay here to get plowing done and alfalfa seeded. We'll see how persuasive E can be.

An hour later and still no sounds of activity above except that Neill is down. All of the events seem to come this week. Yesterday p.m. I attended a miscellaneous shower for Laura Lee at the home of Mrs. Loren Ball – where Charlie Coopers lived – very enjoyable - besides seeing the bride unwrap her wedding gifts we ate cooling refreshments and pieced quilt blocks. They (she and Holly) will live in Marg's house at least for the present. Last night we had a meeting of our S.S. class. Neill left home to come for me just as E & A arrived. Today E and I will go to Aid for a couple of hours and our [illegible] club at Mrs. Search's.

June 16, 1938

Dear Eleanor and Albert,

(We just had a letter from John and he was so strongly in mind that I absently left off your names.)

Dear John;

We are thinking a lot about you tonight – but when one goes to putting these thoughts in black and white they do not phrase them-

selves so easily. So it begins to look as tho I'd better hurry up and get my quilt finished – or now then does Alvis yearn for a quilt; you know I don't want to send you something you would merely have to be polite about. I won't deny that it is sort of a jolt for a time when some of our children decide to marry but still I wouldn't want any of you always to be single and so I am pleased that you have a promise of a home of your own; I know just living around in rooming houses and hotels would pall on most "real" persons and when I think of the great comfort I take in you children I want you to have a family and if folks of your sort don't have children it would seem as tho our country is going to be short of good citizens after a while; I send you and Alvis my best wishes for your happiness and also my love; if it all gets settled after a while let me know and I shall write to Alvis.

“ I won't deny that it is sort of a jolt for a time when some of our children decide to marry...”

Please tell Albert, Eleanor, that he performed all of his duties properly but that I think I was considerably remiss in my leave taking of him – was too much stirred up over the parting. We were greatly pleased to hear from you today and to know that you were to see the sunrise on the canyon of the Colorado river; that is a most wonderful experience is it not. Trust you made your trip the rest of the way comfortably that you are now cosily established in some satisfactory spot.

We are thinking of going over to Kidder Sunday and are in the way of arranging for Ottis and one of the Broveaks to milk for us; we shall have two more to milk for we are sending the sucking calves to market tomorrow. Auntie wrote many complimentary things about Albert and you and your stop with them. I hope I do not need to recuperate from the effects of your visit – wasn't it something that should refresh me. And surely dear knows I go to little enough trouble for any guest. Think of what some do!

This letter is not very lengthy as yet but Dad, Neill and I have had several profound discussions since I began – they are not very conducive to letter writing. Sunday we went to S.S., church – both morning and evening, as well as to Mr. and Mrs. Wiard's Golden Wedding anniversary in the afternoon – that was a too full day but I could not see my way clear to do differently – Eleanor may be interested to know that the Aid took a second thought and bought the Wiards a sheet and pillow case set for their gift; the church was attractively decorated in white and gold with a lavish floral display too. There was a program of devotional and musical numbers – do either of you recall the Austills who used to live here? They have a daughter who graduated from Lawrence high school this spring and among her accomplishments is playing the French Horn – this she did so well that she was one of the contestants in the National contest a few weeks ago – what I am getting at is that she played a French Horn solo that afternoon.

Then Monday afternoon Neill and I drove to Lawrence to see Dr. Anderson anent Neill's arthritis – not much new – and last night we drove to Shawnee in a high wind with threatening clouds to see Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald; we arrived in a rain to learn that we were one night late for that show but settled down to see Dorothy Lamour in Her Jungle Lover; in about 20 minutes the lights went off and came back no more – at least during the hour we waited for the rain to abate. Then we drove home thru a very heavy shower; however to our great good luck it rained but little on our farm. There were two small twisters in the state last night – one of them at Midland. We are most fortunate that we have escaped destructive storms in our part of the country. We as well as all the rest of the state do get frequent and in many parts excessive rainfall. Salina has been badly flooded.

Sam Golden has been critically ill with inflammatory rheumatism – so ill he has made his will. Poor Holly Noteman lost his job in Kansas City with the Chevrolet Company in Kansas City a few days before he and Laura Lee Andrew were married. She had hoped to get a job in the city too and now neither has one; they are in DeSoto as yet.

Neill and I have really been working on making out questions on the Prof. Quizz program; be prepared for most any sort of surprise there. It was Tuesday we were in Lawrence, for Monday afternoon Aunt Dora and Uncle Russell made us a surprise call – it was not much more. We are still eating peas and need help and have begun on our large supply of beans.

No doubt you will be seeing one of America's great beauty spots when you see Crater Lake. Neill feels that the Kansas wheat fields are scarcely a satisfactory substitute for the scenic wonders of Oregon and Arizona. Edith Search leaves for California next Tuesday.

As to the milking program the cost of installing equipment called for at this time was estimated by the health department to be about \$125 – many producers feel that likely there soon would be other requirements. Since we likely may not be able to milk for many more years it seems that we may as well ship what we do milk to the cheese factory at a lower price but no cost for additional equipment. As Dad hopes to go into the hog business somewhat I hope he will consider the suggestions you have offered; they sounded logical to me.

We felt very happy while Eleanor and Albert were here and would like to have them stay long for us to settle down and really get to living together as it were. Neill feels sort of restless and unsettled – enforced idleness is tedious but he seems to be gaining and I hope he will decide wisely about how to spend his vacation. He's delightful company and great help as a chauffeur – especially for me and my friends in the campaigns we want to carry on. You know he's pretty good and unselfish when he takes me to church twice a day without a murmur. We appreciated the very prompt reply to our letter but can't expect another – or at least a reply to this so soon. Much love to all, Mother.



Visit to Kidder and Cameron, MO. From left to right, back row: John Whitelaw, Hugh Garner, Mary Shaw (John's sister), Lucy Garner (Mary Shaw's daughter). Neill Whitelaw, Bertha Whitelaw, Maggie Whitelaw (John's sister), Mabel Shaw (Mary Shaw's daughter), Betty Shaw (Mary Shaw's daughter-in-law). Front Row: grandchildren of Mary Shaw.

Aunt Mary's – Hugh's Auntie and we. Lucy's girls are very attractive and they made up with us easily – especially Sue who seems a very bright child. Lucy and Hugh think they may come to see us soon. The latter is losing much of his hair and they evidently work very hard without too many returns of the sort that buys radios, good dresses and shoes. All the rest were as usual except that Aunt Mary is frail and I really do wonder if she is not correct in refusing to risk the strenuousness of a trip east. Margaret and Esther had just gotten back to Washington from a three weeks jaunt that took them first to Ralph's, then thru the New England states, some of the Canadian cities, a trip on the Hudson and etc. We saw Auntie's [Maggie Whitelaw] wheat which looks promising and were given masses of beets, carrots and transparent apples as well as Morning Dawn petunia plants. Got home about 11 and found Ottis and Tony had done a spiffy job on the chores and O. had even taken a peek into the yard Monday morning to see if we were back.

Neill and Dad were in Olathe Saturday and Dad brought payments on all of our taxes up to date; Neill is quite impressed with the amount of taxes we pay out of our income – gas tax, sales tax and then just taxes – tho our gross income is smaller than any of you earn yet we pay a greater amount for taxes than all of you children together.

N. and I saw Snow White in Olathe Monday evening and enjoyed it. I wish I could say N's arthritis is a lot better – of course he is generally comfortable and all of that but his powers of locomotion are so circumscribed! It is pitiful how few things he can do with his body; he still shells peas, strings beans and etc. This a.m. he took some of my knives in hand and sharpened them. He has bought us a new kitchen clock and a tea kettle and new batteries for the radio. He plans to go to Dr. Anderson for a complete physical examination some day next week; I think he has given up the idea of going to Ann Arbor and since getting about on foot is so difficult for him I do believe if rest can help it is better for him to stay right here; we are faithfully applying heat by means of pouring hot water on his bandage strapped joints for over an hour a day.

June 23, 1938

Dear Children,

The R.R. seems just a little erratic maybe just now but doubtless it will work out all right; we were delighted to hear from Eleanor Monday – the trip to Kidder prevented our getting our Sunday mail that day. Since you are so pleasantly situated in Pasadena we are all thinking of coming out to spend a few (?) months with you! Really it all does sound splendid but I suppose even its charm failed to keep Eleanor's mind completely diverted during the first four days of this week while she was alone; today ends that for the time anyway. The possibility of Albert's being offered an opportunity to stay on for a longer time is interesting and we will be standing at attention to hear more. Neill is expounding his economic views quite enthusiastically and I am having hard work to concentrate on what I am trying to say – for you know when N. talks I listen.

Our trip Sunday was fine except for so much traffic! The roads were all in fine condition and the countryside beautiful. We had dinner at

Some wheat being combined here is yielding better than 20 bushels to the acre and bringing 65 for that testing 60 lbs. We hope ours may do something like that. There seems to be nothing really wrong with it. Aunt Dora [Bertha's sister], Uncle Russell and Shirley and her two boys were here for a short time Monday on their way back to Springfield again; Aileen's were to join them there Tuesday and then all of the family would be together for the first time in 7 years – except Nova of course but she had visited all of them a few weeks ago. Shirley looks well and weighs about 130 lbs. but is almost white headed. Dale – the older boy – is a brunette and Deane the younger is very blonde. They like Lucy's girls are very active.

Tuesday my chauffeur drove me down to Frances Nelsons to a Diminishing Tea that Aid is sponsoring; there were 15 guests and we pieced twenty blocks of the Dresden pattern for a quilt – all that is needed. Then we had refreshments of an iced fruit drink, good home made ice cream and wafers - \$1.80 netted for the treasury and five of the guests will each give a tea to which they will ask as many as they care to with four of them agreeing to give a tea to which they will have three who will in turn pass their responsibilities on to two others. Neill was still patient enough to take me to the church last night for one of our silver teas. I assuredly do appreciate his taking me about and he does it very graciously and really entered into the spirit of the occasion and seems to enjoy it all.

The clock has struck nine and whatever else we were going to say will have to wait for the mail man won't. We are eager to learn more of what you may be going to do and experience John – you are much in our thoughts. Much love to all, Mother.

July 21, 1938

Dear Children:

Dad, Neill and I are getting all lined up for the weekly session of the R.R. – or the writing squad is about to go into action – if only Dad was using a typewriter this room would really seem like an office. In case you note some great improvement in this epistle, let us give the credit to Neill who has been offering some constructive criticism on my copy of this sort. Really, I am enjoying his company and conversation immensely – you know how I do love to visit with members of my family; we have discussed almost every subject. As you gather from his weekly reports he is doing a great deal of reading; twice a day and almost always when I am washing dishes he is sitting in the kitchen, using his hot water treatment and we have a real “talk-fest.” Sometimes it concerns Goethe, Ben Johnson, etc. and sometimes educational topics, occasionally local matters and lately since he has been reading “Classics in English” we have talked over a good deal of the work I did in school along those lines or else the subject matter of Xenophon's Anabasis, Homer's Iliad or matters connected with Greek and Roman history; never have I been so completely taken back to my school days; he really is going to have quite a knowledge of Greek – for you know he has an insatiable curiosity about facts. He will be all but able to translate this language.

Now he is beginning on the Latin and Eleanor should be here to read Virgil with

him. John will readily believe that he spies out any discrepancies in my scholarship and is properly disappointed in me. But I am glad for what diversion he can find for it is very discouraging to have a pretty bad case of arthritis and to face what may possibly be his lot with it all. Anything I can do is far too little. We all try to think that he is making substantial gains but that is hard work; I am determined that he will be better but of course I know I do not have the best of grounds for that state of mind.

We are having a most delightful summer; cool nights – Neill has slept under a blanket on the sleeping porch almost every night since he came home and we've had only half a dozen days when one could not be comfortable in the shade. Then too, we've not suffered too much from dry weather. Crops do well – the prices on wheat and potatoes are ruinous. Wheat was worth twice as much last year as this. A good many fields of wheat did not show any profit – even with as good a yield as 15 bushels – you see seed was high last year and one has to count that in. We were very fortunate to have a yield of 20 bushels and also in that we were able to cut as many of our oats as we were. Yesterday Charlie French disked under a field of oats that he believed would have threshed out 1,000 bushels; the Nelsons have a similar field that they have not yet been able to find any way to save. Yesterday buyers were paying only .45 cents per cwt for potatoes; one grower stopped digging because he could not make expenses; the situation is still further complicated because there are so many rotten potatoes and some of the pickers turn a deaf ear to the plea of the supervisors to pick up

“ ...twice a day and almost always when I am washing dishes he is sitting in the kitchen, using his hot water treatment and we have a real ‘talk-fest’ .”



Bertha's daughter-in-law and John's wife, Alvis

only good spuds.

You children will recall the Earl Ross family, I think; their second daughter, age 11, passed away in a K.C. hospital yesterday morning from a streptococci infection – a very sad case indeed – just the one child is left, a sister near the same age.

Today I was at another “diminishing tea”; this time at Mrs. Vance’s – the first time I had ever been at her house – other guests were Mrs. Hambleton, Mrs. Buckingham, Mrs. Burch, Mrs. Marshall, Mae Miller, Isabel Golden, Lucile Welch, Pauline, Mrs. Lake, Mrs. Stuchberry, Mrs. Zellers, Leta Foley – had refreshments of chicken sandwiches, cake, iced tea. They really had lovely bouquets of roses, lilies, zinnias, dahlias.

The Halls have really had a time with illnesses lately; Jessie has a tumor her doctor thinks and adds that an operation may be necessary; Obidon has been rather violently ill yesterday and today with a sore throat – yesterday they had the Doctor and tonight have taken him to the doctor. There is not much money in picking potatoes and since melon growing has become so expensive – as Ferrell explained to Neill at S.S. last Sunday – I fear they will have hard work to get rich this season.

My burn that I treated with the tea was in the palm of my right hand and I do believe it did look pretty dark for a time – of course it is the tendency of burned skin to look red isn't it: I do hope tho that the color did not stay overlong on your arm, daughter.

We're looking forward to seeing a picture of Alvis; it was news to me that Eleanor had grounds to objecting to the circulation of her photograph. [Eleanor felt that Alvis had not given permission for circulating the photo]. Hope you are all having a dandy time and I cannot see how all of you being as you are and being where you are, how the delights could be measured by any ordinary standards. It would be fine if John could be along during the Allen-Brown get together. Mrs. Burnett has returned from a visit in Washington where Lois is and if you care for me to do so Eleanor I could call her up and give her your address or else ask her for Ieleh's. Auntie asked for the Pasadena address, saying Uncle Henry wanted it so he could write and invite Eleanor and Albert up for a stay. Surry Mills has an arthritis! Had you ever heard Eleanor of some respectable housekeepers who say that freshly washed sheets smell so much more so if unironed? The wheat carry over is so large that the folks we know did not think that it would pay to try to get wheat loans, I think.

Neill has an awful obsession with “Prattling” and fears I must be indulging in that reprehensible practice and should bring this to an end – I have a feeling that I have omitted what I really might want to say that is worth while and if I think of it I'll add a line in the morning. Much love, Mother Thursday, July 21.

I am enclosing a sample from a print I am making myself a dress from (yes I know a preposition is a poor word to end a sentence WITH.) It is reliably reported that the Williams have sold their farm – Frank and Emma - and less reliably so that the price they got was only \$3,800. Neill tells me that he wrote John about some remark I made about Don Juans and applied it to John; believe me I think he has me confused with some one else. Far be it from me to say or even think my dear young son of not deserving of the “something pretty fine” he is looking for. Another preposition!

July 28&29, 1938

Dear Children:

It was no end of pleasure to have your last R.R. on Sunday; I was all for answering it pretty promptly – so as to get letters around still more speedily – but Neill with his usual astuteness pointed out that John

“ Neill tells me that he wrote John about some remark I made about Don Juans and applied it to John; believe me I think he has me confused with some one else.”

wouldn't likely get it until about the 15 so that no time would be gained but that on the other hand we might disrupt the schedule. It did seem possible that John might have no address after leaving Pasadena until Salem again. Hence this letter is going at the destined time. We're all envious of your good times together and impatiently awaiting the time when we can have a complete reunion. Neill is really showing self control in continuing his treatments which do not seem to be doing a whole lot for him at all at once and I know he burns to travel and especially in your directions. But it is well worthwhile, I am persuaded, to go on with these treatments.

Since we didn't have our vacation this season it is a grand and glorious experience to have the comparatively cool summer we have; frequently the radio announcers tell us what the temperatures are and then add that two years ago it was ten degrees or so hotter; for example yesterday the mercury went up to 92 – there was a lot of humidity tho –and in '36 it was 108. Neill and I have just been congratulating ourselves because this afternoon has been so very fine for resting and taking a nap. A card from Margaret Emma at San Francisco today tells us that she is not gushing when she says she had a wonderful time with all of you at Pasadena and the nearby or near nearby places to which Albert and Eleanor took her – she added she was glad to see John there – of course she and John had a much better visit than they could have had during her short stay in Oregon.

Neill is death on having one read something else besides current newspapers and magazines and in his supervision of my reading now has me started on Carlyle's Heroes and Hero Worship while he is continuing his reading of Greek and Latin classics; we make frequent trips to the Dictionary – you know I have one that belongs to the high school here for the summer – and encyclopedia to look up points on which we are hazy – all we lack is a test now and then and I may have to take some of those!

Of course we were pleased to see some pictures of Alvis – and I cannot see why she should hesitate to have these prints sent around at all. You, John and Eleanor do assuredly specialize on favoring small families – this trait even extends to Neill for Sarah's family has just her and her sister. Makes our three seem like a relatively large group. However Alvis will never be able to tell you how many things her sisters have nor how well her brothers are doing. So there may be advantages.

Last Saturday we had a letter from Auntie [John's sister, Maggie Whitelaw, in Kidder, MO] in which she mentioned that Charles' family was to be in Cameron briefly as Betty had two sisters visiting her whom they were taking about and we had not much more than read the letter when Neill who was out in the side yard in his Tarzan like attire was heard greeting some one enthusiastically – it was Charles [son of Mary Shaw, John Whitelaw's sister] and Betty and the two sisters, each of whom had a small daughter with her. Charles' boys had been left in Cameron. The sisters live in the San Joaquin Valley, California. They make good appearances and one of the little daughters has blond curls that rival Shirley Temple's. They were on their way to Lawrence to visit their relative, Joe Williams, head of the high school music department and could stay but a short time. Charles is heavier and looks more like his grandfather Shaw but he and Betty looked quite spruce – the most so I ever saw them, I think.



John's sister, Maggie Shaw (far right) visits John and Berha at their home in DeSoto.

We are now enjoying our own sweet corn and frying chickens and wish we could share these things with you. Am glad you all had the visit at Nell Allen Browns- just consider that Nell was paying off hospitality she and her family have enjoyed at your parents' home, daughter, and do not feel that you must pay in kind at least this season and so add to your housekeeping duties. If you are much like your mother an overdose of such undertakings may diminish your love for things altogether domestic.

When I consider that John's visits were all paid to newly weds I am wondering if he was interested in conducting a research project along that line and what his findings are – if he is more sure that he wants to go on with present plans or if any doubts have found lodgment in his enthusiasm. John was fine help in disposing of the jam and preserves I am confident –perhaps doesn't get them often in his menus.

Seems to me there might be quite some advantages in the Madison woman's proposition about the furniture – but I have wondered what you will do about the rent on the apartment if you do not go back in September.

I see I've not told any DeSoto news yet – there isn't much – some homegrown cantaloupes are on the market from vines that were grown sort of hot house fashion and

“ Neill didn’t say anything after he read John’s letter about the longing he is keeping under control for a trip to just such spots but I know he wished he didn’t have arthritis.”

then set out in the fields. Mrs. Vance and Mrs. Stuchberry had a tea at Mrs. Vance’s Thursday and Pauline and I went. Obidon Hall was very ill with a sore throat last week; they called or had us call Dr. Johnson of Linwood who made several visits and they took the child there a few times too; although Dr. Johnson said he wouldn’t say it was diphtheria he gave him antitoxin and the results were satisfactory but now Louis Tex is sick with what seems to be the same trouble. Obi’s case what ever it was was also complicated with tonsillitis doctor said. He ran over here to greet us for a moment. Love – Mother.

August 5, 1938

Dear Children:

We were looking into the mail pretty closely today and were rewarded by finding your letters. It is always good to know that you are all well and that you still have your positions. And of course there are a lot of other interesting topics you take up and sometimes there are topics we wonder about which fail to get a write up from you. For instance we had no news from John about his stays with Lawrence Watson and bride and a like silence about any happenings while he was with the Wisemans. We surely could stand to be near Crater Lake some of these WARM afternoons and evenings. Neill didn’t say anything after he read John’s letter about the longing he is keeping under control for a trip to just such spots but I know he wished he didn’t have arthritis – and what do you

suppose Dad and I wished? WELL we are glad you could have the trip son and all of the vacation pleasures. We’ll get ours some other time or way maybe.

Margaret was in town the first of the week and came out for dinner Tuesday and spent the afternoon with us; she is looking very well – the young widow is not Flavel but is Flavel’s sister – about 25 with four young children and almost no resources so it’s bad enough. M. had enjoyed her visit with Flavel and is her usual charming self; it was a great treat to all of us to have her. She will be here about the first day of September and as Neill plans to still be here we hope for another visit. I see there is a split infinitive above. Reminds me of an error Neill noted in the Johnson County Democrat today – on second thought I’ll just send it, i.e. the editorial. Maybe you, Eleanor, will have to get Milly and Marg to tell you something of Frances Henderson’s system of getting meals. Surely this letter is getting off on the wrong foot. Then too we have the radio tuned in on a Bob Burns program. That’s not conducive to concentrated thought either.

I think that I shall have my quilt put into the frames at Aid next Wednesday. Today Neill took Pauline and me to the church to another tea – this one was sponsored by Mrs. Marshall, Mrs. Harry Dicken, Mrs. Harry Miller, Mrs. Willoughby Koeller and Mrs. Mickel. The principal feature of the entertainment was a talk on Birds by Mrs. Walter Keeler of Lawrence – who formerly was Miss Myra Sommers and she taught music here in the days when Mr. Abels was principal of the high school – do you recall her, daughter? Anyway the lecture was illustrated and both interesting and informative. Last Friday night, I believe it was, Neill and I saw Vivacious Lady at Bonner Springs – I suppose because we used to call Virginia Martin “Ginger” and is a blonde I always have her in mind when anything comes about this actress. Neill says we are going to Bonner again Monday night when Deanna Durbin is the attraction.

Perhaps you recall Lima Knight, Eleanor; her son aged 14 was killed here near Lenape on the railroad track by the Union Pacific Streamliner. Lima was married to a Mr. McMillen from whom she has long been separated. Dorothy Beaver is in a K.C. hospital suffering with a kidney injury – maybe it is torn loose – she had fallen off of a truck and also seemed to have been hurt by trying to shake down a sack of potatoes. Mrs. Clifford C. Breithaupt has just undergone her second operation this summer for a cancer of the breast. Mr. Bre-



The year following this letter, John and Neill took a trip together to the Rocky Mountains. Here they are at an elevation marker.



Neill, Eleanor, and John 1930's

ithaupt is of course in Raleigh, N.C. teaching. Mrs. B's parents live near Olathe, you know.

Dad will doubtless tell you something about our selling Beauty and Brownie; one comfort is that they went to the same place; we had too much milking to do – 13 cows – and these were the only fresh; even if we keep on milking we plan to sell three more when they begin coming fresh in November. We still get a can or more of milk at a milking.

Under Neill's prodding I am reading Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship"; that he insisted I begin on it and the book is its own urge since. I have begun canning tomatoes and with one thing and another I have little time to read – particularly after I glance over the papers a little. The Halls are marketing their first cantaloupes in the city and have given us some – so far they are sort of tough and tasteless. Maybe I shall think of something more to add in the morning. We're all happy that Neill's arthritis is really showing signs of leaving him. It will be a summer well spent if he can get the better of that ailment! I just called Mrs. Burnett and she of course is pleased that you are thinking of Ielah; I gave her your address and telephone number and hers is 19 20 Michigan; Apt. 201; she works in the county hospital and is busy daytimes but is usually at home evenings with some other girls; the city is Los Angeles. Milly's brother Joe is engaged and the Clarks are planning to leave the farm and live in town.

Neill insists I've written enough of chatter and as I am finishing this on Friday morning and have a pie to bake – the son peeled and cut up the apples for me – I will desist and hie me to housekeeping tasks. Our big boy is a lot of help around the house especially about supper and breakfast time. Just now he's making apple sauce; the apples are left unpeeled. Much love, Mother.

Neill insists I've written enough of chatter and as I am finishing this on Friday morning and have a pie to bake – the son peeled and cut up the apples for me – I will desist and hie me to housekeeping tasks. Our big boy is a lot of help around

August 10, 1938

My dear Alvis:

John writes us that you have promised to marry him and that you are expecting to have the wedding very early in September; he wishes we might meet you and so do we. As you may guess he is exceedingly dear to us and we feel that you will be one of us and that we shall come to feel toward you as we do toward him. By saying this I am trying to tell you that we are glad he has found one to whom he can give his heartfelt devotion and after a good while of living and observing I am persuaded that there is no life so happy as that of a loving and faithful married couple. I am very happy that he is to have a home and I am confident that you and it will mean a very great deal to him and will aid him in his efforts to be a good and useful citizen. He has written us that you are a church attendant [I think my father exaggerated somewhat about this] and I am glad for that too; being a Christian is one of the most important things in life – yes, the most important. He will go to church with you I feel sure and that will be another way in which you will mean a lot to him and us all.

May I tell you a little of my experience with my parents-in-law? I lived in the same little town with them during the first few years of our married life and I found them most lovely; so much so that it has ever been my ambition to be such a mother-in-law as mine was. So I am going to look forward to seeing you a lot in the coming years and of our being just the very best of friends and companions. I've always felt that I deprived Eleanor of a good deal in not providing her with a sister [Bertha's first daughter Jean died soon after birth] – but John has taken this step that will remedy that lack. I hope that events may happily take such a turn that we may see each other before too long. Much love, dear Alvis. Bertha Bell Whitelaw

August 11&12, 1938

Dear Children:

It's good the above is an elastic term and can easily be expanded to include all new members of the family. I had scarcely realized that this "fall" might mean so early a date as September 2 but I recall that last year I felt October 19 came pretty soon [date of Eleanor's wedding] so perhaps I'd have a slight case of jitters no matter what day was chosen for the wedding day of a member of our corporation. As John doubtless knows by this time Neill and I wrote Alvis last night and I trust we were able to express the really cordial feelings we have for her and that while it may seem for a moment that we are "losing" John we know that is really not the case at all. Just wandering around and rooming and boarding in public places is not a condition that makes for happiness and well being for many persons so since I can't have my young son at home common sense tells me over and over that he is taking the wisest step. And how I hope as a husband he will remember to conduct himself in such a way as to cause Alvis to observe frequently "your Mother surely brought you up to be a model husband." Maybe now I'd better emulate Mrs. Roosevelt who replied to one who asked her at the time of the latest marriage in her family if she gave the about-to-be weds any advice that she didn't feel competent to give advice. I am glad that you two are to be able to start out practically debt free and I am also glad that Alvis seems likely to help you form some habits that I consider important. Is the grandmother maternal or paternal and where does she live and have you seen her? Are there many cousins, uncles and aunts to speak of? Of course I am interested in the other quilt that is being completed before choosing the time of housekeeping; I just got mine into the quilting frames at the church yesterday and as there is a good deal of other work it is obvious that it will be some weeks before it can be sent on its journey west, and I don't want you to be chilly. We sent our letter to Albany – is that the correct address?

“ Maybe now I'd better emulate Mrs. Roosevelt who replied to one who asked her at the time of the latest marriage in her family if she gave the about-to-be weds any advice that she didn't feel competent to give advice.”

We had some callers today – not much more than that; they were Mr. and Mrs. A.A. Coult of Nashville, Tenn., Mr. and Mrs. Frank Coult of St. Louis and Mrs. Jay McNary (Anna Coult) of Chanute. All of the Coult's are cousins of Nell Allen Brown and also of Aunt Mary Shaw's children. They were going on to Cameron for supper at Aunt Mary's and over night at Kidder with Auntie. Mrs. A.A. Coult is a musician of some note – pianist. A digression but sometime when you are in a group and have nothing better to talk about try this subject which I heard suggested over the radio – find out how many present have an Aunt Mary; I tried it on a group of eight the other day and six of them had such an aunt and two of them had two.

Maybe Neill will be telling you of Pearl Trout's being married yesterday in Colorado to some teacher; a little hard to imagine isn't it? Mr. Bowling was released from his severe and long sufferings yesterday. After all our hesitation we seem to be going to comply with the requirements of the Kansas City Board of Health for shipping milk to Kansas City Missouri – not because we want to milk but because it is now so difficult to get on the route that we feel it may be advantageous to have the farm on the route and because we learn that the present buildings that have to be remodeled can be made acceptable for a considerably smaller sum than seemed at first likely.

Thanks John for not encouraging Neill in his adverse criticisms on my subject matter in letters – a moment ago he commented on the quantity of "prattle" I must be using to have covered so much space.

Last night – Thursday – for the second time this summer we weakened and attended the DeSoto free show; on Friday nights there is a free show in Eudora and on Sunday nights one at the Robison Service Center – near where the Atkinsons used to live; this situation keeps some folks busy running around nights but not us. When I tell you that we had to park in front of the Ashlock home you will have an idea of how many cars were in town. Governor Huxman was an added attraction on this occasion. It's an outdoor affair and each one is responsible for his own seat – everything is used from packages of merchandise, orange crates, auto seats, on to rocking

chairs. Mr. and Mrs. Earl Steed sat near us last night. This was the first time I'd seen her since she and Fred parted.

Mrs. Hughes is arranging a "surprise" birthday party for Pauline tomorrow night with the guests providing the ice cream and cake; Mrs. Randall whose anniversary (birth) comes the following day will share the honors.

When we showed by request your and John's pictures to our callers yesterday one said that Eleanor resembled Ruth and another thought she favored Mary; all agreed that both the boys looked like their Uncle Henry. Furthermore they were generous enough to say that the uncle shouldn't object. I wonder if he ever realizes the likeness. Your trips must have been very enjoyable, daughter, and make a fine diversion from housework and etc. We are interested to hear about the workability of Albert's gadgets. We meant to watch for the shower of Perseids but tho we had a cloudless sky we also had a brilliant full moon.

Have any of you had some really good green corn this summer? Kansans have been much stunted that way for the past three years but we've really reveled in it recently – also in home grown tomatoes; cantaloupes are ripening very rapidly but only one of the several we've had were really toothsome – the others were tough.

I'm still reading Heroes and Hero Worship – I really have very little time for reading anything but the newspapers which I still insist on scanning – and I enjoy it a lot and find it quite absorbing. As yet Neill isn't reading it; I must finish the book soon so he'll have no excuse to avoid it. The French Revolution also by Carlyle which he is reading is in an edition that uses such fine print that reading it is sort of a Marathon.

Neill is sitting beside me pecking away on his typewriter and when he reads me one of his quips I shudder for fear he may, as he not seldom does; misquote me. So be careful not to take all he says seriously.

Tell us John just where and at what hour you plan for your marriage ceremony to take place; also when is Alvis' birthday: With all of my love and best wishes, Mother



John Whitelaw, 1930's

August 18&19, 1938

Dear Children:

The barn door has screeched – a sure sign that Dad is in and will soon be ready for dinner – and why have I begun? O, just so as to get started, I fancy. --- those marks are for dinner time. I'm going to work at this a minute and then after I do the dishes Neill is taking me down to see Miss Emma; she sent word thru Frank by Dad that she wanted me to come before they move down to their place in the north part of town; Frank has been working on that place – sort of renovating it and observes that one repair leads to another until he thinks he will put \$300 into it. Charlie Morse says they sold the home place for \$2750. We believe that they have \$1000 borrowed on it too. Harold Mize's have moved in with them – having rented rooms we suppose from the new owner; I'll have more information after I've been down there.

This is Friday morning – we went to Bonner to see Robin Hood as planned and enjoyed it a lot; Neill tells me that I have seen only the better grade of "family" shows with him this summer but at any rate they have been free from objectionable features so prominent in the old pictures. I liked "Vivacious Lady" too daughter.

To go back to Miss Emma, she gave me a bushel basket of quilt pieces – some of them are lovely quality and if I can ever get them sorted and can plan a satisfactory way to combine them I can be quilt making for a long time. She plans to get herself some false teeth and really go about when she gets down town. I had never supposed she cared for church but she volunteered she means to come and to S.S. also if the confusion is not too much for her and of all things she is coming to Aid dinners sometimes. I suspect no one knows how lonely she is; she must crave companionship after having lived in such close intimacy with Nettie all of those years.

Quitting milking would be a tremendous luxury greatly to be desired but difficult to attain and too good to be true – something like the trip we all wanted that we should make this summer; we all see about a dozen reasons that involved all of us why we couldn't do that. We have a good deal of feed on hand just now and for some time to come that can be profitably fed and then it is now virtually

“ Quitting milking would be a tremendous luxury greatly to be desired but difficult to attain and too good to be true.”

impossible to get taken on any of these routes unless you can find someone who wants to stop shipping and buy him out – Russell Bowlings was here on such an errand the other evening having heard that we were stopping milking. They stopped a year ago when Russell and Ralph went out of partnership. Little as there is in that line no one seems to see anything he could do that would pay as well. So having such a connection seems to add to the value of the farm.

The folks who bought the Williams place are a middle aged childless couple; it appears to me that maybe they have bought the place more as an investment than anything else; it is very indefinite when if ever they mean to live on it. The name is Smith; it may interest Eleanor to learn that the Mr. plays the organ and bought the one there; you recall that Charlie Morse owned it.

Herbert Lindens have their eleventh child – and are now the parents of seven boys and four daughters; all are single births and all living; further-

more all but two are at home and as might be expected the family lives in a small house.

It certainly is sort of disquieting to have to face the possibility of you, John and Alvis, having the whole state or Oregon between you immediately after your marriage! We hope all can be ironed out in a way that will be more satisfactory to every one concerned. As you see I am enclosing a card from the University of Chicago. Far be it from me to know what is your permanent address and how about yourself?

I am nearly completed with my perusal of Heroes and Hero Worship and after that is finished my mentor has selected Johnson's Trip to the Hebrides for my attention. Considering I have been taking care of corn, tomatoes, grapes and etc. all along with those various activities I have, whether I should be or not, I feel quite well occupied not to say hurried. I have wondered, Eleanor, what you pay for dairy products and eggs in Pasadena; such topics may soon be of much interest to John too. I am getting .20c for eggs now and tho that seems like a fair price compared with feed costs yet the season is that of very low production and the stores here are without eggs most of the time.

We noted in the Democrat that Mr. and Mrs. C.V. Scoville and daughter Ruth have been on a trip to New Mexico scenic spots; also a small grandson broke his arm while visiting at the C.V. Scoville home. We shall miss Neill so much – I dread for the day of his departure to arrive; he has been exceedingly agreeable to get along with and has been my faithful and loyal chauffeur and co-operates in a very helpful way with housekeeping duties. He also goes out to the garden and gathers tomatoes, beans, grapes and the like. I do hope that when he is teaching he can hold the gains he has made. It is not a too bright picture to face – that of always being so handicapped in the use of one's legs but he is very brave and reasonable about it all. Unless he becomes more active in walking it seems to me that the traveling he likes so well, will have to be much curtailed.

Aunt Dora writes that Cecil has been transferred to a CCC Camp in Minnesota; seems a little disappointing since they have bought and improved a home at Farragut. Keep us informed about your plans and movements as best you can. Joe Clark does not go to school now and I believe the young lady is a Missouri neighbor. Much love, Mother

Aug. 25, 1938

Dear Children:

A Bob Burns program is on and Neill is taking his hot water treatment - while doing that he likes to listen to something to help endure the tedium hence I'll try long hand. Our temperatures during a good deal of August tho we had a cool day last Sun. – following a severe wind and rain storm at K.C. and Leavenworth – Buildings were destroyed and much damage done – to go back to the first few words – a majority of our days get up to about 100 degrees.

First I'll tell you the news hereabout. We have an announcement in the K.C. Star of the marriage of Dollie Medill of Olathe- the groom was some one Neill and I had never heard of. In the Olathe paper we saw that Edmund Carter has been promoted in his work

and now is in charge of 11 counties with his headquarters as Olathe. Mel Golden and Peaches Hill were coming home yesterday a.m. from the K.C. [illegible] – driving Henry Golden's new truck when they got to near Shawnee they were hit just back of the cab by a car coming out of a side road. This car went right over the truck bed and took it with it. The driver of the car was dangerously injured. Mel and Peaches were knocked unconscious with Mel having a deep cut on his cheek and Peaches has a concussion. Dorothy Beaver was taken back to the hospital Sun. Today they took three x ray pictures of her and will soon know if an operation will be necessary.

Today I sold 20 young roosters. Some Merriam restaurant men were here looking for 50 such – when I didn't have them they said they'd get them at Eudora – but soon they were back for mine. I received 14 cents from them and the other two went to Taylor's at 15 cents. These young hardies were keeping the hens and pullets from getting to the wash and I am glad to get rid of them.

Neill is a lot of help to me in my canning – he goes out to the garden – gathers the tomatoes and peels them – cuts the grapes and picks them off the stems. He also gathers and shells the beans. Seems as tho I'd not have much to do. N's knee is really a lot better – his ankles less so. I do hope he can keep his gains – to lose him from here and to have John married will keep me a little damp about the eyes for some days – and yet we would not have it different. As Eleanor says we'll be thinking of John and Alvis very often. I mean to write you two a letter to reach you on your wedding day. It does not seem as tho it can be nearly a year since Albert and Eleanor were married but it's true.

We've sold as E. says 2 cows and plan to sell at least three more - I hope in November when they are fresh. Dad went to a sale at Arch Meinke's sale last week and cows sold high there. What do you pay for chickens, eggs and milk in Pasadena? And John can doubtless soon report on Salem questions. I'm now reading away on The Trip to the Hebrides by Johnson and Boswell. Much love, Mother

September 1, 1938



Bertha, 1937

Dear Children:

Maybe I could just as well have said "Dear Girls and Boys" - you know I have always thought that we should have two girls and certainly three boys are not too many. Like Alvis I hope Albert and Eleanor can stop off at Salem on a weekend for you four to have a chance for a visit; the more of us Alvis sees the more she will be able to realize perhaps she has taken on a new family. Those of us back in Kansas dislike to think how long it may be before we shall see John and Alvis. Maybe not so long until you will be having Neill with you for I fancy nothing short of a great disaster can keep him from going to the Pacific coast another summer. He really is a good deal better so far as his arthritis in his right knee is concerned but his ankles are not so much improved. If he never grows worse we all have much to be thankful for but believe me it is hard for a young person to feel that maybe he will never enjoy any greater mobility in his legs than he has at present.

Dad and I'd feel awfully abused if we could not get about a lot better than he can. He is admirably brave about it all.

John and Alvis will be trying to get settled and keep their work going too about the time this reaches them – considerable of an undertaking too, I call it. This will also be about the dead line for John's paper; something in civil service has undoubted attractions and I wish you much success son. Our letter to you newly weds of the first of the week has carried you the messages we otherwise should be writing tonight. We know Alvis is busy; we are glad to have her pictures and hope she'll have time to add to the R.R. and will let us hear form her as much as possible since it is our only way of becoming acquainted.

Toothaches are something to avoid if possible and I hope daughter your teeth are in fine shape now and that you can feel easy about them. I'll be interested in hearing how Leah Burnett is. Making a wise buy in furniture, curtains and etc. is a real undertaking and I hope you'll find yourselves equal to it. Certainly you are trying to prepare yourselves for the job. Anent the Williams farm sale, I understand the \$3400 was the gross sum received. I am told that Frank and Emma are getting quite a thrill from living down town.

Neill and I went to Shawnee Mission today to our September Club meeting – likely Neill has given you most of the details; he made an informal talk telling something of conditions at Clinton and a good deal about some of the museums he visited in Europe; his talk was well received and I was pleased with it myself. We had a picnic dinner to which we had all contributed and it was a grand meal; weather conditions were perfect, we had a lot of guests – 27 present in all. It seems this is the only Protestant Mission extant in the

U.S. and the school in connection with it was the first manual training school in the U.S. As N. says he had to go to Lawrence last night for a repair on his car – it was a hurried trip and you will realize it was when I tell you he drove the Buick there and back in one hour.

Like you, daughter, I indulged in hopes that we might see you again soon but one can not see how a trip to Kansas can be worked in unless you are prepared to traverse most of the U.S. west of the Mississippi. That spring visit wasn't much in a whole year, was it? But there doesn't seem any way of having had it otherwise. We'll have a big welcome for you when you can come. Margaret told us she was coming to DeSoto about this time and we hoped to be able to take her with us to Shawnee but tho she came yesterday with her mother and sister they all went away in an hour or so to visit in K.C. until Sunday. Our plan for Sunday was to have her come home from church with us and after dinner to go for a drive to the Gardner Lake; we'll have to see if she gets back in time to carry out that project; I'd feel like writing her but don't have her K.C. address. Neill leaves a week from today and I'd like to have her here while he is at home; folks tease her so much about Charlie Nease and the new coach, it might be well to use Neill to divert their minds!

“I'm debating with myself if I shall enumerate all of the accidents that DeSoto folk have suffered recently – it would be almost like calling the village roll.”

I'm debating with myself if I shall enumerate all of the accidents that DeSoto folk have suffered recently – it would be almost like calling the village roll; luckily there have been no funerals yet. Will Dicken's hay barn burned from cause unknown at midnight Sunday night. We hear Fat Watson's have a little daughter, John have you had any word? How did you like Roberta and etc.? We hear that Edith Hoffine who went west to Seattle some years ago, married and had two children, committed suicide some weeks since; Mr. and Mrs. Hoffine went out to the coast. Mrs. Mickel is my informant and she knew no particulars.

Club is to meet with me the next time and Mrs. Will Gordon will be the co-hostess: Neill and I were in Lawrence Tuesday afternoon; we saw Marie Antoinette for two hours and a half; the spectacle is magnificent and splendid but also harrowing; I'd much rather see something like Deanna Durbin in Mad About Music. I shall miss seeing some of these good movies Neill has been taking me to when he is gone. I'd like to show you the swell paring knife he presented me with; I threaten to lay it away in a drawer; it even has a solid rosewood handle. Moreover it is a real paring knife.

While in Lawrence I took advantage of the final close outs on summer dresses and bought myself two – one is a natural color lace affair and tho I planned to wait until next summer to wear it Neill thought that I should put it on today for club; the morning was so damp, threatening and dark that we gave up the idea and I wore the other one – a simpler and less expensive creation.

Some café men from Merriam came here last week and bought some 18 of my young roosters – maybe I told you that the last time. If you folks only lived near me I should be happy to present you with a fryer every once in a while. I have been getting along without reading any to speak of for two days or so. I had a wretched accident – I am ashamed to tell you and I was much embarrassed to have to make a clean breast of it to Neill – but the truth is I had been using a small darning needle and got in a hurry to change my dress; I forgot that needle sticking in the front of my garment so that when I pulled it over my head the end – and I don't know which end – scratched my left eyeball; since then I've had a good deal of pain, much weakness and considerable inflammation of the eye ball. However it has been on the gain all of the time so we have had no anxiety about its well being.

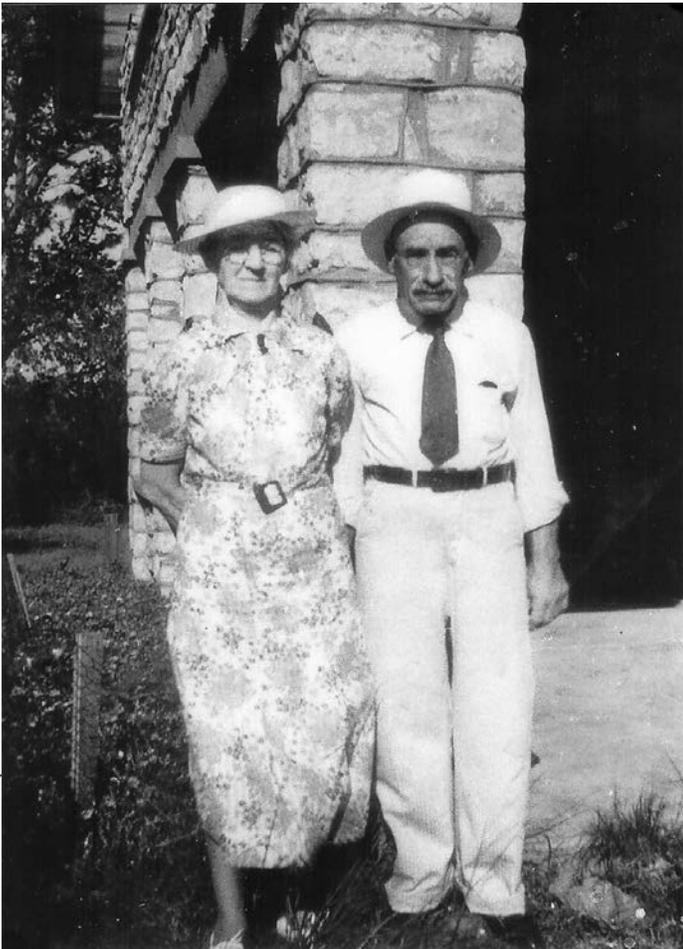
In just about 24 hours from now you and Alvis will be going thru your wedding ceremony; we wish we might see you but we'll be thinking of you and tho it is a dreadfully prosaic thing to have to do on your honeymoon, we shall be most happy if you can find time to write us – briefly if necessary but lots of details are welcome. Maybe I'll think of something else “important” in the morning. Much love to all and each. O, yes, the keeper of the liquor store and a filling station in Kidder was slugged fatally Sunday night, last.

Mother.

DESOTO YEARS

The 1940's

“The yard and especially the baseball ground and the swing look awfully lonesome without the children; sometimes grandpa sits in the swing.””



Bertha and John Whitelaw continued to live in DeSoto for the rest of their lives. They retired from full-time farming in 1942, when their house and farm were bought so that a road could be built between a munitions factory, which was supplying the military during World War II, and the rail road station. The Whitelaws kept the surrounding farm land on which they continued to grow wheat and other grain. They later rented out the land and finally sold it.

Because housing was scarce due to the war, they lived in a trailer for several years. In about 1945, they moved into the town of DeSoto, and bought a two story brick house near the Kaw River.

Changing Homes during War Time: Robin Letters from Neill Whitelaw, 1942-45

Excerpts from letters of their son, Neill, who was often home for the summer, give a picture of the Whitelaw's living situation during the 1940s, and the difficulties of vacating the family home, finding new accommodations, and farming during war time. The shortage of labor to help with the farm and construction of a new home increased their difficulties.

Apr. 4, 1942 The news of the munitions plant is all very interesting and I await the details just as the rest of you no doubt do. The clippings indicate that not much information is being given out. I agree with John that it would seem wise to buy a small place in or very near DeSoto if it develops that the farm and equipment can be sold.

May 13, 1942 John and I discussed the DeSoto situation at length but came to no definite conclusions – he will tell you a bit of what I think no doubt. It surely seems that your present routine is to be interrupted and I would hate to see you do any large amount of re-investing in a farm as I don't believe at your ages that you can expect to do hard work much longer. I hope that the damage situation doesn't get too complicated and cause long dragged out legal tangles.

Aug. 8, 1942 I was glad to get the details on life at DeSoto. That 7x20 feet trailer will be small but I believe that it is your best solution for awhile. I'm sorry that there is so much of my stuff around to move. I think it a fine idea to give away a lot of the books and usable clothing that is of no use to us. I suppose that you will use a gasoline stove in the trailer – will you be able to use that stove from the north upstairs room for a heater? Sorry about the old buick breaking down but it is a wonder that it has lasted this long.

Aug. 22, 1942 The situation at DeSoto worries me but I realize that there is nothing I can do but sympathize. That compressor running at the kitchen must have been hell. . . . I suppose that you'll get moved somehow and manage to

build the garage but it looks like a task from here with no help.

Sept. 17, 1942 I am glad that you are still in the house at DeSoto although I suppose that it won't be long now. That gas company is really negligent – I don't enjoy thinking of mother digging a ditch for their pipe at her age. I know of no simple way to take the rust out of the water and I suppose that Albert doesn't either. It's too bad you are losing the cistern – we did a lot of work on it and the concrete cap is a masterpiece.

Oct. 2, 1942 Your tales of DeSoto fascinate me Mother – it has changed indeed. I'm sorry the school facilities are so crowded tho as the kids need all the learning they can get. That blasting may get tiresome when they get near the house.

Jan. 20 1943 I'm glad that you at DeSoto got the damages but I agree with you that money is no compensation when it is rock and water that you want.

Feb. 19, 1943 I hope you find someone to plow for you Dad as you obviously can't do much of it. I don't see how you get the milking done and

the corn picked as you do.

March 29, 1943 It's tough about your labor shortage dad. I don't see how you'll do much without help. Don't overdo.

May 4 1943 It is tough for you DeSoto folks to have to chase cattle. I thot that a tiresome task when in my prime.

May 26 (1943?) Bertha to her son, John. Dad was able to plow for corn today but just now I can look out of the west trailer windows as I write and I am wondering if the horses won't get a rest tomorrow. We'd certainly like to drop in on you for a few hours at least – look you both over – hoping not to see too much evidence of over hard work and responsibilities – admire and caress the beloved grand children and then admire your newly furnished house hold articles and etc. Maybe we shall be able to do all this some day.

Aug. 27, 1943 I wish you people at DeSoto would think seriously of stopping farm operation, I know it seems difficult but you can't go on forever and we are all so far away that in case of an accident it would be nearly impossible to be of assistance. Dad, you must realize that you can't do all

“That gas company is really negligent – I don't enjoy thinking of mother digging a ditch for their pipe at her age.”

the field work anymore. I hate to think of you going thru another winter with no help available. Let's view things realistically.

Neill to his brother John. Sept. 1 1943 Mother has mentioned on cards several times that she doesn't see how they can go thru another winter on the farm. It seems that Dad is pretty low in the right shoulder and his hands are too stiff to be effective in milking. Also, he is just slow in getting things done, all of which is understandable. I don't know what the solution is but I'm of the opinion something should be done. She asked me not to mention Dad's infirmities in the RR. Dad apparently thinks he must stay on the farm. I wish one of us could get home but it scarcely seems possible. I can't travel alone and you are surely tied up. I'll appreciate what you can say on the subject. I believe the time has come for action even tho Dad may be obstinate. We just can't let them get bedridden over there away from help.

Neill to his brother John. Feb. 7, 1945 I gather that life on the farm is getting pretty rigorous for Dad and Mother. Mother said that she hoped they could sell the farm soon and Dad says that he is pretty slow which is no doubt true. I fervently hope neither of them becomes incapacitated while living in their makeshift quarters.

Finally, in Dec., 1945, John and Bertha were able to move into a house they purchased in town. They had a vegetable garden and a barn, where they kept a few cows for milking. They remained in this two-story stone house until John's death in 1961, and Bertha's subsequent removal to a nursing home in 1963. They continued for several years to farm the land they still owned near the munitions plant.

Letters of Bertha Bell Whitelaw: Summer, 1946

One set of Round Robin letters from Bertha survives from the 1940s. In 1946, her son, John, a Navy lieutenant during World War II, had been demobilized and made a trip with his wife and children to DeSoto, where they stayed a few months. His brother Neill and his sister, Eleanor, and her family were also there for a family reunion. The saved letters are from the period immediately after the family reunion. Not all the letters are dated, but I have been able to deduce dates from internal evidence and a calendar.

June 28, 1946 (letter is dated)

Dear Children:

The receipt of a letter from Eleanor was the occasion of considerable rejoicing among us today for it seemed a good while since we'd had much news of her and the grandchildren and we have been particularly desirous to know that Martha's ear was better after the trouble flared up again at Madison. Now we are looking forward to hearing that John's have reached Portland with everything under good control and that dear little Susan has a "home" once more. We miss everyone but the children by no means the least. Tell them all that the little calf gets to run in the pasture all of the time with its mother and it is growing like a big bad weed. So are the little chickens and this week the hen that looks like a barred rock came up with two little white chickens; Dad and I looked quite a



John and Bertha Whitelaw outside the trailer they lived in during WWII



John and Bertha Whitelaw on the porch of their DeSoto home c. 1946



Betha with her two grandsons, John Whitelaw and Bill Whitford

lot in the big weeds on the R.R. right of way to see if we could find her nest and to see if any eggs were left in it but could not see it; the next day those two little chickens were running around alone and look as we may to this hour we've never been able to lay our eyes on that hen – so I am raising those little orphan chicks by hand and they are the least trouble of any I ever had.

I had quite a time learning just how to comb Uncle Neill's hair but am doing better now tho doubtless he'd welcome a comb by John. He gets to do lots of reading now. We are eating lots of cabbage – I made two quarts of kraut today – string beans, carrots, onions and potatoes but not much meat – one day we had a ham loaf, one day neck bones, another day sausage and today some boiling beef. No bread as yet and the other day Melvin Meinke said they had no bread, flour, yeast, meat, crackers, corn meal or canned peaches – but still we get along. [Possibly continuing post war shortages. There was also a bread strike.] Butter is retailing at .66 a pound; I sold a pound to the Prices. I will enclose a card from Mabel which tells the news at Aunt Mary's. Dad had a wonderful visit and never tires of telling us so; it was fine he could go and thanks are due Eleanor.

We've been very glad of the frequent cards John's sent and I was very pleased with the one Johnny sent me. I see we have the book Albert brought from England for Billy and Mary and also a game book with John's name in it; I presume you'd all like to have them and unless you say not to send them I'll get them off some day.

Mayor Earnheart tells me that the people of DeSoto seem to be 100 percent for installing the water softener but that it will probably be toward the end of this year before it can be installed due to difficulties in obtaining all of the supplies. He had anticipated some opposition. Mrs. Schmidt loudly laments about losing John as a S.S. teacher for those young boys and Ruth Douglas overwhelmed me with compliments she had heard about the good job he did. When I look at all of the groceries that were left for us after you children were gone I feel as tho I should make it up to you. You were all far too generous to us. Maybe I'll think of an important P.S. in the morning – otherwise all of my love to each and all. Mother Many thanks John and Alvis for the navy socks; Martha's activities really astound us. Crossword puzzles in the store are very different now – need help. Bread strike ended says Times of Sat.

c. July 5 to 12, 1946

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

The first Robin since the big visit was hailed with delight by us all – and now if you were here we would ask a lot of questions to clarify some details that necessarily were omitted but that are nevertheless relevant. Neill let me read a letter from the wife of his Hugh Holman and believe me she really went into detail describing an entertainment President Brown of P.C. [Presbyterian College] put on – we almost felt we had been there. Let me not fail to thank Alvis for her letter and for the crowning touch which was to relieve my anxiety as to the state of mind Mr. Poppie was in at the time of their visit; really perhaps your family should make a prolonged stay there so as to give Mrs. P. and the boys a long needed rest.

Surely it is fine that Albert has this new source of income; with the heavy expenses that have been the lot of the family for about two years something of this kind is greatly appreciated. No doubt Eleanor you are about reconciled to the price of your home since you'd be in a dither surely if you were still renting. But on the other hand I feel for John and



Bill and Mary Whitford, John and Susan Whitelaw, DeSoto, 1946



DeSoto 1946. Back row: John Moreland Whitelaw, Eleanor Whitford holding daughter Martha, Alvis (John's wife), Albert (Eleanor's husband), Bertha, John, and Neill Whitelaw. Front row: Mary Whitford, Susan and John Whitelaw, Bill Whitford.

Alvis and their children – and think about Susan's inquiry about where their "home is". It's grand to have 19 pts of peas on the shelf but all that shelling looks like a lot of work to me. And what do you think Alvis? Somehow today I took a squint behind the kitchen cabinet and there still in the original paper sack were the ribbons destined for Susan's hair bows. I'll be sending them some day soon – I hope.

The calf, cows and chickens are all doing well and so is the kitty – she caught still another rat yesterday. When the paper man came to collect a couple of weeks ago I gave him a very "persuasive" talk about the justice of my contention that he should throw the paper on the porch – he still doesn't do it! And wouldn't grandma like to have Mary or some other one of the grandchildren take turns with her about going for the paper. Milk has gone up in price here – Tony gets .15 now and the K.C. dairies that deliver here charge .18 – today Mrs. Storer called up and wants to get milk of us so we are going to let her have a quart a day at the rate of 7 qts for \$1; they come for it of course. I have been selling Mrs. Bowling some whipping cream and butter.

This was club day – up at Mrs. Kaegi's – now don't wonder if I was lucky; as it happened Mrs. Lake and I furnished the social program and I had each one count the number of articles in her hand bag and awarded favors to the one having the fewest – Mrs. Smith who got a lunch cloth made of a feed sack - and to the one having the most – 78 – Mrs. Giebner who got a handkerchief – the big prize as you see went to the handbag that would most likely have room for something more and the small one sort of "vice versa." Mrs. Lake gave a glass plate as a prize to the one coming nearest to guessing the number of buttons in a small jar – Mrs. Scothorne missed by just seven buttons – her guess was 500 and there were 507.

I think I am doing a little better on combing Neill's hair but it has been hard for me to acquire much of the barber's art.

Mrs. Gordon was telling me today of a recent acute illness Mr. Gordon suffered and of what a very superior physician she thinks our new M.D.; Peet is his name; evidently they had liked Dr. Dieko also but this man is even superior.

We take it do we not, Eleanor, that you have a water softener in your house? We still have lots of vegetables – corn and tomatoes are the latest on our table. There is a plum tree down at the extreme east end of the garden that has been furnishing us with a quantity of very good table fruit for the past week or more and I have canned a number of quarts.

So far I cannot see that I have said anything at all important and I guess that I just don't know of anything in that line; doubtless Dad and Neill will furnish that sort of information. Dad and I have read Black Boy [by Richard Wright] recently. Love, Mother

July 26, 1946

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

Never did the Robin look more attractive to us than the one that came today – the 26; it is over two weeks since we had the last one. We had indulged in various speculations as to the cause of the delay but did not hit on the correct one. Perhaps we here are remiss in not having seen to it that Eleanor had the correct Portland address. We are happy that all are well, that the beach party was so delightful and that Eleanor's garden is doing so satisfactorily. Very glad too that Martha's ear is restored to normal. It was pleasant to hear how well sister's birthday turned out too. Seems that a Roper gas stove that works well at the low price you obtained yours Eleanor is indeed a find. Hope all of the other household gadgets are soon in good running order. Did I say that soon after you had all gone I turned on the toaster and it almost immediately went out in a bright little blaze; since then I have been making toast by laying a slice of bread on an asbestos mat and turning up the gas quite a bit; one soon gets a delicately browned piece and not dried out at all; the only possible drawback is that one has to watch her toast pretty closely.

The baby chicks are now so big that one can tell the pullets from the cockerels and it won't be so long until we shall have fried chicken. They have been eating whole corn for some time. We have been having an anxious time about Betty - she's completely well now but soon after we harvested the oats and brought 100 bushels or so down here and put them into the bin where we feed the Kitty and her kittens the boards there spread and one night a few bushels of oats spilled out – poor Betty didn't know any better than

“...since then I have been making toast by laying a slice of bread on an asbestos mat and turning up the gas quite a bit; one soon gets a delicately browned piece and not dried out at all; the only possible drawback is that one has to watch her toast pretty closely”.

to eat a whole lot of

them – many more than she should and I guess she had a dreadful tummy ache – anyhow she didn't eat or drink to speak of for about three days and her milk went down so there was scarcely enough for Kitty. We had to buy some of Mr. Broveak's milk – two quarts a day and then it seemed as tho we didn't have enough to do anything with. Grandpa gave Betty a big dose of Epsom salts and she soon got well and is giving as much milk as ever. But what do you suppose she did today? Mr. Zook brought us some mill feed and when Grandpa took the cow feed into the barn he left his little gate open – for he didn't see her around and then he did a little work in the barn and came out and thought no more about Betty – this is what she did – just what Susan might have if she'd been turned loose – she came out of that gate without any of us seeing her and went right over to the Manning's and how surprised we were when Mrs. Manning called us up and told us she was there! She was good as pie tho about being led home.

Do Alvis and John recall a young woman by the name of Ellis – not Esther – who was in your S.S. Class? She has four, I think young children and has a red haired sister who was always with her – she lived out east of town; we were very sorry to learn a day or so ago that she was taken to a K.C. hospital suffering from poliomyelitis – it is said she is responding to treatment. It is reported that the local doctors' office is thronged with parents with small children suffering from some minor ailments that they fear



Bertha holding grandson Bill, John holding grandson John, 1941

may run into polio.

The yard and especially the baseball ground and the swing look awfully lonesome without the children; some times Grandpa sits in the swing.

Neill is beginning to talk of matters at Clinton more and more and of life there; maybe he lacks some needed drive and we do too to get him off to Tucson [there had been family discussions of an arthritis treatment clinic there] – perhaps we are all faint hearted but I guess it just seems a pretty big and expensive venture for this year. His condition as regards his use of himself seems unchanged to me but he is looking very well in his face and he has gained some weight; his color is fine and he is comfortable. I believe if he could only use his hands more I could feel better about it all.

There were rains of up to about 6” along the watersheds of the Republican and Blue Rivers some ten days ago and presently the river here was higher by a good deal than we had ever seen it – a lot of drift including trees came down and we were quite entertained just watching it all. I happened to see the Linden lad who helped you John about getting the Ashlock’s bed back to them and asked him if his staying overtime made him any trouble and he said it did not – thought that you’d like to know. It was good to see your handwriting once again Alvis; do it often please.

The bag worms got so bad on one of these evergreen trees by the porch that it died and Grandpa cut it down. We’ll have to do so with the other one too. Love, Mother

August 4, 1946 (letter is dated)

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

The Robin much to our satisfaction came today and we set about answering promptly for as Neill says we like to get the letter. Glad indeed that all are well – as are we. Neill seems much as you saw him – did we ever say that he shaves himself? Guess he may have felt he ran less chance of suffering doing it himself than if he submitted himself to my hands. It appears from the way I handle the combing of his hair that I was not cut out for a barber. He feels well and has a good appetite; it is difficult for me to see how he can be so content to sit day after day in that same chair by the west window in the living room reading some 12 hours a day. He does bear a lot of information on a surprisingly large number of subjects. He looks well and of course is always cheerful. Dad seems to get along well helping him to bathe.



John with granddaughter Mary, 1943

All is well with Betty, the kitty and the chickens. The Bowlings, the Stors and Mr. Burke all come after eggs so I do not have so many to carry up town to sell. Dad marvels at how few flies there are around to bother Betty. If you children were here to help milk you would not be bothered by Betty’s tail for Grandpa says that after he sprays her with a little fly dope she does not switch her tail at all. We do not have a bit of trouble selling her butter for the Bowlings, the Prices and the Stors take all we can spare; the Meinke’s called up from the store once to see if I could let them have any. Sometimes the stores here do not have any oleo.

Nova [Bertha’s niece] thinks that she may go to a meeting of their Presbyterian Synod at Billings in October and if so she will come on down to Springfield and will also stop off to see us; we very much wish that she was planning to come while Neill is here. Maurice, Jr., is out of the navy and at home now – working for a neighboring farmer at \$200 a month; he means to go to college this fall – Union College where his grandfather taught so long – Grandfather Hale of course. His mother had wanted him to enroll in some nearer college and he had tried Wooster

but they had no room.



Bertha with grandson John, DeSoto 1941

Aunt Dora's [Bertha's sister] would like to get the O.P.A. to allow them to up their rents which are but little more than in depression years but have been refused permission; the drive to ask for the raise was given impetus by the fact that they have a more than \$300 bill for putting in some paving and curbing at one of their houses. Neill has a high rent story – I think the prize one – to tell about Hugh Holman's future home. Fully as bad as the high prices houses are bringing in Madison; I recall Adelaide, Eleanor.

We are eating a lot of cantaloupes now – most of them seem a bit tough – today we had one of our own and voted it superior to any we have bought. Suppose home grown watermelons will be on the market soon. Dad sits often in the children's swing and looks over across the river and the bridge to the Tipkos and sees them gathering cantaloupes there hot afternoons and feels for the workers.

It is said to be reliably reported that Evelyn Midyett and Jim Midyett are to be married – this fall I surmise; her divorce suit is to come up in October it is reported. Evelyn says that her father has bought the Tipkos farm – on 32 I believe it is – north of town and I remember it because of the good looking fairly new stone house there is on it.



Neill in "Tarzan dress" with nephews John and Bill 1941

Margaret Timmerman is not to teach in DeSoto after all; maybe I told you that she was elected at Bonner too and they refused to release her unless they could secure some one else; they seem not to have done that as yet anyhow. They pay less than DeSoto does and so have more difficulty getting teachers. Mrs. Roberts whom you remember as the grade school principal's wife is just recovering from an operation. Lester Warsop is moving back from Olathe to start up a garage under the building where Cook's used to have their drugstore. The electrician Ross has torn down his building entirely and is building a much larger new place – using these cinder blocks.

It was the east one of those evergreen trees in front of the house that the bag worms killed first and that Dad took out but the other one is dead now too and he expects to cut it any day. We are hand picking that little juniper evergreen in front and also the little mulberry tree; we have found a few on the evergreen tree out west also; we have written to the county agent for advice but have not had a reply so far; we have learned that all of the trees in the cemetery were sprayed against them some time ago.

Mr. Holland called here a few evenings ago and spoke very favorably of you, John; you will be glad to know that he has finally got his car in running order again and used it to go to Bethel for the first time today. John Taylor is expected home any day now; his folks scoured both Lawrence and Sunflower for an apartment for him and his wife but have found nothing. Sorry you have any concerns about your car, Eleanor. We often talk about all of the grandchildren and would love to see them. Love, Mother

Summer, 1946

Dear Children and Grandchildren,

Your good news – that you are all well – is indeed good news to us. At t this moment I hear Neill just getting up from his afternoon nap – time 5:45 – he sleeps very late mornings and takes his nap late and also still sits up reading until about 12. I lie down and sleep for two hours or more usually before he goes to bed but see him upstairs. I've had an awful time learning to comb his hair – my most difficult job of what I help him about; guess you always did that to a barber's turn, didn't you son? We dread to see him go – we'll be so very lonesome and now that I see how badly affected his hands are I shall be more concerned for him than formerly. Do any of you see the Nation? I think you do – in the current issue is an article along lines I've been reading for some time and this bears more directly on his condition I think; the article is entitled "Research in Happiness." I believe some of you and I had a wonder this spring if Neill's brittle temper and high degree – or so it seems to me – of impatience have anything to do with his arthritic condition and now that I have read this I am more than ever persuaded that a more calm attitude might help even that illness. He and I



Bertha with grandson John, 1940

had talked along that line before and while he thinks that the state of his mind has much to do with his general well being he discounts his flare ups as having any ill effect on him – but I still question if such rises in emotion might not have as much effect as climate and I also would like to know if the Tucson specialists work along being “peaceful” with other treatments. But I’ve not said anything about this article to him for I’m sure he read it and sometimes it is not best to wear a subject out.

Lucy [niece of Bertha’s husband, John] expressed great regret over missing you and your family John when we were over in June and she also sent her very special regards to you Eleanor and all of the children wanted us to send their love to all of you; they are a really fine looking group. All of them and us had lunch at noon at 517 Godfrey – and very ample and good meal it was; following our return from the cemetery Lucy and Hugh served us all ice cream and cookies at the house. The place looks very much run down of course; I hope they can dispose of it satisfactorily [the house of Mary Shaw, John Whitelaw’s sister; she died in 1946]. Robert Broveak’s car was not in running order and we were having trouble finding a means of transportation so felt that Guy Longstreth’s offer to take us over was extremely neighborly; all the pay he would accept was the cost of gas - \$3. His car is quite comfortable for Neill too. Uncle Ralph [John’s brother] went with us.

Sure enough Johnny is a good guesser; the kitty has 5 kittens about a week old now and still safe from any cruel Tomcat. One is real dark like the dark one you saw, one is much like her only not so much white on it, one is all yellow and the other two are yellow and white – they are the prettiest I think – just think – as many kittens as grandchildren! I mean I think the yellow and white ones are the prettiest. The old cat still catches rats and needs to for one night a rat caught one of these chickens that is big enough to fry. We’re having our second fried chicken tonight and I wish all of you were here – we’d have two then wouldn’t we?

Mrs. Manning and various others often ask about the children –Bill Welch at the grade school asked if Johnny would be back for school – wonder if he thinks there are no schools in Portland? Some of you will remember Clifford Breithaupt who used to coach in our high school and taught manual training; he and Mrs. Breithaupt visited here a few weeks ago; she is very eager to return to this part of the country – they have been in Raleigh, NC for some years - in fact ever since he left here – and I guess he applied for a position in the Lawrence high school and I see by the Journal-World that he got it. They have two sons and lost a child.

Betty is doing well and makes lots of butter for which there is a ready sale. This morning I went into the P.O. carrying a basket of eggs. Almost immediately Mr. Watson and a man from the plant came up to me and wanted to buy them. Mr. Watson spoke first but he said very quietly to let the other man have them but the latter wanted only two dozen so Mr. Watson got a dozen tho he was going to take the three dozen.

Ione [Bertha’s niece] had thought that she would not teach again this year but the school board in her district insisted so she will be at it again – it is a rural school but they have 300 pupils. This year over at Lenape they are paying their teacher \$200 – with an enrollment of ten pupils. Hugh Garner told me they pay \$150 and have seven children.

It was interesting to have a letter from you Alvis; you always write news we enjoy having and that John is not so apt to relate – so do it again – tho I sympathize with the wrench you suffered in laying down an interesting book. The current Readers Digest has an excerpt from the “Hucksters”; probably I’m not properly appreciative. I’ll await the verdict the rest give with interest. I see Dad told little about Aunt Mary’s death; she had been in the convalescent home for a month; at the last



Alvis Whitelaw and son, John, Eleanor Whitford and son, Bill. 1940

“In a few weeks now or at least months I can begin to cut down on the quantity of soap I now use. Tomorrow I plan to use some of my own home made soap; I’ve tried it in soft water for dishwashing and it works well there.”

her heart failed. The funeral was at the Presbyterian church in Cameron. We had thought that Ruth J. or Emma would be likely to come and were disappointed not to see them – do you gather Eleanor that Mabel somehow failed the Williams girls when they called to see her and Mary in Cameron? No need to help on the flowers unless you really want to – the card read Ralph Whitelaw, John Whitelaw and family; the piece was quite handsome – Ralph got it in Overland Park and paid a lot I think for what he got – but he stood the larger part of the cost – so don’t send much – Dad will be upset if you do.

Re the mess at Park [Park College, which all three Whitelaw children attended] there was quite an account of it – much as your friend wrote you and we meant to send you the clipping but I accidentally have destroyed so it appears – am very sorry. We’ll be eager to hear all about school when the children go – will Susan and Mary go to kindergarten? Love to all, Mother

Very Late Summer, 1946

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

It is fine to have such good news from both families – that Albert is home – or so we judge – and John and Alvis have found a “home” for Susan; she will take much interest in it I hope. Let us hear some more about it – how large a yard it has and how close the neighbors are and maybe the S.S. Surely the rent is very reasonable and there is no likelihood is there of the house being sold away from you – you can stay indefinitely can’t you? Seems Johnny will have to cross a good many intersections but I know he will watch out for the autos and it is good he has a companion. Will Susan go to nursery school? How far does Billy have to go to school? And when does his begin? We were all set here for our school openings on the 3 but so many schools hereabouts from M.U. down are postponing their openings on account of the polio scare that now ours open the 9. Miss Balance [long time boarder and friend, she taught in the DeSoto schools] will not then be here until Neill is gone. Mr. Roberts is back and was at church and S.S. today – Mrs. Roberts had an operation for the removal of a tumor this summer and will come a little later. We are to have a manual arts teacher at the high school this year – the first one since the war began. A new lady H.S. teacher will room at the Ashlocks.

It is very friendly of you Eleanor to keep Maurice Hale in mind and I thank you. The kittens are still thriving and have their eyes open now and of course get better looking all of the time. We still bear in mind Susan’s suggestion and do what we can. How well we’d like to show them to Mary – maybe we’ll have some when she comes again. We had a Cameron paper this week that some of the relatives there sent containing the obituary of Mary [Shaw] and a list of the out-of-town relatives present for the funeral and an administrator’s notice; by that we see Lucy is the administrator.

You will all remember how many homes have been built there as we go out east from North Kansas City – that area is of course Clay County; Kansas City is now proposing to take in that county as part of Kansas City – the residents are protesting vigorously and are holding meetings to see what they can do to avoid being swallowed up so; it seems strange to me that these people have no vote in the matter but K.C. does. Telling of this reminds me that we voted on our water softener project on Friday; there were 142 votes in favor and seven against. This decision also gives us another well which we are supposed to need badly. In a few weeks now or



Albert Whitford with his nephew, John 1941

at least months I can begin to cut down on the quantity of soap I now use. Tomorrow I plan to use some of my own home made soap; I've tried it in soft water for dishwashing and it works well there.

Mrs. Koeller, Mrs. Meinke, Mrs. Timmerman and her two daughters and I went out to Sunflower Tuesday to hear Mrs. Cameron in her lecture on the Bible and stayed for the covered dish luncheon following; we enjoyed it all very much including the after dinner talk a French war bride of World War I gave of her war experiences and early happenings after her marriage – some of them quite amusing. She had spent three years as a girl in England so had no language difficulties tho her mother did.

You will hear no objections I believe daughter if you dust off the typewriter and I surmise we'd get a longer letter from you too in that event. Did you find the hair ribbons, Alvis with the books? They were in their original little bag and when the books were wrapped I saw I had forgotten to enclose it so I tucked it in at one end of the wrappings and I feared you might not notice it was anything but paper; I also sent you a button that I was thinking belonged on one of your house dresses but later found it had come from one of my smocks. Did you ever find a suitable set of buttons for your dress that the Sunflower cleaners denuded?

We did not write you of Aunt Mary's death, Eleanor for we felt sure that Margaret Williams would tell you. Thank you very much for your contribution, John and Alvis. Have the little boys been reading a good deal during the summer and are they eager to go to school? Ann Linden is just getting over an attack of measles – they have no idea how she got them . Hope you will be equal to your office work John – not too great a load – one that would cripple your work and wear you down too much; we'll be glad if you can report that you've secured the help you need.

Eleanor! How I do wish I could lend or give you a quantity of fruit jars – I've filled so few of mine and have gunny sacks of empty ones. Love to all. Mother We shall so sorely miss Neill!

DESOTO YEARS

1950 - 1964

“I am as happy or happier than at any time of life,... Take courage for yourselves and do not mind the added years - YOU need not really be OLD”



Bertha Bell

During the 1950s the Whitelaws continued to live in their stone house in DeSoto. They gradually gave up farming, and sold the farm land they owned near the munitions plant. They kept a garden, where they grew most of their own produce, and also kept chickens. They rented some of their second floor bedrooms to boarders. In particular, Miss Balance, a

school teacher, stayed with them for many years and became a close friend of Bertha's.

In her late 70s and 80s, Bertha was still very active in community and church affairs. With her son Neill as chauffeur, she traveled to visit her sister, Eudora, in Missouri, and her daughter Eleanor in Wisconsin. In the following letter from 1951, her husband, John, recounts Bertha's busy Easter schedule.

Mother got up at 5 last Sunday a.m. and went to a sunrise service then went with the crowd to our town hall where they had breakfast. I was lazy and stayed in bed longer then got up and milked our cow after which she came home and I had my breakfast. She put in the rest of the day going to church twice.

They enjoyed annual visits from their son, Neill, and their Whitford children and grandchildren. In the summer of 1954, the Whitelaw family from Oregon joined the reunion, the last time that all the children and grandchildren were together in DeSoto.

Death of John Whitelaw, Jr.

John Whitelaw, Jr., Bertha's husband, died at home in 1961. He was 90 years old, and he and Bertha had been married 58 years. Bertha wrote to John's niece, Mary Williams, about his death: "We all miss your Uncle very much but rejoice he did not suffer a long period of helplessness and pain."

John Whitelaw, Jr. was a hard-working, quiet, passive man who was never very successful at his chosen occupation of farming. His lack of success was probably due to the hard economic times in which he lived, as many small family farms in the Midwest struggled during the 1920s and 1930s. Personal attributes probably also contributed. His wife and son Neill believed that he suffered from a tendency to make poor business judgments



Three John Whitelaws and a John Reike

and often did so unilaterally, without consulting Bertha or others. Bertha's frustration with him is expressed in some of her letters to her daughter, Eleanor, shown later in this chapter.

He was deeply sentimental about his family. During his last years, John had gradually given up farming and his time was freed up to visit relatives. He travelled alone by train and bus to Oregon in the 1950s, when in his late 80s and somewhat forgetful, to visit his son John, and brother, Henry. He also took several trips to Cambria, Wisconsin, to see his sister, Ruth. Although the third oldest of his sibship of nine, he outlived all his brothers and sisters, and remained a somewhat active gardener until his last days. More on John Whitelaw, Jr.'s life



IN LOVING MEMORY OF
John Whitelaw
DeSoto, Kansas

DATE OF BIRTH
December 10, 1870
Kidder, Mo.

ENTERED INTO REST
January 15, 1961, 3:00 p. m.

SERVICES
Wednesday, January 18, 1961
2:00 p. m.
DeSoto Methodist Church

OFFICIATING
Rev. Samuel Dutton
DeSoto Methodist Church

MUSIC
SPECIAL ORGAN SELECTIONS

ORGANIST
Guy Longstreth

CASKET BEARERS
Herbert Linden *Everett Plummer*
J. C. Davis *L. P. Taylor*
Louis Hayes *Charles F. Baker*

PLACE OF INTERMENT
Silent City Cemetery
DeSoto, Kansas

John Whitelaw's funeral program

can be found in other volumes of Whitelaw family historical documents which I have edited: *Dear Sister: Whitelaw Family Letters, 1900-1961*; and biographies of his parents, *Mary Neill Whitelaw*, and *John Whitelaw*.

Death of Bertha Whitelaw

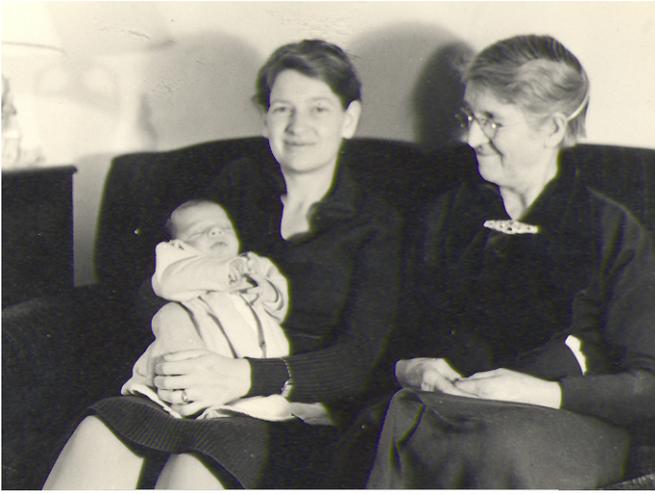
Bertha continued to live in the family home in DeSoto until 1963, when illness forced her to remove to a nursing home in nearby Gardner, Kansas. She died there in August, 1964. She is buried with her husband in the DeSoto Cemetery.

Her daughter Eleanor described her last days: Mother's death was a shock – one can never anticipate the actual moment, I think – but I could not wish her to continue her existence of the past year. She wanted very much to die, felt it was time for her to do so. (Letter from Eleanor Whitford to Mary Williams Enerson, Aug. 31, 1964)

Though she had no family living close by, various family members visited her during her last months in the nursing home, including her sons John and Neill, and grandchildren Martha and Bill Whitford and Nancy Whitelaw. Her funeral was well-attended by her friends in DeSoto. In her later years, her contributions to civic life in DeSoto were commemorated in various local newspaper articles (see next chapter).



John and Bertha, 1955



Bill and Eleanor Whitford, Bertha Whitelaw, 1940

Birthday Letters to Eleanor Whitford

Bertha maintained an active correspondence throughout her last years. Besides the robin, she wrote loving and personal birthday letters to her children each year. One of these letters to her son, John, were included in the chapter on the 1930s. Below are letters Bertha wrote in old age to her daughter Eleanor, reflecting on their relationship and expressing her deep love for her daughter. See also the birthday letter of 1954 concerning Eleanor's birth in 1908, included in the chapter covering that year.

July 7, 1947

Dear Daughter,

The occasion of your birthday brings to mind afresh the delight your coming to us was – and has always been – you were such a lovely sweet baby – a very promising child, a helpful and diligent daughter – and always a source of comfort and joy – the few prick-

ly times are just a part of life – nothing abnormal as I realize more and more. Maybe I've told you how I always wanted a daughter and if you had not been given us I'd have been much more disappointed than if we'd not had a son.

You've been thoughtful and helpful in many ways. Especially do I recall that when I wear the slippers, gloves and other garments you've given me and use the carpet sweeper, dishes and particularly the green woven bag: it is my daily companion on my trips to town. Your children will do much to add a gala atmosphere to your birthday which I hope will be happy – though I know you will miss Albert. Many more to you and much love, Mother

July 7, 1950

Dear Eleanor,

Just a line because it is your birthday and because I want to say again how glad I've always been to have a daughter and that the daughter is you. I can go a good deal further and remind myself of the great help you have always been to me and the house – and of how proud I am of you and your accomplishments. You were a success as a "career" worker and I can heartily congratulate you on your meeting your responsibilities as a wife, sister, mother and citizen. We hope you have an enjoyable birthday and many more to come. We're well – weather is cool – have had rain and send our love to all. Mother

July 5, 1951

Dear Eleanor,

Birthday time for you is just around the corner and I surmise it is no great surprise for you. I hope it is a day of relaxation for you. I recall a cleaning woman goes with your house – your big responsibilities for the trip are over and I hope it may not have been as arduous as some have feared. Margaret has perhaps gone on – so maybe if ever you have a time of taking it easy, this is it. I'm quite convinced you are not wanting a birthday party!

You grow dearer to me year by year – maybe because I now take time to understand you and your problems better than in the years when I was obsessed with my problems. My birthday wish for you includes better health – understanding and courage for all life gives you and love and affection from all of us who hold you deservedly dear. I wish I had been a much better parent – I have always failed you in so many ways. Let us act on James 1:5. [If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.] We still have some showers - just now for instance but the Fourth was a clear and cool day – very much so. Much love to all dear daughter. Mother [Neither Eleanor's son Bill nor I know what Bertha was referring to when she says she failed Eleanor as a parent.]

July 11, 1955

Dear Eleanor,

This is your birthday letter – even tho' it may seem as tho I'd forgotten about it. Last Tues. a.m. – the fifth – Dad announced he was leaving that p.m. by bus for Portland – no one had been given notice of his intention. I called the Lawrence bus station but got

not much information and sent John an air mail post card. Then no more word until tis a.m. I got a card from John saying Dad had arrived on Sat. after a night in Boise – so I delayed writing you until I could tell you of his arrival. The Robin has been here since Fri. but I have held it until now for the same reason. I'll write a little more fully about Dad's decision et al in a note to you and Neill enclosed in the Robin.

Now for the birthday part – getting home was a celebration in itself and I hope you found everything ship shape and the weather not too hot – I see the temperature in Chicago is lower now than for several days. Your cards and note have been a treat – you are in the way of writing as in so many other respects a most thoughtful daughter. You are a very great blessing to your parents – your brothers and I are sure to your own family. I often but not so often as you deserve, remember your generosity and helpfulness. I hope you won't have to be just too busy getting off to Europe. With much love, Mother

July 22, 1955

Dear Neill and Eleanor [enclosed in Robin]

John stresses Dad's good points with a heavy hand – maybe – of course it is true that my views are not wholly accurate – but I struggle to be right and do right. But it seems to me that Dad's judgements have very often brought privation and much real suffering to his family. So rightly or wrongly I have practically lost faith in his judgement. I think of his brothers and Aunt Ruth and feel they too have failed in so many ways. Dad's affability and appreciation verge so closely on fulsomeness that I often am irritated rather than pleased. His life here is so drab and now at this season and in this heat there'd be nothing for him to do but sit on the porch – His deafness makes it difficult to talk to him and his failing eyesight lets him read for only a short time daily – and all in all since I am getting on so happily here I do hope he'll stay where he seems to be so welcome and where he's is having such a marvelous time for a good while yet. On his first card home, he said he was coming home by train. I'd forgotten to tell you. Does he write you? Re no Portland letters, Eleanor - John just added a few lines on your letter and I suppose Neill didn't think to sand it on. Hope I've not done wrong in writing this. Love, Mother

June 11, 1960

Dear Daughter,

Home safely and well – is my wish for you each one. I thank you for your Carbondale card. And many thanks for the sweeper and all the generous and many gifts that money was expended on – and all the hard dirty work you did – it needed doing but it shamed and humiliated me for you to find my housekeeping so very lax. I'm concentrating on the flower beds and the basement now – worked there this p.m. Some work there will wait on a strong man – Patsy has cut some weeds in the garden area – the house part you left so clean needs nothing yet (in my opinion) and I don't yet feel equal to having her wash woodwork. Dad is so silly over young girls I feel I'd have to be close by – so she wouldn't be bored – today Mrs. Gordon volunteered I looked so tired at Club. I've not slept well for some time. I spend enough time in bed but can't sleep. Of all things I don't want to be a "care" to my children but I'm coming to see that I am – and how I regret it. I wish they could feel comfortable about letting me jog along in my inefficient ways – Dad's childishness gives me some concern these days.

Still no word from Sterling Shaw. If the enclosures are of any interest to you and your fellow bridge players I'll be glad to send more. Weather about as when you were here. With all your responsibilities as wife of the Director of Lick and your family cares – please have no anxious thought about us – and don't bother the boys about us either – please. We'll not starve nor freeze and must take other things as they come. Many many thanks for all your kindnesses, you made a great sacrifice to come. I hope we realize how much. Know you will have deserved fun when Neill arrives. Love Mother. The rug looks much better.

July 6, 1961

Dear Daughter Eleanor,

Maybe you don't think much of this card. I don't either but it gives me a chance to tell you something of the joy having you has brought into my life. If I were to have only one child it was my prayer that it might be a daughter (and you know your father always considered you perfect). If you have no daughter-baked birthday cake it gives us a twinge but I know your children, your brothers, husband, relatives and friends are all joined with me in wishing you the best of everything and thanking our heavenly Father for you.

It's been very warm – in the nineties – but last night K.C. had 3" of rain. We had a lot – and its cooler – Quite a storm according to the Star. Hope all is well with you and yours and I'm thinking much and appreciatively of you. Thanks for check as always. Your loving mother.

Robin and Other Letters of Bertha Whitelaw, the 1950s

During the fall of 1951, Bertha's son John went to Germany, to help with reconstruction of a social service system following its destruction during World War II. He saved some of the robin letters from his mother, which are reproduced below. A few other letters from the fifties also survive, and are included here. The robin letters of this period report the chronic problem of keeping their house in repair, and of the circumstances surrounding the death of John's brother, Ralph. In the following letter to her husband's nieces, the Williams sisters, Bertha discusses her Scotch ancestry.



The DeSoto church Bertha attended, erected in 1942 (photo 1982)

Jan 30 1951

Dear Girls,

Silence is doubtless golden sometimes as the old adage has it – but I am very dubious if that is true in the matter of acknowledging a much appreciated Christmas gift. Nothing you could have selected for us could have pleased me more than the large and lovely sheaf of heather we received from you. It is the very first I'd ever seen – so to have some is a distinct pleasure and to have an abundance so one can share it with friends who likewise have never seen any or had any was a delight. When I'd be about to give a friend a sprig I'd ask – "Have you any Scotch Blood?" Frequently the answer was "yes." One woman evidently longed for some, yet held to being strictly truthful, came up with "Well I've some scotch practices" – so she got hers too. If you've wondered if I have any scotch blood myself I'll say yes – more of that than anything else – and I have the scotch practices too.

October (about 19-21), 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

It does seem an awfully long time between R's these days – to me: I wrote the first installment on the new R. just a week after the Whitfords were here – whatever became of it cannot imagine. It bore a return address I'm positive. Now it is my intention to start another R. a week from now; I realize writing in it will be a burden for Alvis especially and she will be writing John too and I know Eleanor is extremely busy too so I have a guilty feeling that perhaps I am selfish – can you all bear with me?

Neill and his rooming problem, the Whitford's house deal and the separation of John's family are all problems; I am hopeful that a move for Neill to the Gray's may be just the thing for both parties. The acquiring of the new home at Madison seems to be a move to great convenience without any special drawbacks that I can see. Of course it is flattering as I see it for John to have this summons and the undertaking may lead to still better opportunities I'd think – but being away from his family is not so good and of course Alvis will have many additional responsibilities. I hope to learn of a happy and speedy solution all around.

You all know that Uncle Ralph [brother of Bertha's husband, John] has been very ill for some time – Dad will write details but maybe I'll tell some things that he may omit; last Saturday the 13 Dad went to see him; he was at a home near the Burgdorfers where he had his board and room for doing some very light chores; Hunt is the name – youngish people and very fine folks too. He seemed to be in a serious condition and was taken to the Kansas University Medical Center Mon. Tuesday soon after noon when I was away at the Bible class at Sunflower, Dad got a call from the hospital telling him R. had just passed away and that he must come there at once. He was taken down by our trailer lady – Helen Caldwell Davis who is on her vacation this week.

We had previously talked over the funeral plans with the mortician here – Paul Amos; he has another establishment at Shawnee so the matter was turned over to him. He came to see us Wednesday morning and we worked out all the plans; this included a brief

service in his chapel at Shawnee by a Methodist minister we knew something of; we were well pleased with his presentation. Music was furnished by an electric organ and there were about a dozen friends from Shawnee and several lovely floral pieces. That service was at 11 and then the one at Kidder at 2; the Burgdorfers took us over there; we met Lucy and Hugh, their minister, and Mary Elizabeth [nieces and nephew of John and Ralph]. She had called us from Newton, Iowa the evening before so we expected her but of course Lucy's knew nothing of it.

We had called Lucy Tuesday night and she had agreed to see about having the grave dug and the minister on hand. They did so under great difficulties for there was much rain and their road was under repair so that they had to travel in their truck. I trembled for Mary making the trip alone – carrying probably at least \$200 in cash with her. I will be glad to know she reached home safely.

“Ralph had a suitable suit, the casket was a very good looking one, the flowers in sufficient supply and so we hope all concerned will feel that all was done decently.”

Everything went off very smoothly just as planned; the day was overcast with a little light rain and a chill wind. Henry had insisted that the burial be in the Kidder cemetery; he thought that in order to use the Whitelaw lot it would be necessary to have cremation; so there was a plan to use either space in the adjoining Coult lot or else in our lot where our little Jean and Mary and Theo are buried but when Lucy looked the matter up she found the Whitelaw lot was a double one and so there was room – so we think Henry will be delighted it was so. Mary insisted on bearing half the expense – wanted to bear it all but Henry who had expressed his willingness to pay up to \$300 would not let her do so. Probably the entire expense will not run much over \$300. We thought the mortician and his wife were most efficient and helpful in every way and their charges reasonable. Ralph had a suitable suit, the casket was a very good looking one, the flowers in sufficient supply and so we hope all concerned will feel that all was done decently. Perhaps you do not care for such a full account – if this does not reach Portland before John leaves Alvis might send this account to John if you think he would care for it. Dad is feeling better than a few days ago but is quite shaky; could not write at all yesterday.

We were happy to see Mary and it was good to be with Lucy and Hugh again; Lucy told us that Charles' Ted who is in service – ground work in the air corps – passed his tests with the highest grades in his class and so is not to be sent out of the states.

Aunt Dora [Bertha's sister] writes that Uncle Russell suffered two severe attacks on a recent day and was left quite weak; naturally I have them much in mind.

Another half day – tomorrow I hope – will see the last of our inside painting done; then will come the wiring for Miss Balance's refrigerator. Robert Ross is to help Calvin Davis. Things move slowly but they do for other residents too. We shall do over the bath room too as soon as we can get it done. Calvin thinks he can fix the window cords but it will be later – possibly much later. I will see if he can do the gutter work too but in the mean time he has to take some time off to help at some other homes where he promised work before he began with us. The drip from the roof does not trouble so since the porch is here. Glad to see Presbyterian College beat Davison. Anything else I have in mind can wait until next week, don't you think? Love, Mother
Ralph observed to Mrs. Burgdorfer not long ago that he had thrown away his life.

Oct. 26, 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

Here is the attempt – the second one – to get two R.'s going; I admit no one of us really likes to write so often – but it is so pleasurable to hear every week! Neill says the former one I started never reached him; his word must be good (?) I had hoped to be able to tell you of Nova's visit [Bertha's niece] but a letter came from her saying she made the trip by bus and thought that she was being routed by DeSoto but got no nearer here than Fort Scott. However we had visitors from a distance today – Abel Coult of Nashville, Tenn., Mr. and Mrs. Frank Coult and defective daughter from St. Louis and Miss Mabel McNary (Anna Coult McNary's daughter). They were on their way to see their sister who lives near Chanute. It was very pleasant to see them; they had written us they were coming.

I was glad the kemtoning was all done except for the bath room so that no one else would have to look at the smudgy walls. Calvin is now working on the windows – putting in new cords where needed. Miss B. wants him to do one of her rooms, we want him to do some work on the porch, and we want him to do some wiring so Miss. B. can get her refrigerator installed and then there will be the storms to look after; believe me he is a busy person – especially as there are other families wanting him to do things for them and he wants to paint his trailer and bury his water line.

We are of course thinking of John and of his last hurried days at home and the office, of Eleanor's and their house project and of Neill's room problem. So any and all news will be most eagerly received. Did I say the apples given us by Mr. Healy were from our farm? They were. The Santa Fe has an enormous job here putting their tracks in good condition; several trucks bearing the name of List and Clark have been hauling rock from the west R.R. crossing down past the Depot for the past two months; they buy their gas from Guy and I think their account is \$500 a month – maybe that is that much a week but that does sound Big. Just now they are cutting down this ridge between their tracks just north of our house and hauling it away in truck; naturally we have it noisy when they work at that.

Miss B. and I went for a walk over across the bridge to the Tripkos place last Sunday afternoon; the devastation over there is much greater than one would suppose; we also went into the deserted house that Fred Grob's lived in some years ago. It is absolutely ruined. The bridge is in poor repair too and there is very little traffic over it.

We have a card from Mary Elizabeth and are glad she made a successful termination of that big undertaking. We also have a nice letter from Mabel; she said that had Lucy or we let her know in time she would have come to the funeral tho she could not well have done so at that particular time. She offered to help on the expenses too as did Lucy. I wish Uncle H would give up his harsh feelings about Mabel.

I spent from 7:30 to 12 Friday night with the 6 yr. old son and 2 ½ yr. old daughter of a neighbor – the Coles – while the parents went to a wedding; the children were very good and I had no trouble. Yesterday forenoon early I went to Lawrence with the Gordons, Mrs. Mell and Mrs. Scotherne to see Mrs. Harry Smith and Mrs. Ransom both of whom are ill and bedfast and will be so for long periods. When I got home at 11 I went to the Robins and was there with their little daughter of 15 months until 5. So I keep occupied. Our men roomers are all gone; their families are moving with them to Sunflower; however a young woman has rented Neill's room for just sleeping; her parents live near the Davison's but are so crowded that she needs a place to sleep; she paid her rent Thursday evening and was to come the next morning; so far I have not seen her. Hope to get two men roomers soon.

The Christner girls were here Sunday for the church homecoming; both look fine. Mary gave an interesting talk about her experiences in Germany; she has some slides and a story that goes with them and is to come out sometime and give us that. I see by the Star that she gave such a talk at a brotherhood meeting of one of the K. C. Presbyterian churches one night recently. Margaret asked after all of you.

I think there is more I meant to say but I cannot recall now what. So love to all, Mother

Nov. 3-7? 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

Reading your letters and thinking over your activities and problems seem to bring you much closer to us; an experience we appreciate. Of course we are thinking a great deal about John just now; we wonder how he crossed the Atlantic- whether by boat or plane ; likewise we think of Alvis and the children and realize that Alvis has a great deal of responsibility – has that all the time but still more when she is the only parent available. It is good to think that a visit to us all by all of them is in mind. We hope it can be soon.

When your children are somewhat older, Mr. and Mrs. Whitford, I shall not be too surprised to hear that Eleanor is dabbling in the real estate business. By that statement I mean that I think that his buying and selling program has been well managed. I am partly led to this conclusion by some recent real estate deals that have been completed here recently. After Harry Miller's death Mae felt that she could not continue to live in her present home; she offered it for sale at \$1700 and as E. stated can be done she came down – down to \$1400 – but I understand that the Goodrums (elevator folks) who bought it paid her \$800 for two large rugs and \$1000 for a pool table; this latter article they want to find a buyer for. In turn Mae bought Clifford Morse's house – near here – the former Zook place; she pays \$1500 for that. And he moves away the shop he built on that. I am astonished at these prices – so much so in fact

“I am astonished at these prices — so much so in fact — that the Madison prices no longer scare me.”

— that the Madison prices no longer scare me. Houses sell not only at high prices here but find a ready demand. Of course there are no houses or apartments for rent and several new houses are going up. Seems to me the Dheims are giving you a generous lot of furnishings. Are they leaving Madison?

Glad the Grays have a little more money. Did you ever tell them, Neill, about your sister, who never had to be reminded to do her piano practicing? Since there is a new manager at the hotel, I'll leave off some of my concern about your having a room until you tell us what sort of a place he conducts. Glad you feel so well.

Football doesn't go so good here either; DeSoto has a good team I'm told and we beat Eudora by one point but the rest of the time we get beaten rather badly. Wed. night there was a game with Tongy here — a very bad night to play — and we lost by two points. The coach is considered good too. The discipline at the high school causes lots of talk; unruly students — supposed to come from the Village and the faculty can't control them etc.

We hope the moving will not get you down entirely, Eleanor. How about Mary and Martha's grade cards; didn't they get any? Mary is a sweet child to remember anniversaries as she does.

We had a fine letter from Esther Shaw [cousin of Bertha's husband, John] a few days ago; she did not mention her health; Frank Coult's spoke of her operation having been a very serious one; they also highly praised her roommate's loyalty to her; she stayed away from her own work for two weeks to care for Esther. At Ralph's funeral Lucy seemed to feel that Esther had perhaps preferred to spend some spare time with her roommate rather than to come to them — but maybe Lucy did not understand as much about it as Frank did. She spoke very appreciatively about Ralph and enclosed a check for \$15 from herself and Margaret toward anything that was needed for him; a marker of some sort will be required, Dad thinks and will save this money for that. Uncle Henry [brother of Bertha's husband, John] has a very harsh attitude toward Mabel — is just the reverse about the Wms girls but Mabel has written two letters to us in which I feel she expressed an entirely considerate view of R; she offered to pay some expenses too. Of course I think the Wms girls are fine but so are the Shaw children as I see it all; Lucy and Hugh were at great inconvenience in arranging for the burial under difficult circumstances.

I spent Thursday forenoon babysitting with the Robins little girl; she was good and is a very happy child and accepts me readily — so I am glad to have a chance to supplement my income a little. Much love to all, Mother
We thank Susan for her fine letter.

Nov. 13, 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

There surely was lots of news in the Robin and it was indeed satisfying to have a letter from John in it; the plan Alvis and John have worked out is an excellent one I think; I hereby give it my approval. Then too there was a card from Eleanor telling us they were moving on Monday; she hoped their good weather would hold and so do I. Today I heard there was a storm in the Wisconsin area but perhaps it did not strike until they were moved. I think it is speedy work to buy a new home and sell the old one and get moved all in the space of a few weeks. All the school news about the children is exceedingly interesting to me; please keep it up.

We have been lucky about the weather for the past two weeks or more; nothing more disagreeable than moderately frequent rains. But mildness and sunshine have been the rule. There is no special need to worry about us. I will be frank enough to say that Calvin Davis has a lot of other things to do besides working for us so our jobs lag; for instance he had to dig a ditch 18 inches deep to bury his water line, and is putting up some insulation around his trailer and still beyond that was obligated to do some work for others before they moved here; but we are comfortable even if we haven't the window cords all fixed nor the storms on as yet. But how to do differently I do not know.

Don't see how you had time to have a sore hand, Eleanor – for you are busy! K.C. and Lawrence seem to be about to reach their community chest rolls. The most news we have in DeSoto is that somebody either sells or buys a house nearly every day. A lot of grading is being done on the Santa Fe right of way just back of our lot; all of the high ridge is being cut down; watching the work is quite interesting to us and our various callers.

Aunt Dora wrote that they had 14 inches of snow at Springfield but she and Uncle Russell came thru it without special difficulty. The roads leading north from DeSoto have been repaired now so that one can go to Linwood at long last but not yet to Lenape. While it is said that we may have a new bridge if money can be found to build it still there is now considerable traffic over the old one.

Presbyterian College [where Bertha's son Neill was a professor of physics] is not the only school that has had a discouraging foot ball season; DeSoto won only one or two games – beat Eudora for one and I am inclined to think that Eudora lost all of their games. Last Friday night Lawrence, ranked as the first team in the high schools of Kansas, played against Wyandotte, the so called second team and was defeated 14-7. The Robins went to it and I sat with their baby; I was there all Thursday forenoon too.

“...this forenoon I ironed, washed my hair and worked down some butter, of course besides the incidentals – but I feel well and not really tired.”

Are Neill and Eleanor as we – somewhat hazy about just what John does in Germany? Details by him or Alvis will be welcome. Of course it will be wonderful to get a letter from him telling of his experiences every week or so. Am glad you saw a bit of London anyhow. We looked up Frankfort and now have looked up Geese Bay.

Do not worry about the interest, Eleanor; we have enough to get along on; nor about sending anything re: Uncle Ralph; you recall Mary W paid half of the expenses despite Uncle Henry's protest; this money Esther sent is to apply as a modest marker. We have been to a little expense but not enough to think about. Will not get the marker for a few months yet.

Tell us how the bridge party came out Neill. Too bad about Thelma's father; last week a 58 year old woman died here of cancer following two operations and a short stay in St. Duke's. I am still busy for me but when I consider Alvis' and Eleanor's activities I think I am just slow. A week ago Tuesday was our bazaar – we served two meals that day and cleared \$400. Last Thursday was club – yesterday we met to make out the Athenaeum club books, today I went to Bible class and this forenoon I ironed, washed my hair and worked down some butter, of course besides the incidentals – but I feel well and not really tired. Dad talks an awful lot about going to do this or that but really most days all he does is the cow chores, a few little errands about the

chickens and cares for the furnace. He is not really well but he would be unwilling for me to say so. I put some three-in-one oil on this typewriter ribbon – pretty messy isn't it? Mrs. Vance observed her 87 birthday last week and Mrs. Maggie Foreman and Mrs. Hambleton are very frail. Love to all, Mother

Today is the 47 birthday of our baby Jean – the little sister none of you knew [Jean was Bertha's and John's first child. She died soon after birth.]

Nov. 29, 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

The eagerly awaited Robin came today – the 29 – and had been further delayed by having been mis-sent to Lansing, this state. Our lives are very quiet compared with the activities all of you are engaged in; moving, a Thanksgiving dinner at Corvallis, and at Cambria, calls from old friends and associates and an invite out for Christmas, life on the European continent etc; all this makes the arrival of the R. an event.

We are comfortable and getting along as well or better than one might expect of those of our age and the difficulty of finding any



Susan Whitelaw outside John and Betha Whitelaw's old home (photo 1982)

one who can do various chores for us that we'd and you'd like to see done; no storms up yet, nor are the window cords fixed, nor the wiring done that would enable Miss Ballance to have her refrigerator moved here. Calvin and Dad started on the window cord job, got stalled and Calvin has not been able to get around to it again.

Dad let Mr. Curtis go when there was about half a days work left to do on the back porch; trying to be tactful I said nothing for a long time but finally I took up the matter - speaking my views very vigorously about the importance of having that undertaking finished; I got no place; I was told that he'd do it himself. I pointed out many reasons why that was an unsafe undertaking for him and also unnecessary; I subsided - the weather grew very cold - so much so that outdoor work was impracticable - and waited; then one evening as I was casting around in my mind for a tactful way to open up the subject again, Dad fore-stalled me by saying he was no good, that he had a pain in his shoulder that kept him from being able to get his arm up to nail those missing boards in place - so I agreed when he said he'd ask Calvin and for a wonder Calvin did come over this evening and

put the boards on; I hate to see Dad undertake to put the storm door on and the screen door on the porch but maybe he can - and if not maybe Calvin can and will - tho I know he has obligations elsewhere too. Miss B. has been after Robert Linden to do this wiring but he doesn't come yet; Neill may recall I tried to get him at the beginning of September. So we'll get done what we can and will make out if we can't and please do not any of you worry - or make any comment on this part of this epistle! Pretty please.

Mrs. Hambleton is in the hospital again - her mind is much affected. Probably none of you have seen an account of Alfred Gordon's death; he was in Korea - had been there less than a month; as you know he was 36 years old. Somehow the plane did not take off properly and he was killed. So far we've not learned other particulars. His wife and two children - they had adopted a little girl - live in Santa Ana, California. His death is a very great blow to all his relatives of course. When or where he will be buried none of us know as yet.

We are pleased to see the pictures of the new Whitford home. Further we agree it is a good idea to send on the contributions from the Robin to John and will do so. I think I reported that DeSoto high school had a disastrous foot ball season - won but two games. I don't know why; we have a larger enrollment than most of the schools we played with; the coach is well liked. Does Margaret Williams put on another play this year? She sent us a box of Wisconsin cheeses for Thanksgiving containing several varieties - we're much pleased and must tell her so.

You will all remember Velma Seaton and that she helped her widowed brother rear his five young daughters in the worst of the depression years when he did not even have a job. Lately he was a real estate broker and later still died; I saw an account of his will being probated; he had grown quite wealthy and had left his property to be equally divided among his daughters and Velma.

You will recall the Gittings in Kidder too - Mr. G has just died; he left two sons, Jesse and Jim and three daughters, Lucile, Ann and another whose given name was not mentioned and I can't recall it; can any of your?

“Dad let Mr. Curtis go when there was about half a days work left to do on the back porch; trying to be tactful I said nothing for a long time but finally I took up the matter - speaking my views very vigorously...”

Aunt Dora writes that Dale Engle who is in the air corps at Lowery Field, Texas has been given a medal for being the most outstanding man among 700 in his class.

We are sorry about your grandmother's illness, Alvis and hope she can be spared in reasonable health for all her loved ones for a long time yet.

Mr. Healy – the man who bought our farm – was here the other day; he has a buyer in prospect for the acreage that lies west of the government road - some 8 acres or so and he expects to get \$500 for it – pretty good price I'd think.

Much love to all and here's hoping delays won't catch up with this Robin. Mother

December 5, 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

This Robin we are writing in came a few days ago – Alvis says she kept it a couple of days but we thought best to keep it even a bit longer so that it would be sent on a week after the one we contributed to last week; with Uncle Sam's help let's hope the R's keep regularly spaced. Too, we made the excuse of waiting to write until we had some news; we still don't have too much of that but we are at it anyhow. All as usual with us except that we now have three new men roomers – two of the others went to the Village – since the entire family got work at the plant, another got part time work in Lawrence evenings so he went there and a young woman we had had a chance to get better transportation with friends from Lawrence with whom she could stay – so we lost her. It's more relaxing to have the house to ourselves and Miss B but its more remunerative to have three other roomers.

I mean to get a letter off to John this week and will send Neill's along to him. We greatly enjoy his letters. Paper reports sound as tho you have had a very severe wind storm around Portland, Alvis – not so bad as to bother you, I hope.

A few days ago we had a periodical entitled the Don Martin Broadcaster from Hollywood – it's quite illuminating; I will send it around – it is too large to go in a letter.

We have the porch all done including wyrglass inside the screenwire, except for the painting – I find it a great convenience; it is not at all decorative because of the nature of style of architecture it had to be but I enjoy it a lot and believe it will keep a lot of cold from coming in our north door.

We, Miss B.; and ourselves, have been trying all fall to get the necessary wiring done so that her refrigerator could be installed but



DeSoto High School (photo 1982)

Calvin, Robert Ross nor Robert Linden ever got around to doing it. So Sunday the Staggs came out and Mr. Staggs did it. Mr. Staggs has wired several houses here and works at electrical work for the railroad (I don't know which one) at the K.C. Union Station – so I guess he knows how; so far there is no cost to us – I think Miss B. paid him something for the materials he used. Anyhow all seems to be working well. She did not feel much need of it but she had it parked up at Mrs. Moll's where it was much in her way.

Mr. Harris has had a terrible accident – I fear how much use he will have of that leg. Babs Ballance goes about on crutches out doors and moves about the house by catching hold of furni-

ture and has had hopes that her stiff knee could be loosened but now the doctor tells her it always will be stiff. She is much discouraged; she also has to wear a troublesome brace. Surely it is hard and the condition cannot be charged up to her at all – and there have been no damages collected.

Mrs. Cobb told us at the church today that their former home in the bottom, north of town, was too badly damaged in the flood waters to be worth repairing; probably they can salvage it for some use. Almost every day one realizes more clearly more about the great losses that high water caused.

Mrs. Hambleton is still in the hospital – still very ill; her mind is greatly affected. In case you do not take up selling real estate some day Eleanor I really do believe you'd do well as an interior decorator – and Alvis would too in my judgment. I'll be paralyzed to have you girls view these efforts of mine! Too bad about your grandmother's condition but it is good she can have the care she has. Maybe I'll think of something more in the morning; this is of Dec. 5. Love to all, Mother

Maybe for the sake of the yard it is well that only one of these three men keeps a car here – you should see the sand blowing north of the river today!

December, 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

The fat Robin came today and we spent an enjoyable period reading all the letters in it – and that was quite a period. Surely sounds as tho John is seeing a lot of Germany but when I read about what he is supposed to accomplish I wonder how he will get much of a dent made in that large assignment – it is so very difficult to get new ideas into the minds of our fellow countrymen – as Eleanor sees it when she pondered the matter of attending her A.A.U.W. group. I can see how there's mountains of things for you girls and Albert too to get thru in the next ten days or so. Of course I'm snowed under with things to do – but it must not be because I've so much to do; it must be because I am so slow about turning work off.

Christmas mail is coming in on good time and as usual cards from people who have little cause to send you a card – especially when there is no message whatever on it.

Having heard so much from Miss Balance about the sufferings of her sister in law since her auto accident a year and a half ago I feel for Mr. Harris and his family. He of course did not have nearly all the injuries she did but his leg condition is comparable. Neill was much impressed when a child to some of my nervous reactions in the care of small children so he is not too much surprised at Verna's reactions I imagine.

DeSoto high school has an enrollment now that puts it in the class A classification so far as athletics go – so now we play such schools as Bonner Springs and even larger schools; likely we will make a poor showing in basket ball. Can you realize that Carl Martinson is now playing on the grade school team? Do Bill and Johnny play in grade school teams?

I did baby sitting again Tuesday forenoon for the lumber man's family – the year and a half Martha Sue; I find her very interesting.

Mrs. Hambleton is still in the Lawrence Memorial hospital and Charles Douglas has also been there for angina heart trouble; so Ruth has it hard.

Am glad Emma's finances are looking up; you have never told us Neill whether you ate Thanksgiving dinner with them. We have many inquiries about you children from "did John's family go to Germany with him?" to "do you expect any of the children home for Christmas?" Marie Sheldon and Phil Krause as well as others have told me they enjoy reading the excerpts from John's letters

“Christmas mail is coming in on good time and as usual cards from people who have little cause to send you a card – especially when there is no message whatever on it.”

“Dad may forget to acknowledge all of your birthday greetings but they all came promptly – even one from John. Your cake looks awfully good Eleanor but we are saving it for Christmas – is that o.k.?”

that I work into my items.

We have thought that we knew a great deal about the flood damage hereabouts but last Saturday Miss Balance rode to the city on the train and was so impressed with the sights she saw that she advises that every one should take the train to K.C. and so see what she saw. She particularly emphasizes the damage done to the extensive lay out of stock pens and etc. at Norris.

Dad may forget to acknowledge all of your birthday greetings but they all came promptly – even one from John. Your cake looks awfully good Eleanor but we are saving it for Christmas – is that o.k.?

Our streets are being decorated for Christmas and we have a Christmas snow that is providing fair coasting for the children's sleds; various programs are planned so I guess it will be Christmas again. I rather take it from John's letters that he finds the Germans friendly to U.S. ideas – much more so than I had thought from general reading I have done. It is interesting to me to know that so much remains of the Roman occupation of Germany.

During this stormy snowy time I surely do appreciate having this back porch. I'm uncertain about where to send this letter but I guess I'll risk sending it to Chapel Hill and how I hope I'm right in doing so. Albert's folks will not drive will they? Much love to all, Mother

December, 1951

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

The robin came today well wedged in between bunches of holiday greeting cards. It is a lot at least that all seem to be well. A message from the Grays of

Clinton yesterday assures us that Neill is looking very well and is almost one of the family. But so far we have no word from Neill giving us his vacation address; I've already sent mail twice to Chapel Hill, N.C. in care of the Rev. Bernard Boyd and am hoping that is the correct address.

It may be that N. has sent his address and that it is being held up by slow mail; there is much in both the Lawrence and Kansas City papers about the struggle post office people are having caring for the mail. A picture of some of the mailing stations in K.C. reminds me of the times N. and John worked at such jobs there. It is difficult to do business at our office tho there are three people on duty at all times besides Mr. Manning. Packages have arrived on time and in excellent condition from Alvis and Eleanor.

I seem to think that I am busy – and with what do you suppose? Just getting my Christmas greetings and letters written. But how about you girls and your children; it makes my head swim to think of all you are involved in with your children. But I'd better get busy with some news or my contribution will be wanting what it may be supposed to consist of.

Several of the messages we've had ask to be remembered to all of you; Margaret Ruth sent a very attractive card showing their children; will try to send it around sometime. Nearly everyone writes a few lines at least this year. So much of my news this time is not good but here goes: my cousin in Ohio, Anna Humphreys has lost her sight to the extent that a daughter writes for her; Uncle Russell had three convulsions on a recent morning – he came out of them satisfactorily but his physician fears his mind may deteriorate; a rental property belonging to Aileen – furnished – burned the other day. She had insurance on the house but not on the furnishings. A house here burned the other day – the one that Ben Heckert used to own and that we once thought of buying. You will recall something about Rand Jewett's daughters – nurses at Lawrence Memorial hospital – Kate and Anna, both were killed Tuesday night at Lawrence in a railroad – auto collision; Anna's husband was driving the car; he is too badly injured to give an account of the accident. Warlie Cunningham has suffered a stroke. W.S. Mize is in the K.U. Medical Center for a prostate gland operation. That will be enough of that sort of news for awhile doubtless.

We got off a letter to John Tuesday I believe it was – air mail. Still have all of the roomers and are getting along fine with them. One of them has had two years at Warrensburg and means to go back and finish; reads his own copy of Time. By the way Neill we have a card from Time saying our subscription is out – it is \$6 for one year; shall I mail you this card of if you wish to renew the subscription can you get it for less? Thanks Albert and Eleanor for sending us the Readers Digest again.

I had to smile when I read in John's letter his remark about wishing he could read the German newspapers; I am sure it is a real hardship for him not to be able to bury himself in a paper. What do you say Alvis?

I talked to Calvin about the electric water heater etc. and we agreed to watch the charges and act accordingly – so far I have asked them for no cash payments for they have helped us out in a number of ways and would take no pay for it; e.g. Helen took Dad to the hospital when Ralph died, Calvin was moderate, very, in his charge for the painting, has run various errands, helped to put down the kitchen linoleum, did some work on the back porch, installed two gas stoves and other chores for me; it gives us old people a sense of security to have some young people who are ready and willing to help us out at anytime living in the yard so I do not feel like squeezing the last penny out of folks who are friends as well as renters and roomers. It is very difficult to get some one to help for pay these days so we appreciate knowing that another kind of help is available.

As I said before I feel for Mr. Harris; I am glad Mrs. Harris can rise to the occasion and hope the young daughter does too. Hope Mrs. Harris can put her emotional upsets into the background. Uncle Henry writes very flatteringly about Nancy and indicates he and Mary enjoyed having Alvis and the children with them Thanksgiving time. A note from Mrs. Edwards says she has just returned from a two weeks stay in the hospital.

“...so far I have asked them for no cash payments for they have helped us out in a number of ways and would take no pay for it.”

We've not mailed you any gifts as yet, Neill – will send them direct to Clinton, I think. I fear you did some sputtering about your car expense. Don't do too much of it; since it has occurred just be glad you could pay it – and of course could be more careful the next time; it's not good to get upset emotionally, as you well know.

It would do your heart good to hear the eldest one of our roomers caution me about going out in this icy weather; in fact he absolutely forbids me to do it. Neill could not do a better job himself.

Thanks for the family picture, Alvis. We think Nancy looks as Susan did; do others agree? Johnny and Susan look surprisingly tall. Love, Mother

Jan. 4, 1952

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

It is good to read the Robin – all so interesting telling of your Christmases and John's letters bringing fresh ideas of Germany and German ways. While it is the general opinion here that our winter so far has been severe yet we have been comfortable and free from colds. I believe the new porch keeps out a very great deal of cold. We've been lucky about escaping icy times so do not feel any concern about our well being. With the numerous gifts the children have it surely will be a very long time before they will wonder “What can I do?”

Perhaps our biggest news is that Mr. Healy sold the acreage west of the gov't road thru our old farm to a Mr. Griggs who was washed out at Cedar last spring and paid the purchase price - \$500 to us. So we have a healthy bank account and no special drain on it now. Still have all the roomers and all goes well. Since mail to Germany moves so slow I do not suppose any of this Robin will be sent on to him – so will make comments on his news when we see him. We've written him three letters but suppose he had had none of them when he wrote – had enclosed Neill's.

Miss Ballance brought home to us the Christmas tree she had at school and with our numerous gifts added to that we had as good a Christmas as we could ask for. We thank all of you for your timely gifts and feel you were most generous. I'm rich in books – Alvis sent the Revised Standard version of the New Testament, Nova, Letters to Young Churches (a translation of the N.T. epistles) and the S.S. class as part of their gift a copy of "Moses" by Sholem Asch; each one is excellent and I am enjoying each one. We were well remembered with fruit cakes and candy – and a big box of figs. Neill sent Dot and Guy some delicious pears and she gave us two of them and etc. The Williams girls sent an imported Scotch shortbread – very good. It came as did the box of cheeses at Thanksgiving time from the Gourmet Shop in Madison; some of you know of it of course. W.S. Mize passed away yesterday following an operation of prostate gland trouble – a cancer. Mrs. Mize has very poor eyesight I am told.

The Sudermans – our minister – invited me to go to Lawrence with them one evening recently to attend a session of the Student Volunteer Missionary conference; there were 2100 students – college – with their leaders in attendance from some 40 colleges and from that many countries. Any from Presbyterian College, Neill?

Uncle Henry's sent us a large box of as fine holly as I ever saw – so many berries this year. I had a lot of fun dividing it around. I might say that along with a note from Mabel came a \$20 bill – she wanted Dad to have it as help on expense he had been to in connection with Uncle Ralph. I feel Mabel has been most generous and fair and I wish Uncle H. could get over his grudge toward her. I see Neill you still like a speedy motor car. Traffic conditions are hectic here – three accidents have occurred recently at the Penner corner. Various people generally and in letters have asked to be remembered to you children – particularly the cousins. Aunt Dora is always losing your Portland address Alvis but she appreciated your greeting.

We seem to have only one sheet of the usual paper so I am using this and hope you can read the part on the flower. Miss B. and I take Omnibook together so perhaps we'll be reading some of the same articles. Hope Alvis gets her projects completed and Eleanor gets her rest and can be peppy again without effort. I am glad to have my contention that a typewriter is a most interesting gift for child verified. Do the schools in Madison or Portland have typing taught in the grades?

For the first time in years I saw the old year out and the new one in since I was baby sitting for a near but unknown neighbor to any of you for their 3 year old daughter and 6 year old son – the same place where I was once before; very fine people to cooperate with – both old and young. While there naturally I had the grandchildren much in mind. Had a chance to read children's stories. Love to all, Mother



Family reunion in DeSoto, 1954
Back row: Bill, Eleanor, John, John Jr.
Middle row: Bertha, Neill, Mary, John, Susan
Front row: Martha, Nancy

Bertha's son John kept the following Robin letter, perhaps because of its interesting reflections on growing old.

February 6, 1953

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

The Robins seem to come quite regularly now – leave here on Friday, reach Clinton on Monday and so on; Thursday and Friday for the Portland contingent. I do not suppose the Whitfords would like to be singled out for good health wishes – so as there have been letters from the children there recently I assume that all are better. There are plenty of ailments hereabouts including a broken hip for Mrs. Likely whom none of you will recall I surmise unless it be John, but fortunately your parents are still not under a physician's care. Dad, however, is full of excuses for not doing more and of aches, pains etc. However he will not see a doctor – that is a difficult task too since there is none here and the ones at Eudora and Sunflower are greatly overworked.

The polio drive locally and all over the county went over in a big way. There were a good many cases locally last summer so interest is good. News about the children's school work is always of interest to me – I am naturally inclined that way and then Miss B. is a real teacher – not just teaching for the money or because there is nothing paying more available – so she discusses a teacher's plans, methods and the individuals in her room with me very often. So tell me more.

Last Sunday Miss B. took Dad and me out to dinner at the café where we go when we go out here; the event was all too well remembered; John's and Neill's messages were here on the day and Eleanor's would have been had it not been missent to DeSoto, Wisconsin. Cash, six kerchiefs, a corsage, two pairs hose, two tea towels, a bird feeder, a dish of fruit salad, and 36 letters and cards made up the tangibles for the event. And believe it or not it makes me feel uncomfortable to have so much done for me – and the S.S. and Builders class remembered me with "words". Now for the parts all of you had in this my appreciation and thanks.

Maybe you think you dread being 81 - probably think you will never reach that age – neither did I and would have supposed life would hold nothing at that age but sitting around and waiting to die. However that is not the way I find it – as to health I feel as well as ever, perhaps, better than at many times, my enthusiasm is I believe up to par, and my interest and enjoyment of opportunities and pursuits still keen. Problems and worries are fewer and with an ever growing faith in God's promises I can meet them better. So my testimony is that I am as happy or happier than at any time of life. Pardon me for devoting so much of this letter to talking about myself and taking from your time to read it all; but I thought that perhaps you might like to know something of how I feel when I am an old old woman. Take courage for yourselves and do not mind the added years – YOU need not be really OLD.

Uncle Henry wrote us a letter filled with astonishment at the fact that there has been a golden wedding anniversary reached in the Whitelaw clan; seems he cannot recall any among his ancestors. It had not seemed so strange to me except for the fact that we were almost "up in years" when we were married. Aunt Dora and Uncle Russell [Bertha's sister and brother in law] have now been married 57 years and I am sure that both my half brothers and their wives lived to see their anniversaries well up into the 50's. So did my maternal grandparents – but not uncles, aunts or cousins so far as I know nor my parents.

Keep us informed about Nancy's hand; I am so grateful that you were able to have so skilled and interested a surgeon for her. A young man of Olathe suffered a very like accident when a car he had propped up on bricks fell with his hand underneath it in such a way that his wrist was nearly severed- should have said hand; I'd like to be able to follow his case. And I guess this is all.

Much love to all,
Mother

IN MEMORIAM

Mrs. Bertha Elizabeth Bell Whitelaw 95 died August 24, 1964 at the age of 92. Prior to her marriage in 1903 to John Whitelaw 97, she taught Latin and Greek in the Iberia Academy at Iberia, Missouri, and later at the Kidder Institute in Kidder, Missouri. In 1909 she moved to Kansas and had resided in DeSoto since 1919 where she was active in the Methodist church with the Woman's Society and the Sunday school classes. She was a member of the Athenaeum Club and the DeSoto Chapter of the Grange. Her husband preceded her in death, dying in 1961. She is survived by a daughter, two sons, six grandchildren and a great-grandson.

IN MEMORIAM

Mrs. Bertha Elizabeth Bell Whitelaw, 95, died August 24, 1964 at the age of 92. Prior to her marriage in 1903 to John Whitelaw 97 [again, probably the year he graduated or at least his class], she taught Latin and Greek in the Iberia Academy at Iberia, Missouri, and later at the Kidder Institute in Kidder, Missouri. In 1909 she moved to Kansas and had resided in DeSoto since 1919 where she was active in the Methodist church with the Woman's Society and the Sunday school classes. She was a member of the Athenaeum Club and the DeSoto Chapter of the Grange. Her husband preceded her in death, dying in 1961. She is survived by a daughter, two sons, six grandchildren and a great grandson.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

MRS. BERTHA BELL WHITELAW
FEBRUARY 1, 1872
AUGUST 24, 1964

GOD hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.

SERVICES

THURSDAY AUG. 27, 1964 2:00 P.M.
DESOTO METHODIST CHURCH

OFFICIATING

REV. JAMES M. STARKEY
DESOTO METHODIST CHURCH

MUSIC

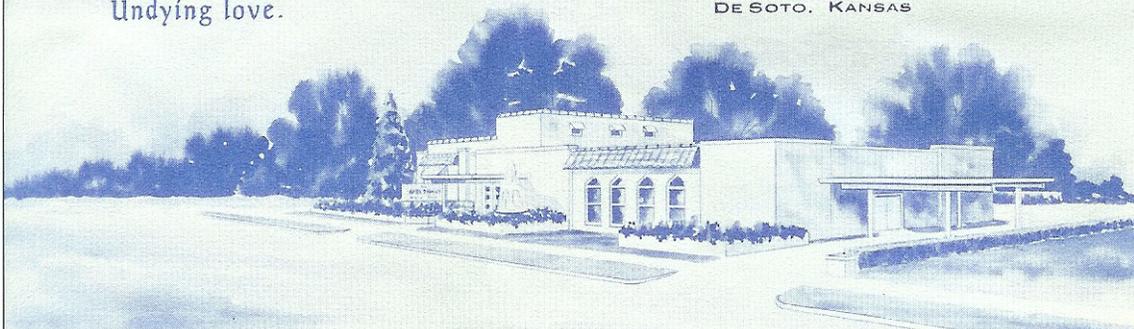
SPECIAL ORGAN SELECTIONS
ORGANIST - MR GUY V LONGSTRETH

CASKET BEARERS

HOWARD CALDWELL LLOYD COKER
WILLIAM JACKSON ELMER JEWETT
ELDEAN SCHULTZ EDGAR SOULE

PLACE OF INTERMENT

SILENT CITY CEMETERY
DESOTO, KANSAS



The De Soto News

DE SOTO, JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS, THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 1964

Mrs. Whitelaw Dies At Gardner Hospital

OBITUARY

MRS. BERTHA WHITELAW

Bertha Bell Whitelaw was born at Earlham, Iowa on Feb. 1, 1872, daughter of Alexander and Martha Gordon Bell. She was graduated from Drury College of Springfield, Missouri in 1895. She was married to John Whitelaw of Kidder, Missouri on Jan. 21, 1903. Prior to her marriage, Mrs. Whitelaw had been a teacher of Latin and Greek in the Iberia Academy at Iberia, Missouri, and later at Kidder Institute, Kidder, Missouri.

Mrs. Whitelaw moved with her family from Kidder, Missouri to the old Franklin area near Lawrence, Kansas in 1909, and remained there until the family moved to De Soto in 1919. At De Soto Mrs. Whitelaw has been active in the Methodist church, teaching a Sunday School class continuously for many years, and being active in the Woman's Society. She also has been a long-time member of the Athenaeum Club and the De Soto Chapter of the Grange.

Survivors are a daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Whitford, Mt. Hamilton, California; two sons, Dr. Neill G. Whitelaw, Clinton, S. C., John M. Whitelaw, Portland, Ore.; six grandchildren and a great-grandson. Services were held at 2 o'clock Thursday at the De Soto Methodist church; burial was in Silent City Cemetery, De Soto.

Mrs. Whitelaw died at the Gardner Community Medical Center on Monday, August 24, 1964 at the age of 92.

Submitted By
Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford

The DeSoto News
August 27, 1964

Mrs. Whitelaw Dies at Gardner Hospital Obituary Mrs. Bertha Whitelaw

Bertha Bell Whitelaw was born at Earlham, Iowa on Feb. 1, 1872, daughter of Alexander and Martha Gordon Bell. She was graduated from Drury College of Springfield, Missouri in 1895. She was married to John Whitelaw of Kidder, Missouri on Jan. 21, 1903. Prior to her marriage, Mrs. Whitelaw had been a teacher of Latin and Greek in the Iberia Academy at Iberia, Missouri, and later at Kidder Institute, Kidder, Missouri.

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LEADER AND FRIEND

“The most remarkable woman I ever knew.”

Pansy Penner, friend of Bertha Whitelaw

DeSoto Writer Has Record in Her Job

What is it like to have written the news from your home town every week for 35 years? If you can't imagine, ask Mrs. Bertha Bell Whitelaw of DeSoto, who has set just that kind of record. She was not a young girl when she started either. She was 51, in fact.

“It was 1923,” she recalls, “our children were off to college and, as any parent knows, that always means extra cash from the parents. We had lived near Lawrence, near Noria in Franklin community, before moving to DeSoto in 1919. We had read the Journal-World since



MRS. BERTHA WHITELAW

In her later years, Bertha became something of a community institution. Her long residence in DeSoto, her years of reporting on local news for the newspapers, and her participation in church and civic groups, made her well-known and respected.

She was a familiar figure on her daily walks into town. An article in a local history book, written about forty years after her death, recounts the following story:

“Bertha Bell was a short, wiry person. She walked about everywhere she went in DeSoto. She carried a woven wicker basket and in later years she used a cane to make the incline from her home to town. Oftentimes she would leave her cane at Longstreths Service Station because she could coast on down to the church. Then she would pick it up on the way back home.”

Complete article transcribed on page 108

This same article provides the following story about her interest in education:

“At one time Bertha Bell offered to teach Latin in the H.S. for free if they would add it to their curriculum. She was a great promoter of education. But no, they did not add it to their curriculum. She could talk intelligently on almost any subject due to the fact that she read many magazines and newspapers and her Bible each evening as her entertainment.”

In 1958, the DeSoto Methodist Church celebrated its centennial; Bertha was one of those honored in recognition of her 40 years of continuous service as a Sunday School teacher.

In the following pages, I have included all the newspaper articles I have found about Bertha Bell Whitelaw. Together, they give a picture of a woman who was integrated into her community and revered by her fellow townspeople.

Quilting Bee Links the Decades

Kansas City Star –

April 27, 1958 (maybe – hard to tell from photocopy)

written by Sarah Kroh.

Excerpts

The Golden Circle, as this quilting group of the Women’s Society of Christian Service is called, has been meeting every Wednesday as far back as the oldest members can recall. That was in the 1880’s. The quilters simply don’t believe in vacations or holidays. They meet every Wednesday throughout the year. They work on two quilts and have 17 ahead. When they are swamped, they work on Friday also.

Another 86 year old woman who wouldn’t dream of missing the quilting sessions is Mrs. John Whitelaw. This little gray-haired woman, known to her friends as Bertha Bell, “out quilts and outwalks us all,” a younger member declared. This energetic woman who also teaches a Sunday school class at the church and has for 40 years, passes up offers of rides to the quilting days. She says she needs the exercise. For the last 40 years Mrs. Whitelaw has been at the church almost every Wednesday. She learned to quilt from her mother when she was 30 years old [note – she must have been younger, because her mother died when she was 28]. So I’ve been quilting 56 years,” she declared. To Mrs. Whitelaw, as to many others, the circle means a great deal in companionship. But she says the spiritual side of the meetings is the most important. Devotions are held regularly after the noon luncheons. “We can grow in grace here together,” she said simply.

Financially, the circle through the years has made sizable contributions to the church. At one time the women paid the preacher’s salary. Now they help in many ways, with missions, furnishings and maintenance.

The following article, like the preceding, may be from the Kansas City Star – one of the two is dated April 27, 1958 - or maybe they were both in the same paper on the same day

DeSoto Writer Has Record in Her Job

What is it like to have written the news from your home town every week for 35 years? If you can’t imagine, ask Mrs. Bertha Bell Whitelaw of DeSoto, who has set just that kind of record. She was not a young girl when she started either. She was 51, in fact.

“It was 1923,” she recalls, “our children were off to college and, as any parent knows, that always means extra cash from the parents. We had lived near Lawrence, near Noria in Franklin community, before moving to DeSoto in 1919. We had read the Journal-World since 1910 and my first thought was to add the family coffers by reporting.” She has been reporting ever since.

Mrs. Whitelaw was valedictorian of her class on graduation from Drury College at Springfield, MO. Her sister also was highest ranking graduate in her turn at the same school and two of the three Whitelaw children have followed suit. The oldest, now Dr. Neill Whitelaw of Presbyterian College at Clinton, S.C., missed the honor, graduating second in his class while the family lived in Johnson County. But he now wears a Phi Beta Kappa key, thus redeeming himself. The Whitelaw daughter, Eleanor, now Mrs.

Quilting Bee Links the Decades.

Many Members of DeSoto Group Have Been Attending Sessions Each Week for More Than Half a Century.

By Sarah Kroh.
(A Member of The Star's Staff.)

DESOTO, KAS., April 26. The glow of friendship that often shines between the old and younger generations is doubtless the nicest side of the Wednesday quilting meetings in the Methodist church here.

For age doesn't matter—whether you're 86 or many years younger, you feel right at home in the basement of this neat white frame church in this small town.

Loyal to Group.

Visiting and quilting seem to go together, and the women (about 20 to 25 come every week) say the older ones are the most faithful. The younger ones say, too, many of their elders can quilt faster (and better) than they.

The Golden Circle, as this quilting group of the Women's Society of Christian Service is called, has been meeting every Wednesday as far back as the oldest members can recall. That was in the 1880's.

The quilters simply don't believe in vacations or holidays. They meet every Wednesday throughout the year. They work on two quilts and have 17 ahead. When they are swamped, they work on Fridays also.

Best Day of Week.

One of the oldest in the group is Mrs. Nannie Marshall, who was 86 this month. Mrs. Marshall said: "When I came here in 1891, the women were quilting every Wednesday, and they haven't missed a Wednesday to my knowledge."

Mrs. Marshall, a member of the circle 67 years, says Wednesday is the best day of the week for her. For here she sees her old friends and makes new ones.

Another 86-year-old woman who wouldn't dream of missing the quilting sessions is Mrs. John Whitelaw.

The little gray-haired woman, known to her friends as Bertha Bell, "outquits and outwalks

us all," a younger member declared.

Record of 40 Years.

This energetic woman who also teaches a Sunday school class at the church and has for 40 years, passes up offers of rides to the quilting days. She says she needs the exercise.

For the last 40 years Mrs. Whitelaw has been at the church almost every Wednesday. She learned to quilt from her mother when she was 30 years old.

"So I've been quilting 56 years," she declared.

To Mrs. Whitelaw, as to many others, the circle means a great deal in companionship. But she says the spiritual side of the meetings is the most important. Devotions are held regularly after the noon luncheons.

"We can grow in grace here together," she said simply.

Work Begins Early.

Promptly at 9:30 o'clock on Wednesdays, quilting activities begin in earnest in this quiet little town. Half an hour or so before that the doors are

usually opened by the first arrivals, who are Mrs. Jewel Smith and her group of riders.

Sometime ago Mrs. Smith appointed herself as unofficial transportation chairman to see that all members who needed rides were taken to the church. So she cheerfully picks up the older members early in the morning and takes them home when the day is over about 4 o'clock.

The morning slides by quickly from 9:30 to 12 o'clock as the women work and, of course, enjoy conversing.

"Oh, we talk about our children, the grandchildren, neighbors who have moved away and about our church, which is so vital to us," Mrs. G. V. Longstreth, who has belonged to the group several decades explained.

News of Friends.

"We aren't a gossip group, though; but this is the one day of the week away from home for some of our oldest members. So there's plenty of news to discuss," she added.

This is the year of the church's centennial. That is

the important topic at the moment.

At noon stitching is halted while the women gather around tables filled with homemade food. Often recipes are exchanged as the women enjoy each other's cooking.

Aid Many Projects.

President of the circle is Mrs. Fern Kercheval. Mrs. Frank Richardson and Mrs. Nellie Freeman are chairmen of arrangements for handling the quilts. Mrs. Albert Cobb is property supervisor.

Financially, the circle through the years has made sizable contributions to the church. At one time the women paid the preacher's salary. Now they help in many ways, with missions, furnishings and maintenance. They also contribute \$300 annually to the church budget.

The best contribution can't be counted in terms of money, they say. That is the contribution their older women make in guidance and wisdom for the younger ones.

One member explained:

"We don't need to think up ways to keep our older members busy and happy. We depend on them to give us that spark and grace which we all need so much today."



QUILTING AND CONVERSATION are intermingled as members of the Golden Circle of the DeSoto Methodist church work on a wedding ring pattern. From left to right are Mrs. John Whitelaw, 86; Mrs. Nannie Marshall, also 86; Mrs. William Loveall, 80; Mrs. Albert Cobb (standing), who is property supervisor, and Mrs. Dorothy Gregory, 75.

Albert Whitford of Madison, Wis., and the second son, John Whitelaw of Portland, Ore., were class valedictorians. All are college graduates and hold advanced degrees.

Dr. Neill Whitelaw is chairman of the physics department at Presbyterian College. John Whitelaw heads the Portland Community Council, comparable to the Community Chest. Dr. Whitford, son-in-law, currently is director of Washburn Observatory at Wisconsin University and will go in August to California to become director of Lick Observatory.

Mrs. Whitelaw, active and alert at 86, says she got her own schooling the hard way, driving five miles by horse and buggy over muddy Ozark roads every day [note – this might have been while attending Drury College – did she live at home?]

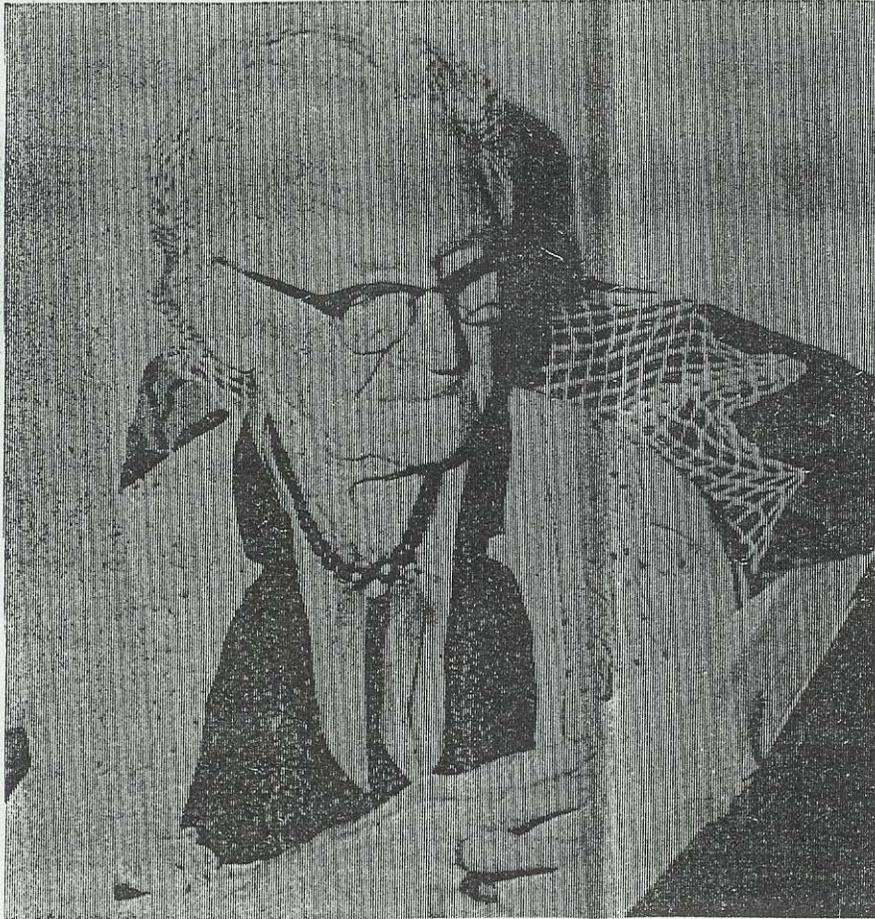
Before her marriage she taught at an academy near Iberia, Mo. South of Jefferson City. Tuscumbia is the county seat. [I thought it was in Miller County.] Later she was on the faculty of Kidder Academy near Cameron. She married a farmer and moved to Kansas where she has made her home since. Her husband now is retired.

Besides being a reporter, Mrs. Whitelaw is an ardent stamp collector and loves to work puzzles. A member of the DeSoto Methodist Church since moving there, she has taught a Sunday School class 30 years, its members, as she says, "growing old with me." It was first called the "Live Wives."

THE JOHNSON COUNTY DEMOCRAT



COUNTRY CORRESPONDENT'S WORKSHOP. The Johnson County Democrat was host to its country correspondents at a workshop held Thursday. The group met at the Democrat, was conducted through the plant and then attended a luncheon and business session at the Episcopal church. In the photo at the left, Mrs. Harold Hodges, Monticello correspondent, listens to a conversation between Mrs. Bertha Whitelaw, DeSoto and guest speaker Miss Maude Freeland of Missouri University. Mrs. Frank Hodges, jr. talks with Miss Frances Grinstead, guest speaker from the University of Kansas, in the photo on the right.



Mrs. Bertha Whitelaw and her Bible

Enthusiasm DeSoto R

"I've always been a naturally enthusiastic person. Perhaps that is one of the reasons for my long life. I think if you are interested in life you will live a better life than if you settle down when old age comes and don't care if school keeps or not."

That is the view of Mrs. Bertha Bell Whitelaw, DeSoto, who celebrated her 90th birthday this month.

She is still active in her church as well as doing much of her housework and cooking alone.

"I never supposed I'd attain this age. I don't feel old. I don't see or hear as well as I use to, but I still can walk. I walk up town every day. You can't expect to have everything when you live this long I suppose."

Enthusiasm for Life Keeps 90 year old DeSoto Resident Active, 'Youthful'

The Daily News, Saturday, Feb. 24, 1962 page 5

"I've always been a naturally enthusiastic person. Perhaps that is one of the reasons for my long life. I think if you are interested in life you will live a better life than if you settle down when old age comes and don't care if school keeps or not."

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Her mind is alert and her memory hasn't failed her, either. She still teaches Sunday School at the DeSoto Methodist Church as she has for 43 years.

"I teach the Builders' Class now. All of the members are younger than I am but they are still 'old.' I started by teaching a high school class and we've just grown old together," Mrs. Whitelaw said.

She also is still active in the church's Women's Society for Christian Service and the Aetheaeum Club. "The Aetheaeum is the oldest club in DeSoto and I'm the oldest member of it now. I've held numerous offices in it over the years," the bright little woman said.

Mrs. Whitelaw has lived in DeSoto since 1919.

"All of my children graduated valedictorian from DeSoto High School," she commented, proudly. She has three children, Dr. Neill

Whitelaw, head of the physics department of Presbyterian College, Clinton, S.C., Mrs. A.E. Whitford of Mt. Hamilton, Calif., and John M. Whitelaw, director of the Community Chest for Portland, Ore. Dr. Whitelaw has his Ph.D. and the other two children have received their maters' degrees.

She has six grandchildren.

Mrs. Whitelaw graduated from Drury College in Springfield, Mo., in 1895. "It wasn't hard to get into college in those days because not many persons wanted to attend college. I had just grown up with the idea that I would attend college. I heard my mother talking to a young woman when I was quite young. They were talking about the woman's having recently graduated from college. I liked the sound of that word 'graduated' and decided I wanted to do it too," she said.

She majored in Latin and taught in academies in Missouri for five years. "I've maintained my interest in words. I liked doing riddles when I was a little girl and today I like to work out word puzzles," she said.

People are her biggest interest and she loves to chat. In 1923 she started writing as a correspondent for a newspaper and her items still appear in The Daily News. Daily Mrs. Whitelaw reads the newspaper and the Bible. She is a graduate of the Menninger Bible course. "If more people would study the Bible this world would be a much better place. I know I fall far short of the life I should lead, yet, 'as man thinkest, so he is,'" she said.

Tribute

De Soto News Johnson County Kansas, September 3, 1964, Vo. 44 No. 47

By Pansy Penner, P. 1

"The most remarkable woman I ever knew, especially for her age". That is a general summing up of Bertha Bell (Whitelaw) as she was familiarly known by a host of friends. A graduate of college before the turn of the century! And a teacher of Latin and Greek in two different academies – a true picture of her venturing spirit. She never lost her love of learning and was a constant reader until her eyes were affected by cataracts over a year ago; astronomy and philatelics being two hobbies of learning as well as crossword puzzles! It wasn't just curiosity which prompted her favorite saying, "Know any news?" She was vitally interested in people and she converted that characteristic into newspaper correspondence, writing for years for the local News, the Olathe Democrat and the Lawrence Journal World. Both the latter newspapers recognized her unusual ability and she was the subject of feature stories paying tribute to her.

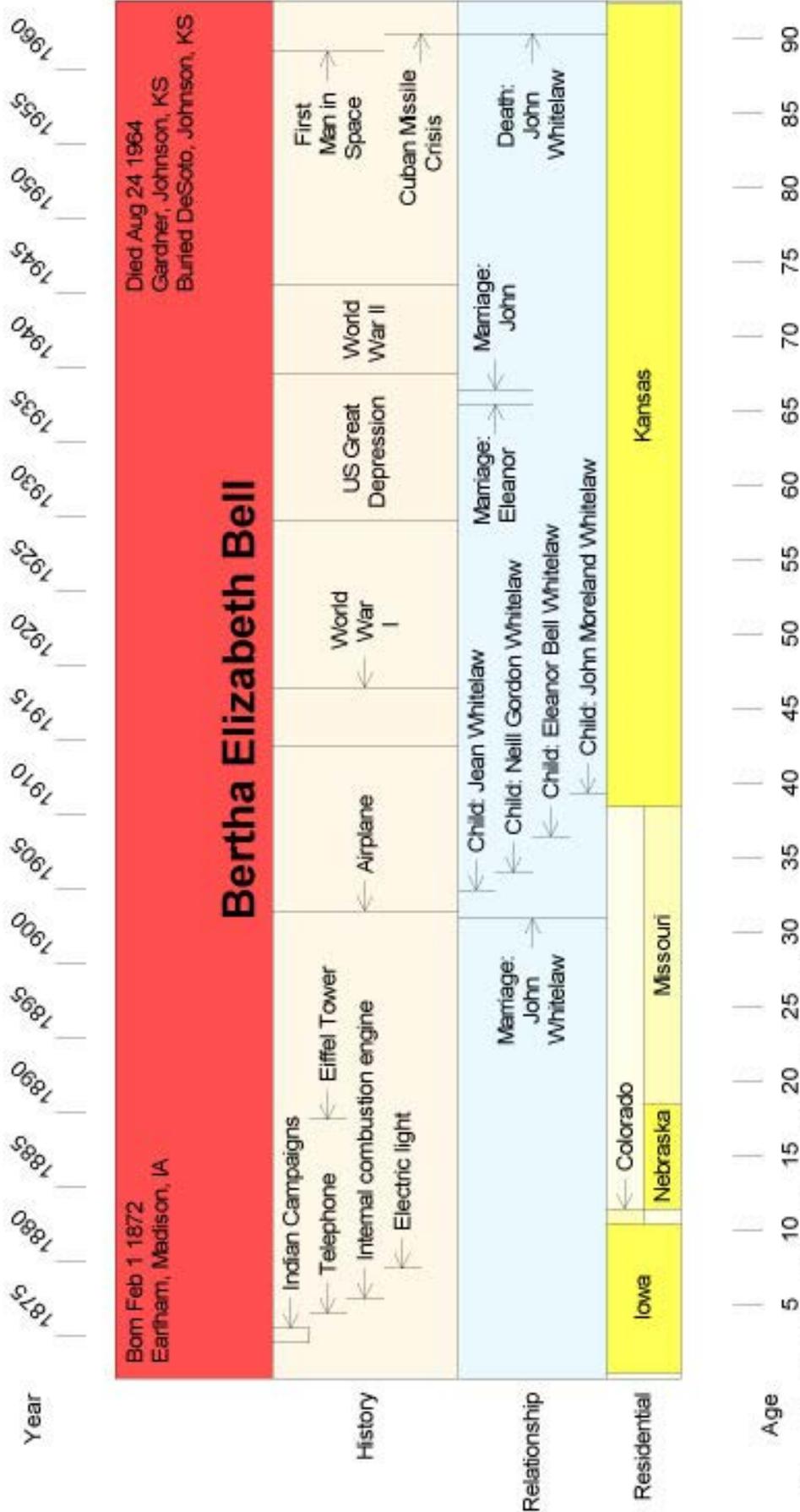
She was public spirited, having been a vital member of the school board for many years, active in the Grange, Athenaeum Club, and any other worthwhile project. But her heart and soul were in the church, this one having been the fourth denomination to which she had belonged. She was a graduate of the Menninger Bible course. They moved to the farm Southwest of De Soto in the summer of 1919 and she began teaching a Sunday School class of youth, The Live Wires (I was in it), in August and taught continuously until 1963 when her health forced her into the hospital – 44 years of inspirational and productive Christian influence. She served on the official board, in the Ladies Aid and was a charter member of the WSCS and instigator its prayer circle – every department was of interest and vital concern to her.

All community newcomers were her concern too, and her neighbors as her family. She loved her home, the "sunsets on the Kaw" the river scenes and the bridge. She walked uptown daily – rain or shine, snow or sleet, refusing freely offered rides most of the time, preferring her walk, which she found helpful, inspiring and neighborly. What a lesson for all of us!

Concerning her family with whom she was in constant touch by letter and phone, but circumstances forced them to be far apart; her consoling thought was, "I'd rather they were away and wishing to be back, than to be here and wishing they were away."

Her one dominant fault which worried her friends was her extreme aversion to attention, concern and gifts, being imbued with an extreme sense of modesty, sincere feeling of shortcomings and unworthiness. None of us agreed with her. Her quick wit, her sincere expressions of concern and commendation, her deep spirituality, her personality, and influence have made a contribution to all who came in contact with her.

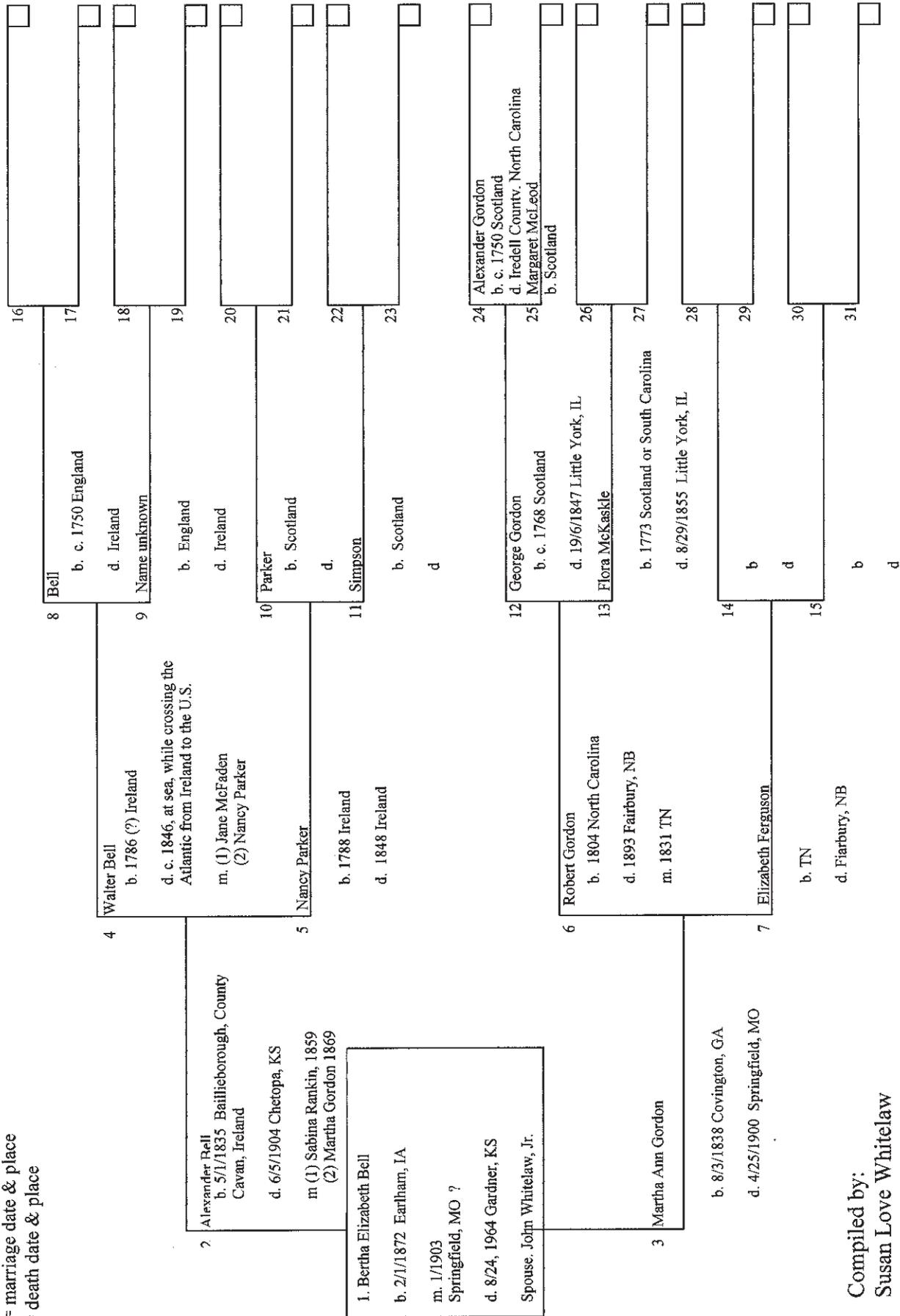
APPENDIX A



Biographical Chart for Bertha Elizabeth Bell (1872-1964)
 Created on Dec 1 2007

Ancestor Chart: BERTHA BELL WHITELAW

b= birth date & place
 m= marriage date & place
 d= death date & place



Compiled by:
 Susan Love Whitelaw
 July, 2007

APPENDIX B

ALEXANDER BELL, FATHER OF BERTHA BELL

Our Bell ancestors come from Baillieborough, County Cavan, Ireland. County Cavan was one of the nine counties forming the Ulster Province, and was colonized by the British in the seventeenth century with English and Scottish Protestants, as part of a campaign to suppress the native, Roman Catholic, Irish population. It is not known what role, if any, our ancestors played in this British policy. In 1922, when Northern Ireland was formed as a state separate from the Republic of Ireland, County Cavan and two other counties on the border of the two states were not included in Northern Ireland and are today part of the Irish Republic.



The following genealogical information comes from various family documents which I have transcribed and included at the end of this Appendix.

Bertha's Great Grandfather Bell

The first Bell ancestor about whom we have any information was Bertha Bell Whitelaw's great-grandfather. This ancestor Bell (first name not known) was born in England in about 1750, though his family may have come from Scotland. He was raised a Protestant. His wife was also English. At some time he moved to Ireland.

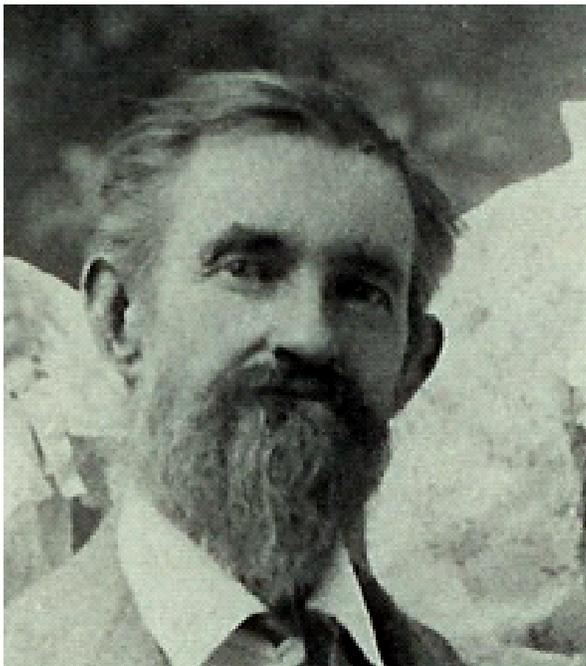
Walter and Nancy Parker Bell

His son, Walter Bell, was born in Ireland. He married Jane McFaden, and after her death he married Nancy Parker, our ancestor. She was born in Ireland but her parents came from Scotland. Her mother's maiden name was Simpson. Eleven children were born to Walter and Nancy Bell, including Alexander, their eighth child and Bertha Bell Whitelaw's father. All the children were born in the province of Ulster, County Cavan, near the town of Bailieborough. Nancy Parker Bell was buried in Ireland.

Immigration to the U.S.

All of Walter and Nancy Bell's children emigrated to the U.S. in relays between 1850 and 1860. One of Walter's daughters, Esther, returned to Ireland to bring him to the U.S., but he died on the ship en route, and was buried at sea.

We don't know the specific reasons for the decision of the Bell family to immigrate to the U.S. However, they were part of a general exodus from Ireland at the time. The emigration from the Ulster Provinces, largely Protestant, was somewhat different from the emigration of the mainly Roman Catholic population in the southern provinces. According to the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (1980) the Ulster Irish, also known as the Scotch-Irish, were not as severely affected by the great potato famine as was the rest of Ireland. Immigration from Ulster to the U.S. had been in full swing since pre-Revolutionary times, long before the potato famine of the 1840s. Many, if not most, of the Ulster Irish immigrants were middle class, often small farmers, but with a substantial minority of laborers and also of artisans and shopkeepers.



Alexander Bell

Alexander Bell

Alexander Bell, Bertha Bell Whitelaw's father, was born on May 1, 1835, in Baillieborough, Ireland. He came to the U.S. when he was 17 years old, in 1852. He sailed on the ship "Universe," which left Liverpool, England, and arrived in New York on March 30, 1852. He lived first in New York City, where he worked as a cabinet-maker, then Michigan and Illinois. His first wife was Sabina Rankin (b. May 17, 1843); he married her in Illinois in 1859, and had two sons, William Henry and Alexander Rankin. When she died on Nov. 11, 1862, in Henderson County, Illinois, her parents raised his two sons, though Alexander stayed in close contact with them all his life. According to Gordon Campbell, a descendant of Bertha's sister, Eudora, Sabina Rankin's brother, David Rankin, was the founder of Tarkio College, Tarkio, MO.

Alexander Bell joined the Union Army as a Private, on May 24, 1864. He enrolled in Company D, 138th Regiment of Illinois, and was discharged on Dec. 15, 1864. Five of Alexander's brothers also served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and three of them were killed in action or died of wounds.

After the Civil War, he entered a partnership with a brother and a brother-in-law and bought a large farm in Earlham, Iowa. He married Martha Gordon, Bertha Bell Whitelaw's mother, in 1869, and continued to farm in Iowa, Colorado, and Nebraska. The family finally settled in Springfield, Missouri.

He and Martha had five children, Eudora, Bertha (our ancestor), Robert, and

two other sons who died as children. He outlived his wife by four years, and died in the home of Alexander, a son by his first wife, in Chetopa, Kansas, in 1904. He is buried in Springfield, Missouri.

Bell Family Documents

The following documents are reproduced below:

- Letter from Alexander Bell to His Children, 1903
- Regimental History of the 138th Regiment of Illinois (Alexander Bell's Regiment during the Civil War)
- 1904 Obituary of Alexander Bell
- A Bell Family Tree, prepared by Agnes Bell Campbell.
- Alexander and Martha Gordon Bell Family Chart, prepared by Susan Whitelaw.
- 1937 Letter by Bertha Bell Whitelaw, with genealogical information on her father, Alexander Bell, and his siblings.
- 1955 Letter by Bertha Bell Whitelaw. This letter expands on the previous one, with additional genealogical information on her father, Alexander Bell, and his siblings.
- Undated document on the Bell family by Bertha Bell Whitelaw's cousin, Dr. Alexander Flack. This document covers the same material as the Bertha Bell Whitelaw letters, but offers additional detail on Alexander Bell's parents, siblings, and children.
- 1955 Letter by Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford, Bertha Bell Whitelaw's daughter, describing her trip to Ireland seeking Bell family roots.

Letter of Alexander Bell to His Children, 1903*

LeRoy, Minnesota
Nov. 9th, 1903

My dear children, You see by this letter heading that I am back in LeRoy. I am back sooner than I expected. Most cataract patients have to stay 15 or 20 days but I got off at 10h 2 weeks today noon. I started for Rochester it is about the same distance from LeRoy that St. Joseph is from Kidder, it is a nice little city of 1,000 people. There is an Insane Hospital located here and at present has 1500 patients in it and St. Maryes Hospital has 160 surgical patients in it all the time from 12 to 20 people are operated on every day except sabbath this number leave every day it is wonderfully busy place with 3 operating tables one on the 2nd floor and 2 on the 3rd floor about 11 Drs. all told have a hand in the work. 3 of these are women the Mayo Bros do all the cutting. Very few of these operations cost less than \$100, some of them cost \$1,500.00 and they cure 99 per cent of all cases people from every where are here it is said to be the only place in the U.S. where they take people a part and put them together again sound and whole. I arrived at the hospital Monday afternoon 4 o'clock and was assigned a bed then I was taken to the bathroom and given a warm bath. Then my supper brought to me at my bed at 5:30 then I was allowed to visit the patients in this ward and get acquainted and talk until 9 o'clock. Then the lights are turned off and all noise must cease the halls are fully lit up all night this makes plenty of lights in the wards and rooms for the night watchers call Bells are attached to the beds so if you want anything you can ring the nurse up the beds are nice and comfortable a very nice little dutch girl was our waiter during the day time and visited us 2 to 3 times daily and were very nice to us and spoke words of good cheer in our ears some of the wards are cared for by the sisters altogether there is some 30 of them. I have no use for them in a general way. The board is very good and plenty of it well on Tuesday morning at a little before 9 o'clock I was ordered by my nurse to get ready for the operating table. I was ordered take off all but my under cloths and socks and put on a night shirt and rap up in a blanket and march with the nurse to the operating room and on arriving there I found a large room of wonderful Brilliance glass floor everything white as snow and in this room were 7 Drs. and 4 of the sisters 3 of them are Drs. Dr. Charles Mayo does all work on the eye he also does all kinds of cutting and carving on all parts of the body well there is a long white table underlaid with Pulverised ice and so I laid down and I felt as if I would freeze so very cold then they commenced on my head and eyes they washed my eyes with soap and warm water put warm cloth thick and heavy over my eyes then they tied my head up in cloths then put medison in both eyes then rubbed my eyes for a few moments then put more medison in both eyes then let me rest for awhile and when I layd there until I thought I was about froze the Dr. went to cutting with his instrument he ran it around the inside my eye I could feel it and then he seemed to lift it right up and the light came in under this covering he was taking off and he showed it to me and it looked like a grain of yellow corn. My eye felt quite sore and is still quite sore after the operation I was placed on what is called the Hury up and run to my ward and placed in my bed by 2 nurses and covered up with blankets and it was about 20 hours before I regained my natural Heat. I was in total darkness now and so remained until the next Monday night at 6 o'clock then the Dr. dressed my eye and turned out my left eye. I remained in bed until Monday morning they take away all your clothes and bring them back when you are fit to get up the nurse fed me all this time a very kind good girl she is and so on Thursday morning I was permitted to leave on account of an old man who had his leg taken off and lived south of LeRoy in Iowa and I could help him a most home otherwise I would had to have staid a week longer my eye is getting better of its soreness but it will sometime before it is all healed. I have never heard from Gordon yet did he come up to your place. I will write him today Dr. Bill \$100.00 Hospital bill \$10.75 all expense \$116.50 Your loving Father, A.B.

*original spelling retained

138th Illinois Infantry, Regiment History

Adjutant General's Report

The One Hundred and Thirty-eighth Infantry was enrolled for service during the month of May. This Regiment rendezvoused at Camp Wood, Quincy, Ill., and was mustered into the United States service June 21, 1864, with Colonel J. W. Goodwin as Colonel commanding.

On the 26th day of June the Regiment was directed by the Secretary of War to proceed to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and there to report to Major General Samuel R. Curtis, commanding the Department of Kansas. The Regiment was assigned to garrison duty at Fort Leavenworth, with Colonel as Post Commander.

This Regiment contained many veterans, whose discipline did not fail to give it the character of experience, and whose previous honorable service infused into its ranks a spirit of praiseworthy and patriotic emulation.

At this time the counties of Jackson, Clay, Platt, Ray and Lafayette, and other counties along the western border of Missouri was over-run and in possession of bands of guerrillas and bushwhackers under the command of the noted Bill Anderson, Cy Gordon and Coon Thornton. Early in July Major Tunnison with companies C and F, was ordered to occupy the post of Weston, Missouri, and operate from this point in driving the guerrillas from this territory. During the months of July, August and a portion of September these companies were in active service, scarcely a day passing without a conflict with some of the horde of desperadoes infesting that community. Early in the month of September, having cleared the counties spoken of, of guerrillas and bushwhackers, companies C and F returned to Fort Leavenworth to continue their services in garrison duty. At the expiration of the term of service the regiment returned to Camp Butler, near Springfield, for muster out.

At this time General Price, commanding the Trans-Mississippi Army, invaded the State of Missouri from the southeast, driving General Ewing, who occupied Pilot Knob from the entrenchments and taking possession of that part of the State, thus cutting off communication between St. Louis and the southeast. The safety of St. Louis and the entire State of Missouri was threatened by this invasion. General Rosencrans was in command of the Department of Missouri, and was at the head of an inadequate and poorly appointed army contending against fearful odds for the preservation of the city and entire State. This regiment voluntarily extended its term of service, and, by direction of the Secretary of War, proceeded to St. Louis and there reported to General Rosencrans for duty.

The duty of opening up the communication between the South and East part of the State was assigned to this Regiment. They proceeded along the Iron Mountain Railroad as far as Ironton, Company C occupying the advance in guarding railway bridges from destruction by the rear of Price's Army. After General Price and his army was driven from the State this Regiment again returned to Camp Butler and was mustered out of the United States service on the 14th day of October.

Source: www.rootsweb.com/~ilcivilw/history/138.htm

Obituary [Alexander Bell died June 5, 1904]

The death of Alexander Bell at the home of his son A.R.[Alexander Rankin] Bell, Esq., came as a great shock to his many friends. Mr. Bell came here only a week or ten days before his death in perfect health. On Friday night May 27, he was taken suddenly sick and Sunday noon, June 5th, he passed away. Mr. Bell was born in County Cavan, Ireland, May 1, 1835. He came to America in 1852 and located at Bigsville, Ill., where he was married to Sabina Rankin in 1859 and to them three children were born, William and A.R. Bell of this city and a daughter who died in infancy. Mrs. Bell died in 1866. In 1869 Mr. Bell was married to Martha Gordon of Bigsville and five children blessed this union – three sons and two daughters. Two sons, Ralph and Norman, dying in childhood. The remaining children are Mrs. J.R. Jones [Eudora] of M [?]oggon, Iowa, Mrs. John Whitelaw, Jr., of Kidder, Mo., and Mr. A.G. Bell of Springfield, Mo, their mother, Mrs. Martha Bell, having died four years ago.

Mr. Bell lived for 15 years in Illinois and in 1871 moved to Earlham, Iowa, where they resided until 1884 when through the ill health of Mrs. Bell they sought a change of climate and for a year resided in Colorado and two years in Nebraska and in 1887 located in Springfield, Mo., which remained his home until his death.

Mr. Bell was an active and influential member of the United Presbyterian church for 44 years, having united with the church at Bigsville, Ill., in 1860. He was a man much interested in all moral reforms and an active and ardent temperance man, a firm believer in the "might of right," of rugged honesty and faithfulness, a citizen that is a great loss to his community, for an honest, sober, God-fearing citizenship is the most valuable asset a community can have.

All of his children were able to reach the bedside before his death, excepting the Mrs. Rev. Jones of Iowa, whose husband came in Monday Morning. Short services for the immediate friends were held at the home of Mr. A.R. Bell Monday morning by Rev. McFadden and the remains were taken to the old home at Springfield, Mo., to rest beside the loved ones in the beautiful Hazelwood Cemetery.

Everything was done by kind hands to make the last hours of Mr. Bell as painless as possible and in the hope that his life might be spared for years of usefulness, but the summons came and he answered, "Ready," and leaves as a priceless heritage the memory of a useful life, a Christian character and a loving father to his children and grandchildren.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Martha Gordon and Alexander Bell Family Chart

Alexander Bell (1835-1904)

m. (1) 1859 Sabina Rankin (d. 1866)

Children;

William

Alexander Rankin

m. (2) 1869 Martha Ann Gordon (1838-1900)

Children;

Eudora G. Bell (1870-1957)

m. John Russell Jones (1866-1953)

Eula Ione Jones (1896-1979)

Aileen Bell Jones (1900-1977)

Nova Lucille Jones (1902-199?)

Shirley Katherine Jones (1903-1947)

Gordon Russell Jones (1909-1990)

Bertha Elizabeth Bell (1872-1964)

m. John Whitelaw, Jr. (1870-1961)

Neill Gordon Whitelaw (1906-1968)

Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford (1908-1986)

John Moreland Whitelaw (1911-1974)

Robert Gordon Bell (1874-1906)

Ralph Alvin Bell (1876-1887)

Norman Osmond Bell (1878-1885)

Bertha Bell Whitelaw Letter, 1937

Bertha Bell Whitelaw wrote of her Bell family ancestors in a letter to her children.. [ed.note – I have re-ordered some of the sentences for the sake of coherence]

My father [Alexander Bell] lived at Ballyboro, County Cavan in the north of Ireland.

My great grandfather (first name unknown but as it was the custom to name a son for his father it may have been Walter – my grandfather's name) was born in England and may have come from Scotland, say about 1750 or thereabouts.

Great grandmother Bell also was born in England.

G'pa Bell's [Walter Bell] first wife was Jane McFaden. My father [Alexander Bell] was the second wife's child).

My father's brothers and sisters came to the U.S. in relays from about 1850 to 60. My grandfather [Walter Bell] started too but died aboard a sailing vessel and was buried at sea.

My grandmother (name Nancy Parker) was born in Ireland but her parents came from Scotland – don't know what part; (maybe I could find out.) Simpson was my great grandmother's maiden name on my grandmother's side.

All were Presbyterians as far as we know. Some of the close relatives were Roundtrees and Stewarts; the latter came to Wisconsin."

Bertha Bell Whitelaw Letter c. 1955

In this letter to her daughter Eleanor Whitford, Bertha Bell Whitelaw wrote the following genealogical information on her Bell ancestors. It is undated but was written just before Eleanor's trip to Ireland in 1955. This letter is reproduced below in its entirety.

Dear Eleanor;

I don't know just how interested you are in matters genealogical re the Bells but I deduce from what relatives and others say, that when they are older they wish they had learned more while their parents were living about their families – so I am telling you all I can think of that I feel may interest you or your children some day. I have two lists of my father's brothers and sisters; one looks to be old – the paper and ink – but just how I came by it I do not know – on it are the names of 11 children – I've understood there were 12 but they are not listed chronologically nor are birth dates given; here is the first and after each name I am jotting down what I know of each.

Jane Bell
Born Sept. 1, 1820

Margaret Bell
Feb. 14, 1823 (no. 2 on the second list) and great grandmother of this Cecile A. Bradley of Brandenton, Fla.

George Bell
born Feb. 3, 1824. He was the oldest son and as Grandfather Walter Bell's estate was entailed, he inherited the property. As I recall Father said he inherited three estates – one from an uncle – the other I do not know about. He was a heavy drinker – was married twice; had two children, a son and daughter – grown up when we were small but came out from Ohio to our Iowa home and often visited us. The son soon died but his widow visited us on the Morse place once; do you recall her? Uncle George ran thru all his property – his second wife drank too and they died in poverty.

Grandfather Bell was married twice – there were three children by the first wife. There are three years between the births of George and Agnes on his list so I am wondering if these three I've listed were the first wife's. Then comes

Agnes
born Feb. 10, 1827. Dr. Flack's mother and Mrs. Campbell's mother. She
And her husband, Thomas, visited us at Springfield once and later after Mother's death Father and Gordon visited the Ohio relatives as you'll see mentioned of in these letters. Mrs. Campbell's husband was a Standard Oil representative and they lived in Constantinople for a number of years.

James Bell
born April 25, 1829. I believe that he along with his brothers, Walter, William, my father and possibly Henry and George all served in the war between the states. He and William both were killed in that struggle, and Walter died later as a result of injuries. I recall as a child of his body being moved from a cemetery near Earlham to the Union Cemetery by our church. His widow, remarried, visited us in Iowa I recall.

Esther Bell
born Nov. 10, 1830 The family came over to this country in groups, and after Esther had been here awhile she went back for her father, who died en route to America and was buried at sea. It seems to me that there was a sister the family lost sight of while they were still young and maybe she was the one. At least there seems no further data for her. Husband's names are given for all the other girls.

Alexander Bell [Bertha Bell Whitelaw's father]
born May 1, 1835. He was 17 yrs old when he came to America – so that would have been in '52. I have his army discharge papers. He lived first in N.Y. City, then Michigan, Illinois, later in Iowa; you remember the other moves.

Matilda Bell
born Feb. 10, 1837. I think she is the one spoke of as Lillie, mother of Mrs. Hostetler.

Henry Bell

born March 23, 1839. He was in partnership with my father and David Rankin (Father's first wife was David Rankin's sister) in the farming and cattle raising business when my parents were married and his wife and mother were good friends for the years they spent in Iowa before returning to Ohio.

William Bell

born Feb. 20, 1841. As I have said, he was killed in battle.

No Ellen Bell is mentioned on this list but on the second list her name is given and she married a man named Amspoker; I can dimly recall father speaking of an Amspoker; maybe some one of these cousins will set me straight on some details if they and I exchange a few more letters.

On the second list are the names of three daughters as the first wife's children – names not just like those on the first list.

Elizabeth married to Armstrong

Margaret “ Mansfield

Ellen “ Amspoker.

Agnes “ Flack

Walter

William (I am sure he was the youngest)

George (I am sure he was the eldest son)

Matilda (Married Minter, Mrs. Hostetler's mother)

Jane married White

Esther

Alexander

Henry

Perhaps you'll only feel muddled when you read this – I do not feel too clear about it all myself; I could wish I had some one to talk it all over with – you perhaps still more so when you get back from your visit to Ireland, or perhaps Dora tho her mind is not too clear since her accident or one of these cousins.

You will notice that my grandmother Bell's maiden name was Parker; Dora once told me we had relatives named Roundtree – if you go looking around among tombstones you may notice such names.

Perhaps later I'll think of other items I'll wish I had included. (How about wishing I could visit Ireland with you?) But I thought I'd better get this off soon or you'd be on your way before this letter would reach you. A lovely and rewarding trip for you and Albert.

Love, Mother

If only you had the time to ponder over this!

Document on the Bell Family by Bertha Bell's Cousin, Alexander Flack

Bertha Bell Whitelaw's first cousin, Alexander Flack, collected information on the Bell family. The material he sent to Bertha Bell Whitelaw is reproduced below. It is undated.

History of the Family of Walter Bell

Courtesy of Dr. Alexander C. Flack

-----Bell, father of Walter Bell, was born in England; at some time moved to Ireland, was probably a Presbyterian. His wife also came from England.

Walter Bell was born in Ireland. He had one sister but she probably died young. He married twice. His first wife was Jane McFaden. To this union were born three children, Eliza, Ellen, and Margaret, all of whom came to America. This second wife was Nancy Parker; she was born in Ireland but her parents came from Scotland. Her mother's maiden name was Simpson. She had one brother who never married; a sister Mary who married a man by the name of Roundtree and left a large family in Ireland. She had a 1/2 sister by the name of Stewart who married a cousin of the same name and emigrated to Wisconsin about 1832.

To the union of Walter Bell and Nancy Parker were born 11 children, Jane, Mary, George, Agnes, James, Esther, Walter, Alexander, Matilda, Henry, and William A. Walter Bell lived to be quite old, both of his wives dying before him. When the last of his children came to America and found homes, they sent Esther (commonly called Esse) back after him. The trip was disastrous and he died on the ocean and was buried at sea. At that time (shortly before the civil war) it took on an average about six weeks to make the trip on a sailing vessel.

1. Jane born Sept. 1, 1820 married William White but left no children.

11. Mary born Feb. 14 1823, married Samuel Flack, a cousin of Thomas Flack and left four children: Hugh, John, Mary Anne (who married a man by the name of Tyndall and lives on Long Island), and Margaret, not married.

111. George, born Feb. 3, 1824, died Nov. 14, 1909; left one son William, now dead. (Will left two children Mamie now dead, and Will, a bachelor, both of Beattie, Kansas. Mamie left two children.) You and Dora will recall that he also left a daughter Mary who married a man named Larkin and lived for many years at Rock Island, Illinois (wasn't it) and after several years residence died in Kansas City, Missouri. George was twice married, served in the Civil War with the Army of the Potomac.

IV. Agnes, born Feb. 10, 1827, died August 25, 1909, married Thomas Flack. See the history of Hugh Flack (in possession of Dr. Alexander C. Flack of Fredonia, Kansas, or his heirs).

V. James, born April 25, 1829, was not married. It is my belief that he served and died in the Civil War.

VI. Esther, born Nov. 10, 1830, usually called Esse, married in New York and soon after took a steamer for California with her husband. This was during the early gold excitement. She wrote to her brother George, giving her husband's name and their address, but the letter was lost and the name and address forgot.

VII. Walter, born Dec. 18, 1833, died Sept. 1869 of wounds received during the Civil War in front of Atlanta in August 1864. Was buried in the Union Cemetery between Winterset and Earlham, Iowa. He was married but left no children.

VIII. Alexander [Bertha Bell Whitelaw's father] born May 1, 1835 was married to ----- Rankin in Illinois 1857. To this union were born William Henry Flanagan and a still born sister in 1856; three years later a second son, Alexander Rankin was born, William lived many years in Chetopa, Kansas where he died about 1930. He left four children.

Rankin, as the second son is known, has also lived many years at Chetopa; he has four children, one son Kenneth dying in young manhood about 1916 leaving one son.

In 1869 in March [in Winterset] near Earlham, Iowa, Alexander was married – three years after the death of his first wife, to Martha Ann Gordon, daughter of Elizabeth Ferguson and Robert Gordon. To this union was born Eudora, Jan. 1, 1870. This child early became a member of the united Presbyterian Church. She liked going to school and after graduating from the preparatory department of Hastings College, Hastings, Nebraska, took a classical course and was graduated from Drury College, Springfield, Missouri cum laude as valedictorian of her class in 1894. In June (the 19) 1895 she was married to J. Russell Jones, a Presbyterian minister of Balaton, Minn. – a college romance. They have five children: Ione, born July 24, 1896, at Springfield, Missouri, who married Sidney Cook of Springfield, Missouri.

Aileen Bell, born at LeRoy, Minn. July 24, 1900. Aileen Bell, who is a graduate of the U. of Illinois, was a social worker and teacher; she married C.C. Campbell, a Presbyterian minister and they have two children, Gordon and Margaret – present address Miltonvale, Kansas.

Nova Lucile, born Feb. 28, 1901, LeRoy Minn. She is a graduate of Drury College, Springfield, Missouri, taught in Missouri and Montana [and Wyoming] and married Maurice Hale. They have four children, Maurice, Margaret, Marian, and David Alexander. The home is at Powell, Wyoming.

Shirley was born in LeRoy, Minn. In '03. She attended Drury College and the college at Emporia, Kansas [Eudora's grandson Gordon Campbell never heard of his Aunt Shirley attending college in Emporia]. She married Ellis Engle [Engel] and with their two sons Dale and Dean lives at Hope.

Gordon, born in '09 at Columbus, Kansas, is a graduate of Pittsburg State Normal; he married Georgia Weir and they have one daughter; at present Gordon is teaching in the Aurora, Mo. High School.

Bertha Elizabeth, Feb. 1, 1872 [ed. note – the subject of this volume]

Robert Gordon, born March 1, 1874, died January 21, 1906, at Springfield, Missouri, where with his two younger brothers he is resting beside his parents in Hazelwood cemetery. He was married but had no children. His wife's name was Nell.

Ralph Alwin, born Feb. 3, 1876, died after a long illness at Oxford, Nebraska in 1887.

Norman Osmond born March 30, 1877 died –accidentally killed – at Oxford, Neb.

All of the Alexander Bell children by the second marriage were born at Earlham, Iowa. Alexander Bell served in the Civil War in the Western Army. He was an upright citizen as was his wife, Martha Bell, both staunch United Presbyterians; he a Republican and she a Democrat. Both strong Prohibitionists. For many years before his death at Chetopa, Kansas, he voted the Prohibition National ticket. He was a spare man, 5 feet, 10 inches tall, pleasant and easy to get along with. Martha Bell was a woman of very strong convictions, about 5 feet 4 inches; very energetic. Had curly hair and was very good looking. She passed away April 25, 1900 at the family home at Springfield, five miles northeast of town. He died at the home of his son, A.R. Bell, at Chetopa, Kansas. She of uremic poisoning and he of flux. He died June 5, 1904 and both passed away at 12:30 p.m.

Alexander Bell, as all of his brothers and sisters, was born in the province of Ulster, County of Cavan near the town of Bailieborough, Ireland. When he first landed in America he worked for a time in New York City, learning the trade of a cabinet maker; a fellow worker called him a vile epithet and he left for Ohio, later worked on a farm in Michigan for "old Jake Silver", then to Illinois and after the Civil War came to Iowa where he, his brother Henry, and brother-in-law, David Rankin engaged in the business of farming and stock raising in Madison County.

IX. Matilda, born Feb. 10, 1837, married a man named Minter of Cadiz, Ohio, had several children.

X. Henry, born March 23, 1839, was married to Libby -----; had three sons and a daughter. The family home was near East Liberty, Ohio. He was in the Civil War, went with Sherman "to the sea."

XI. William, A. born Feb. 20, 1841, was not married. He was in the Civil War in the Western Army; he was wounded in the battle of Chickamauga and died soon afterward in a hospital at Nashville.

Dec. 4, 1955

Dear Bell Relatives:

Please excuse the carbons, but Mother would like to send the information I garnered (practically none at all) to each of you, and I thought it would be simpler for her if she could just inclose a copy.

On Sept. 1 I took a bus from Dublin to Bailieborough in County Cavin - I arrived in Bailieborough about 1 pm. (I believe I left Dublin about 10:30 am), and had about three hours there, returning to Dublin on the same bus. Bailieborough is not far from the northern border of the Republic of Eire, and the greater part of the population is protestant. I was told that people who can afford it send their children to Belfast to school in order to avoid the compulsory study (2 hours a day) of the Gaelic language. County Cavin appears to be largely agricultural, and the general population quite poor.

I was directed to the home of the minister of the Presbyterian Church - both his residence and the church are in the country, about two miles from Bailieborough. I found a cab to take me to the home of the Rev. W. Eakins. The oldest records in his possession were the baptismal records, but they went back to 1866 only. Rev. Eakins knew several families by the name of Bell, but only one man who had ever evidenced much interest in ancestry. He lived nearby, and since he seemed to be the only possible source of information, Rev. Eakins offered to take me to see him. First, we went to the churchyard cemetery, but could learn nothing. I looked for McFadden, Parker, Roundtree, Falck, and Bell but could learn nothing. Any stones old enough to be of interest to us either had no inscription - not even a name, or were illegible.

By this time Rev. Eakin and I were becoming better acquainted. He confided that he thought a visit to the Bell to whom he had referred would be a complete waste of time - that he was ignorant, and would know nothing. Consequently Rev. Eakin took me back to Bailieborough, and suggested that I see a Solicitor there.

The Solicitor, Mr. Vance (Title of his firm: Messrs. Vance, Solicitors, Bailieborough, County Cavin, Eire) was very pleasant, but could give little information. He was then engaged in an effort to trace a Samuel Flack, only son of Jane Flack - Samuel had emigrated to America. An estate in New South Wales was involved. Mr. Vance thought something might be found in the records of the Parish Church (Church of England - now Ireland) relative to Parker or McFadden, and if he found anything, he would write me.

Rev. Eakin also suggested that I go to the Registry offices in Dublin which I did, but they had no records going back farther than 1870. Rev. Eakin also suggested some information might be obtained by writing to Church Records, Presbyterian, Belfast, North Ireland. This I have not followed up.

I did talk to the same Miss Coleman and her nephew with whom Herron Flack visited in 1923. Miss Coleman is now so old that I was unable to elicit any information whatever, and her nephew knew nothing. He still runs a small shop which sells post cards, and a history of the village. Miss Coleman thought there was a McFadden who had been a sexton (probably at Parish church) who had had two daughters that she remembered.

I learned a little history of the region. In 1714 quite a number of Scots were brought to the Bailieborough area to work on the Lisgar estate which was then owned by a Scot named Hamilton. The Lisgar mansion has now been taken over by the government, and most of the estate has been broken up into small farms. I wonder if the Bells, at least, came to Ireland in this way. I always understood our branch of the Bell family was of Scottish descent. Do any of you know?

Herron Flack wrote in a letter to my Mother that the village had apparently not changed for generations, and with that remark I am in complete agreement. The entire district is poverty stricken (as is most of Ireland so far as my observation went), and I received the impression from Rev. Eakin that he feels there is no future there. I can only be thankful that my ancestors left when they did.

I am very sorry that I was unable to obtain any of the desired information. I wonder if the other traveler in the family had better luck? I am happy I made the trip tho I felt very conspicuous the entire time I was in the village - one had the feeling everyone knew what you were doing in Bailieborough. There are lots of Bells around - a drugstore in the village was operated by the Bell family; I made my first inquiry there, but got no response from the lady with whom I talked tho I told her of my ancestry. The churchyard cemetery had a Bell plot, but any identifiable stones were fairly recent.

Thank you all for the information you so kindly wrote Mother.

Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford

APPENDIX C

MARTHA GORDON BELL, MOTHER OF BERTHA BELL



On her mother's side, Bertha Bell Whitelaw was descended from the Gordon family. My information on the Gordons comes mainly from the Gordon Family History, a document compiled in the 1990s by Sara Tamburrino, a descendant of Bertha's sister Eudora. This valuable document consolidates information about many branches of the Gordon family from family sources, family genealogists, and public records. I have also consulted Gordon family documents distributed by Oscar and Robert Gordon, second cousins of Bertha Bell Whitelaw, in the 1940s and currently in the possession of Mary Whitford Graves.

Alexander (1750? – dod unknown) and Margaret McLeod (dob & dod unknown) Gordon

The Gordons were farmers in the Highlands of Scotland, of the Presbyterian faith. The first Gordon about whom we have definite information is Alexander Gordon, born about 1750 in Scotland. He was twice married; first to Miss Margaret McLeod, by whom he had two children, son George and daughter Christian. He was married the second time to a widow, a Mrs. McKaskle. I believe that there were no children from this marriage.

Alexander Gordon immigrated to the U.S. either before the Revolution or about 1780 (accounts differ) and settled in Iredell County, North Carolina. His immigration was part of a general movement of people from the Highlands, which in the 18th century had more people than the land could sustain. Rents on land increased during the 1760s, causing economic hardship and encouraging emigration. According to the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (1980), between 1763 and 1775, about 25,000 Scots emigrated to the new world, mainly to the thirteen colonies, with a small number going to Canada.

George (1768 – 1847) and Flora McKaskle (1773-1855) Gordon

George Gordon, Bertha Bell Whitelaw's great grandfather, was born about 1768 in Scotland. He immigrated to the U.S. with his father, Alexander Gordon (either before the Revolution or in the 1780s). He settled in North Carolina, Iredell County, near his father, and appears there in the 1790 and 1800 censuses. There he married his step-sister, Flora McKaskle, daughter of his father's second wife, born in 1773 either in the Scottish Highlands or in South Carolina (accounts differ). The couple were members of the New Sterling Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, where George was an Elder. The church was located in an area known locally as New Scotland, which was settled by 12 Scottish Highlander families. The 1800 Land Evaluation for Direct Tax register shows that George Gordon owned about 100 acres and a stable on Third Creek in Rowan County (Iredell County was previously part of Rowan County), near Stewarts Spring. His occupation was listed as tailor.

George Gordon and Flora McKaskle were married Sept. 13, 1792, in North Carolina. They had twelve children, as follows:

- Barbara (July 27, 1793 – Oct. 2, 1802).
- Alexander (Sept. 12, 1795 – June 15, 1801).
- Cornelius (Oct. 1, 1797 – 1870.)
- John (Dec. 20, 1799 – Aug. 23, 1802)
- Alex John (April 9, 1802 - dod unknown.)
- Robert (April 6, 1804 – June 2, 1893) Bertha Bell Whitelaw's grandfather
- Reuben (April 27, 1806 – June 28, 1818)
- Barbara (May 3, 1808 – Dec. 7, 1869)
- Daniel (Apr. 25, 1809 – Oct. 24, 1894)
- Miles (June 17, 1813 – Feb. 21, 1895)
- Christian Sophia (Jan. 21, 1815 – Dec. 12, 1864)
- William Dixon twin of Christian (Jan. 21, 1815 – Feb. 11, 1884).

In about 1819 the family moved from North Carolina to Covington, Georgia, where he and Flora became members of the Hopewell Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, which was organized in 1830.

Leaving the South

In 1840 the family moved to Oquaka, Illinois, as part of a general migration of the Gordon family from the South to Illinois. George and Flora Gordon bought a farm in the Little York area, and lived there the rest of their lives. One family tradition suggests that George and Flora, along with their grown children and their families, moved from Georgia to Illinois because of the growing conflicts about slavery. However, Bertha Bell Whitelaw's niece, Nova Jones Hale, wrote from another point of view in a letter to her cousin, Eleanor Whitford (undated letter). "I never had the idea that the family left Georgia to get away from Civil War tensions. I see you use the word "flight." I just had the idea that there wasn't much future in Georgia for small farmers or middle class whites and they went to Illinois where there was more chance for getting ahead."

According to Bertha's second cousins, Oscar and Robert Gordon, their grandfather George "was never a man that accumulated any great wealth as what notes we saw charged him 12% interest payable quarterly. The farm he bought cost him \$600.00" (Letter to cousin Maude Duncan, undated).

George Gordon wrote a will in 1847, shortly before his death. A typed transcript of the will is reproduced on the following page. It shows that he left to his wife, Flora, support from the farm and whatever household furnishings she chose. The farm itself he left to his two youngest sons, Miles and William, with only small bequests to the other children.

Will of George Gordon, 1847*

IN THE NAME OF God, AMEN. I, George Gordon of the State of Illinoise, Henderson County, being in Moderate health and sound mind, thanks be to God, yet considering the mortality of my body and that is appointed for all men once to die; I do make and ordain this my Last Will and Testament, that is to say principally and first I give and recommend my soul into the hands of Almighty God that give it; and my body to be buried in decent form nothing doubting but at the general resu- rection I shall receive the same again by power of Almighty God, and as touching much worldly estate where it has pleased God to bless me in this life, I give and demise and dispose of in the following form and manner.

In the first place I bequeath to my beloved wife Flory her support off the farm while she lives and also the west end of the house and bed and bedding and such kitchen furniture as is nessary for her use, and firewood to be furnished for her and clothing and boarding and what property she may possess that at her death she may dispose of it as she sees proper.

Second. I bequeath unto my two sons Miles and William Dixon all my real estate and there appurtances and also all my personal property of all kinds after what my wife is to get, which property is to be equally divided between them but when divided William Dixon is to get fifty dollars more than Miles and my two sons Miles and Wm. Dixon is to pay of all my lawfull debts and after there mother's death they are to pay to my daughter Barbara forty dollars out of the estate as her share of my estate.

Thirdly I bequeath unto all the rest of my children which is married and left me two dollars each to be paid by those same legitees out of the estate.

All of which I subscribe my name and fix my seal in the presence of two witnesses this 7th day of May in the year of our Lord. 1847.

George Gordon {SEAL}

Witness:

David Sherer

James X Carr

*NB. Original spelling retained.

Robert (1804-1893) and Elizabeth Ferguson (dob and dod unknown) Gordon

One of George and Flora's sons was Robert Gordon, born in 1804 in North Carolina. He moved with his parents to Covington, Georgia in 1819. He was a blacksmith by trade. In 1831 he was in Tennessee, where he married Elizabeth Ferguson, who was born there. The couple then returned to Georgia. The Newton County Deed Book shows that Robert Gordon purchased two lots in Covington in 1834, probably for a blacksmith shop.

Not much is known about Elizabeth Ferguson's family. They came originally from Ireland and, after immigrating to the U.S., lived in Pennsylvania before migrating down the Appalachians to East Tennessee. This is the family my father referred to in his memoir when he states that his mother's family were Scotch Irish who had come down the Appalachian Trail. He referred to this family as the "Fighting Fergusons."

Robert and Elizabeth Ferguson Gordon had several children. The older children were born in Georgia; the younger ones in Tennessee and Illinois.

Mary Antenet Gordon (Sept. 3, 1837-1913)
Martha Ann Gordon (Aug. 3, 1838-Apr.25, 1900) Bertha Bell
Whitelaw's mother
William Harrison Gordon (died prior to 1870)
Robert Bruce Gordon
Victoria Gordon
Barbara Sophia Gordon (Jan. 16, 1850- Nov. 5, 1933)

The Gordons also reared four nieces and nephews who had been orphaned by a plague of black diphtheria. They never owned slaves. They left Georgia in 1839/40, along with Robert's parents. However, unlike the George Gordon family, who moved directly to Illinois, the Robert Gordons immigrated to Tennessee, and stayed about seven years, before joining other members of the Gordon family in Illinois. In 1866 Robert and Elizabeth Gordon moved again, to Winterset, in Madison County, Iowa. They moved once more, to Fairbury, Nebraska, where Robert Gordon died in 1893.

Martha Gordon

Martha Gordon, Bertha Bell Whitelaw's mother, was born in Covington, Georgia, in 1838, and was baptized in the Presbyterian Church. She moved with her parents to Tennessee while still an infant, and as a young girl accompanied them to Illinois. At about age 16, she moved with her family to Iowa, where she taught school. There she met Alexander Bell, a widowed farmer with a large farm in Earlham, Iowa, and in 1869 they married.

Martha and Alexander Bell had five children, all born in Madison County, Iowa. The family left Iowa after several years and, after living briefly in Colorado and Arkansas, settled in Nebraska. They moved to Springfield Missouri, in 1890, where they retired. Martha Gordon Bell died of a sudden illness in Springfield in 1900.

The obituary of Robert and Elizabeth Ferguson Gordon's youngest daughter, Barbara, gives a picture of their family life. Barbara was Bertha Bell Whitelaw's maternal aunt (sister of Bertha's mother, Martha). The following excerpt is taken from a photocopy of a newspaper clipping entitled "Former Seton Resident Dies"; no date or name of newspaper.

. . . . Barbara Sophia, youngest daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Ferguson Gordon, was born in Little York, Warren County, [Illinois], Jan. 16, 1850. During the few years previous, as early as 1846, there was a general exodus of the elder Gordon families and their relatives from Georgia into Henderson County, near Biggsville [Illinois]. Robert Gordon brought his family north, by way of the Mississippi river, during the fall of 1849, landing at Oquawka and locating at Little York.

Tennessee and Georgia had been the homes of the Ferguson and Gordon families since pre-Revolution days. The experience of a northern winter in those early pioneer days was too severe for the frail constitution of Elizabeth Ferguson Gordon so the new daughter was taken for her first year into the home of Barbara Gordon Reynolds near Biggsville where she and her sister, Sophia Gordon McDill, who had no child of their own, gave her their names and very tender care.

When later, Robert Gordon moved his family into the vicinity of Biggsville, she was taken home by her parents and together with three sisters and two brothers grew to young girlhood surrounded by the wholesome atmosphere of a country school and church life. They attended South Henderson United Presbyterian Church, the old Record School, and she later attended school in Oquawka.

In the autumn of 1866 the family followed the covered wagon trail across the fenceless plains of Iowa, to Winterset, then a small hamlet in Madison County, not a great distance from Des Moines. Here she spent eight years of her life teaching in the pioneer schools of that section. Here she united with the United Presbyterian Church of Pitzer which had developed from the small gathering of people who first met in her father's home."

Letters of Martha Gordon Bell to Her Daughter, Bertha Bell, 1899 - 1900

[Martha wrote these letters from Springfield, Missouri, where she was living in retirement with her husband, Alexander, and son, Robert Gordon, to Bertha, who was teaching in Iberia and later Kidder, Missouri. Bertha kept these letters, written in the last year of her mother's life. Martha died after a short illness on April 25, 1900.]



March 10, 1899

My darling little girl, You have no idea how scandalized I feel after I bought material for that skirt off of a right new bolt of goods, the very first that was taken off of it, and then took it to Mr. Coles and gave Emma a round silver dollar to make it, and then have you think it was ready made. If I were you I would buy my clothes ready made. You would not know the difference. I suppose it is all account of the kind of braid I got. I bought the goods of that McGaw girl and she showed me that braid and said it lasted better than the velveteen, and I asked her if it was used much and she said it was, and supposed it was something new, but when I got to Emma's she said you would not like it. But then it was too late to mend matters.

It is too bad that your board is so poor that you are forced to buy salmon to eat. It is not very easy digested and I am afraid you will get your stomach out of order. Do you think the other place will be any better? The number of students have just about doubled since you went there have they not?

The last two days have been so warm that we have all thawed out and are so limp we can hardly get around. Grandfather and Gordon are badly stuffed up with colds.

There is quite an excitement here, about Irish potatoes, almost every one has lost by freezing and the price is likely to go out of sight. Your father opened his potato pit today, and found them in excellent condition, perfect in every respect. Your father has been congratulating himself all day on his success in keeping potatoes, and feels very proud of it. I only wish he had more of them.

The wind blew hard from the south today, and your father and Gordon burnt brush along the east fence. Your father and Gordon went to Mr. Johnson's yesterday for Gordon's cow. She is a counterpart of that cow we bought of Walter Nash, looks just as she did when we got her, only she is so gentle. She has never been fresh, but you can milk her on either side and she is not a bit wild. She will be fresh in May. Gordon is beginning to feel like a householder with so many cows and thinks of hunting up a partner and going into the butter peddling business.

Your father took twenty five dozen eggs to town yesterday, and got twelve and a half cents a dozen for them.

Stewart Shockeley has a horse and buggy and will drive into town and work as he does now.

Mrs. Deitze is breaking her pasture up, and I suppose she will put it in corn. And Bowens won't get it this year. Give my regards to Grace. Lovingly, Mother



March 15, 1899

My darling little girl, August is going to have a little surprise party tonight for Betty. I believe it is her birthday. August and one of Ernest Wiggins brothers were here awhile Sat. eve. and said Ernest had another little boy two weeks old, which make him five boys and one girl. August has made a fine boat and maybe if you play your cards right you will get to ride in it. Bob Stout was here yesterday and says Stewart Shockley has given up the idea of coming out to the home place, it is too far from his work. Bob says our bokanah [?] peach trees are not hurt by the cold and he thinks those two pear trees in the blackberry patch the finest two pear trees in Greene Co. They are not injured in the least by the cold and are going to have same pears as this year and that is all the pears that I have heard of being alive near here. Bob says the pears on our old tree are all killed and they had to cut those young trees that your father put out last spring back to a few inches from the ground. Almost every one has either cut their peach trees down or back. Mr.

Cole has cut his blackberry patch down. Apples, grapes, strawberries and some varieties of plums and cherries are all right. Red raspberries are killed to the ground. Aren't you glad?

The Standard contains a notice of old Mr. Atson's death I will send the paper to you and you can forward to Dora. Did I tell you that Mrs. Dr. Briggs was married again. Gordon's son Al. Austin in town Sat. and says he looks well and very much as he did when he went away. Vic and Blanch are home. They came I believe before Al. The Young boys have moved and Gordon saw Mr. Smith in town Sat. and asked him when they were going to move down here and he said he didn't know, just when they would move.

Your father and Gordon have been hauling out manure [?] this week and they will get nearly done with it today. I planted sweet peas yesterday and made a bed for lettuce and was going to sow it today, but it is too cold and windy.

You will see by the [illegible] that Nellie Crawford's mother is dead. I am sorry for her it looks like that she is about as good as left alone with the kind of a father she has.

They played snap at Mr. Young's and had ice cream and cakes.

Your father gathered 75 eggs yesterday. August says they have 5 little chicks and 5 hens setting. The wheat fields are getting quite green and the farmers are plowing for oats. It has been as windy here this spring as it is in Nebraska. Give my regards to grace. Lovingly, Mother



March 24, 1899

My darling little girl, I suppose this is to be my last letter this term, and as you will be so very busy the last days that you be there, I will not send the papers, but will save them up for you to look over when you get home. Gordon and Mitchel did not get away Thurs. and now they talk of starting on Monday now and if they do, Gordon may not get back during your vacation. Tho if the weather should be bad they will not be likely to go.

Your father went over to Jack Youngs yesterday afternoon to get some oak lumber to make a platform for the stock well, and saw Emma Cole there and told what you said to tell her and she said she did not know whether she could come over right away or not. Your father asked Lizzie to come while you were at home and Mrs. Young said Lizzie did not like it because you did not answer her last letter, and did not know whether she would come or not. Your father told them you were so awful busy, that they ought to excuse you for that.

I have set eight hens. Have not got any turkey eggs yet. The pump men got through Thurs. morning, but Mr. White is coming back Tues. to put a new pump in the stock well, and bring a tank, but your father does not have to pay for the pump and tank until next winter. I suppose my waist is done but I have not got it home yet. The roads have been so bad, and the Sabbaths have been so stormy that I have not needed it.

No one on the Smith or Moon places yet. I had your father get some lemons yesterday and that we would have lemon pie while you were home but if you would rather have custard we can make them. Your father got half a dozen cans of salmon yesterday so you can have some if you want it. Regards to Grace. Lovingly, Mother



June 9, 1899

My darling little girl, I am so tired, and you will be home so soon now, that I know you excuse a short letter this time. We had a tremendous hard rain yesterday and I feared for the young turkeys, but they came out all right. I have not lost one that I know of. I have not called on Mrs. Dishman yet. I think there will be peas when you get home. We have not had any new potatoes yet, but I suppose we could have if we wanted them. We have plenty of old ones. Aggie's sister thinks she will get well, but Maggie said they

did not know how it would be.

I finished canning strawberries today and have 45 quarts. Your father was to see Mrs. Kidd Thurs. and they still thought her better. I am sorry Mr. Grinitti's health is so poor hope it will improve when school is out. No Dr. King is not attending Mrs. Kidd, it is a Dr. Clemmons. Your father did not like the Buffalo farm. We have not thought it very warm here yet. Nettie Cole went to Dysarts yesterday morning and Jessie took her home this morning. They stopped here to leave some magazines I had let Eunice have. Gordon sold his jersey cow today to Comestock for 24 dollars and your father sold Bessie for twenty five. Bye bye. Lovingly, Mother



Sept. 27, 1899

My darling little girl, I would have written you about the smallpox scare, if I had thought anyone else would have done it, but I did not think there was the least danger and I thought it needless to trouble you with it. Do not give yourself any concern about it for there really is no danger. I have not seen any one who believes there has really been any smallpox in town. There is or has been some kind of a skin disease in town, but it is not dangerous or even serious.

It is very dry here today. We are having a strong south wind. The flowers look jut about as they did when you left them. Your father and I went home with Maggie Kidd for dinner on Sabbath, and called to see Aggie. I did not see much change, perhaps her lips were not so blue. Will wants to go back to Texas and says if he had it to do over again he would not let Aggie come home. He says she would have been well by now, if she had staid there. Mrs. Jim Aikins' mother Mrs. Brown was at Maggie Kidd's one night last week. She and Mr. Brown are visiting a son here and a daughter near Seebanon [?]. They say their daughter Ella and two of their sons married into a family by the name of Johnson. The say May Aikins is married. The Browns and Jim Aikin all live 20 miles north of Clinton. Mrs. Disman was here this afternoon. They are going to move back where they came from in about three weeks. She said Mr. Smith and Jack Young had been trying to get those gates removed but they say they won't do it. Bernie Smith is in Texas and his father thinks he is trying to get into some kind of business there and does not know how he is going to get along without him. We had a little frost last night and the night before. That little bantam that hatched under the crib chilled to death last night.

Lovingly, Mother



Oct. 15, 1899

My darling little girl, This is a holiday and day Gordon, the Shockley boys and some other fellows went possum hunting last night. They got one possum. Gordon's fish began dying in the tank and he brought them to my hand and they still die and I am afraid they will all die. I saw John Dysart's wife at Church last Sabbath was a week ago and she said she hoped to get away in a few days and I suppose she is gone. Dr. Kings were boarding, but they may be at John Dysart's now for anything I know.

Your palm takes a good bit of room, but not too much, for it is the most imposing plant we have. Your sea onion is sending up its flowerstock early this fall. It is two feet high now. I dug the gladiolus bulbs yesterday. The little flower garden has many flowers in it now as it has had anytime this summer. I was putting manure on the rose bed today and noticed one white rose and four red rose buds just ready to open.

I kept [illegible] with the ten young chickens at the hatchery, and night before last something killed six of them, and something had been eating the eggs out of the baskets in the milk house, so I set the wire in there, and set both the steel traps at the hatchery door and this morning there was a pole cat in the steel traps and another one in the wire trap. I had no idea it could have gotten into it. I took up a part of my old pond lily today and put it in bucket and intend to put it in the cellar. I was afraid to leave it all out for fear I might lose it. There is so little water in the pond.

I have no idea that there will be any danger in your coming home Thanksgiving. People are coming and going all the time, just the same s they would if there was no smallpox or skin disease, whichever it is. That woman on Blaine St. was gone yesterday when your father went to town, but we don't know how she went. Your father and Gordon are not through digging potatoes yet I think they will get through tomorrow. Lovingly, Mother

I have not tried to make out those words yet. Auntirn [?] is here and says Vicie is not well has kidney trouble. It is very warm today about 85 in the shade. I caught another polecat last night.



Nov. 15, 1899

My darling little girl, This has been a most beautiful day and I am glad of it for the Stones resumed their journey to Joplin this morning. They were here just a little less than a week. Their oldest child was a ten year old girl, small of her age, and she carried the babe here from the Smith place every day but Sabbath to be washed and dressed. Mrs. Stone and the babe seemed to be feeling first rate this morning when they got this far on their way, and I hope they will get through without mishap.

We set the stove up today. I called Stone's babe Paul for Paul Kruger, but I did not tell them so. I sent with Gordon a little spoon for the babe. I told him to have Paul and the date of his birth engraved on it. I did not know what other name they would give him, they all thought so much of Gordon that they added Gordon to Paul. Will Long did not have any little spoons, so he and Gordon went to a jeweler that he does engraving for and got a solid silver one with a gold bowl and he engraved it.

I went home with Maggie Kidd for dinner last Sabbath and stopped to see Aggie. She looks much better than when I saw her last and they are greatly encouraged.

Gordon was in Dr. King's office last Sat. and Mrs. Balderson and Inez were there and Miss Daniels came while he was there. Told Dr. King she would like to speak to him and they went into another room – Maggie Kidd said she was at Bladersons a few days ago and Mrs. Balderson said she would like to have an osteopath look at Inez's back, that she had fallen off a horse when a child and hurt it, but Maggie thought it strange they did not go to Mrs. Kerns, she thought it would be embarrassing to a young girl to go to a young man. I told her I guessed Inez thought the young more interesting. We picked Nett Cole up on Blaine St. Sabbath evening where she was trying to walk off a headache and brought her up to the corner. She said Emma had been sewing at Mrs. Harts and had not got through and to go back this week for a few days. August expected to come back the 17 inst.

We dug callas and caladiums yesterday. It was cloudy and I was afraid It would turn cold. Gordon killed and sold two of his hogs Mon. and will kill the other two tomorrow. Take good care of yourself. Lovingly, Mother



November 17, 1899

My darling little girl, This is a most beautiful night and very warm. Gordon has gone to Metzgars to a candy pulling, tonight. That Stowe girl, whose name you saw on the margin of the Leader, is a sister of Will Blanton's wife, her father is a broken merchant or farmer rather. I believe he used to be worth something, but has nothing now to speak of. He has bought 20 acres of brush land, somewhere south east of Whittakers and is going to garden and truck it and Maud is trying to learn the millinery trade with Miss Meeks, and the other one is clerking at Heens. Walt Shockley introduced them to Gordon, and he and Walt have been there twice. I got so thoroughly disgusted with the Campbellites this fall during their meetings, that I will have to change my mind if I ever have anything more to do with them [the Campbellites, named for their founder, became the Disciples of Christ protestant denomination]. I despise the very thought or sight of them. Gordon says Will Long wears Ida Bybee's picture on a button on this vest.

Mrs. Bower and Clare were here yesterday afternoon. Mrs. Bower brought your dollar that you sent her for that scholarship in India and said that had failed to get the necessary amount, and she thought perhaps you would not like to have your money go for anything else. I told her to keep it as I did not believe you would care where it was applied. Was that right?

Minnie Bybee was not at home last Sabbath and I did not ask when she would be home. Old man Ball's have come back to Springfield. I don't believe thy got to where they were going. The old man got sick and thought he had better hie himself back to Green Co. W have been watching for the meteoric showers but have not seen any, have you seen any? I baked a lot of cookies today and they are good.

Turkeys are getting pretty low here now, corn is scarce and everyone is rushing their turkeys in. I want to buy ten bushels of shelled corn next month to feed to my turkeys. They are fine now. Collins and Bert Phillips have both been working at Mr. Dysarts. Collins said Sabbath the he was only going to work there this week. Lovingly, Mother



Nov. 22, 1899

My darling little girl, Mrs. Dysart and Minnie were here yesterday and they said they had had a card from you. So I suppose you know that you are invited to a Thanksgiving dinner at their house. Mrs. Dysart wants me to make a five minutes talk on the origin of Thanksgiving, so I think I will write out what I say instead of trying to speak it off hand, and if you think you can help me to get up some little thing after you get home I will wait until you get home to help me. Of course I can't get up anything fit to read by myself. Lucy did not get here to wash until today, it rained a little Monday morning and she did not come and she went to town yesterday and it was quite showery today and she had today the clothes in the house and it took her till almost night to get through.

I rejoice with you in getting such good rates. Addie Kidd gets a little better every day and they are very good over the fact. Will seemed in better spirits last Sabbath than he has been since he came back. [rest of letter missing]



December 6, 1899

My darling little girl, I hope you did not get very cold going Monday morning. Gordon said you didn't but I thought perhaps he didn't know, he forgot to come by Coles, but I rather think he forgot it on purpose, for Paul was riding his bike here in the afternoon and he let him get away without taking the money, and so took it over after night himself. Lucy came to do the washing a little while after you had gone, we had set the boiler off. I see you did not take those paper wrappers, and if you have enough to do you till Christmas I will leave them til then.

Ed. Morbury fixed up his fence in front of our house yesterday. I didn't see him but I heard him. It is quite warm here today, and the fillies are buzzing around us in a provoking manner. I hope you found everything all right and the Kidderites were not afraid you had brought smallpox back with you.

Your father and Gordon cleaned the cistern this morning, and now I expect it will not rain for a long time. I started to write that order for the Constitution this afternoon and got everything hunted up and had everything done but setting down the answers to the problems, and got the first and second ones done, but when I went to the third one I could make nothing of it. They want the length of the broken piece, while you give the length of the part left standing. I will enclose it and you can do as you like about it. It seems it is more trouble than it is worth. With much love, Mother



Dec. 13, 1899

My darling little girl, It is quite winterish here today, tho it was real nice Sat. and Sabbath. Mr. Besheans wanted to make the deed for your father Sat. and I went to town with him and bought seventeen dollars worth of table linens and blankets. If you could know what superb blankets are on your bed you would want to come home right away and sleep between them.

I saw Mrs. Will Whorton in town Sat. and she said Leon McAllily [?] had a little girl two weeks old and she said Lulu Whitlock was teaching in her own district again this winter. Sece Wharton was present when we were talking and said he met Dick Ingram and Vic that morning as he came to town, he only spoke as he passed them and did not know why they had come home. Mrs. Wharton said she did not believe Blanch was expecting them, tho she had gone home the night before. Sece Wahrton had bought 40 acres of land from Mr. Bensheans adjoining the Benshean's place and he wanted to sell it to your father, so your father went over yesterday to look at it and bought it at twenty five dollars per acre.

Gordon harnessed his horse and got his buggy out to go to church last Sabbath but the horses had all gotten into the cornfield and filled themselves with corn and the filly of his was colicky and he stopped awhile to doctor her and Bob Stour came before he got away and staid till one o'clock, he told Gordon he was going to housekeeping before long and wanted him to come to see him then. He seems to see a great many virtues in Emma but no faults of course. So I would not be greatly surprised if you did not get to see Emma Cole again. Gordon read forty pages of that book I got at the five and ten cents store that day you and I were in town to your father and I last night and he is a good reader and we enjoyed it, he read two installments of a very entertaining story in the Denver News the night before.

We all went to Cullies for dinner the other day and as we were passing the Lower Jewelry store on our way back, your father and I, Will Long motioned to us to come in, so we went in, selected Dora's chain and your ring and ordered Gordon's ring. Your ring I think is very pretty, the prettiest opal I ever saw, it has a single opal, but there are rings there with clusters of five and three at the same price and if you should like them better you can exchange.

Gordon says Bob told him not to say anything to anyone about what he told him the other day. I am so glad you are feeling so well and are so contented and happy. Mr. Speaker came out the other day and put in a filter but I think I told that once, but I did not tell you we got some water in thee cistern, but we did. With much love, Mother



Dec. 20, 1899

My darling big girl: Gordon is going to town this afternoon to attend the entertainment given by the Kentucky Colonels, and I will send you a few lines today, as I am afraid you will hardly get it if I wait till tomorrow. I thought when Mrs. Cole told me yesterday morning that Emma was going to be married Friday night, that I would have a real news item for you, but Gordon tells me he posted a letter Monday, to you from Emma so I guess you already know it. Mrs. Cole said Geo. Was coming home today, but I expect you know that too. I did not get to church last Sabbath but Mrs. Long told your father to tell you to go right to their house, she said she was afraid that neither of them could go to meet you, as they have to work till eleven o'clock every night now. Too bad you broke your glass. Gordon is talking of going for you as early as six o'clock Sat. morn. Lovingly, mother



Jan. 10, 1900

My darling little girl, Gordon's ring came Sat. and he is greatly pleased with it and it is indeed a very fine ring. It has been soft and muddy almost ever since you left. Your father called last Thurs. to see if Emma's picture came and found it had not so he went to see O. Day and he said it had been returned and he had just found it and he would deliver it himself. I hope Emma has it before this, as she wanted to write you and wanted to see her present first.

Your father took Aggie a turkey Sat. and was surprised to find her so improved in health, he says she looks like there was nothing the matter with her if the water was all gone, she says she feels first rate and is gaining in strength. She says the Dr. is going to treat her every day this month and see if he can't get the water away.

Joe Bauer was here yesterday morning and said they were all well so I suppose Mrs. Bauer is still waiting to know her fate. There is a rumor going the rounds that Mr. Dyrants have rented their farm to the Stowery [?] boys, and are going to go on a visit. Annie Stowery is going to keep house for the boys. We don't know anything about it, that is what we hear.

We still have cake of both kinds and it is good, this damp weather keeps it moist and nice. It is too bad you forgot to ask for your own pecans. I will fill that little tin box and send it to you. I got another copy of the Review Sat. I am reading On the Face of the Waters and find it very interesting. Dick Ingram has not gone back yet, and Al is at home now. I have not baked any bread since you went back. The roads are getting quite muddy. We did not any of us go to church on last Sabbath on account of the mud. I have just gathered in the eggs, and I got fourteen, have not got so many for a long time. Lovingly, mother



Jan. 19, 1900

My darling little girl, We are greatly in hopes your tooth will not ache and we are very glad your toe is so comfortable. Nett Cole was so nice to your father and I when we were there the other day. She was watchful of the fire and brought in apples and cracked a dish of shellbark hickory nuts which were very nice. She seems so lonely I feel sorry for her.

We have all gotten tired of bought bread, my stomach got so sour I quit eating and baked myself some corn bread, and then Gordon's stomach got so sour he could not eat it any longer, your father has not complained but he does not eat bought bread when I have corn bread or biscuits. We have two of those large round loaves on hand and I don't know what we are going to do with them.

Gordon says those compliments were all appreciated and wants you to send any more you may get. That man Mathews that the Kings boarded with died a few days ago and Gordon heard that the Kings had two rooms at Dr. Longs and were boarding there. We don't know anything about it. Your father had a little cold last Sabbath and the roads were very bad, so we did not any of us go to church. You will see by one of the Leaders that Jesse James of K.C. is married and the girl he married is a McGowan and she lived in Springfield once.

I got twenty seven eggs yesterday and the same amount today. It has been cloudy and raining a very little, snowing a very little, and misting considerable for three or four days, not freezing any to speak of, but just making everything nasty. Lucy said the other day that Grace Stiver said they had to move the last of this month and she did not know were they were going and she would rather go into any kind of hut than to go to town. I told Lucy to tell her she could have my place for a dollar a month. Did I tell you Leon Westmoreland and Joe each had a new baby? We all send lots of love. Mother



Feb. 3, 1900

My darling little girl, Your father (Providence permitting) will go to town Monday morning to send his pension papers off and I will try to cheer you up a little. Be as courageous as you can and put your dependence in God. Now please take a dish of cold water after you are undressed and take a good sized cloth and wash and bath your face around that sore tooth, for five or ten minutes, and then again in the morning. Now just try it and see if it does not take the inflammation out of it.

Your father saw Paul Cole in town today and he told him to tell me that Emma was sick. She has inflammation of the womb, was taken sick last night and Bob said he thought awhile that she would die, he sent for a Dr. and today she was resting easier.

We did not know that anyone had joined our church till we got your letter. Minnie Bybee is not home that I know of. Gordon went to church tonight, so you see his foot is not very sore. I baked seven mince pies this forenoon, and this afternoon I made Mrs. Deitze a little visit. She was feeling fine and I never saw her look so comfortable, she has a new cookstove, a very large one with six plates, she has moved her table to the north side of the room and has her stove along the south side and that gives her good room in front of her windows and she had her work basket on a stool and had been sewing on a pair of shirts for Mr. Dietze when I got there she was reading her german paper and when she saw me, she came out to meet me and seemed very glad to see me.

We had a tramp here from Maine last night and I had to make a bed on the cot for him and give him supper and breakfast. It rained here this evening and it is lightning in the north, but I hope your father can go to church tomorrow. I want him to stop and see Emma. Your father got a letter from Will Flack today, which I will enclose. Now please don't give way to the blues, but be a brave good little girl with love from all, Mother.

Your father called yesterday on his way from church to Emma, she looked pale and said she had been pretty sick, but was better, her mother and old Mrs. Hopkins were there, Mrs. Hopkins lives near there. Lovingly, Mother



Feb. 23, 1900

My darling little girl, What do you think I did tonight? I forgot to write to you until after I had gone to bed. I got me a couple of wrappers the other day, and today, I thought I would shorten them and work them over some, so I brought the machine out and went to work and never once thought of this being Friday until I had been in bed for some time, but when I thought of it, I piled out and dressed and here I am scratching away for dear life, but am afraid I will not find much to say.

We are having our third snow storm this week. It looked at noon today like spring had come, we had a little shower or two in the forenoon, and then it cleared up and looked fine, then about four o'clock the wind turned to the north west, and it snowed furiously and it was snowing when I went to bed, and it promises to be cold in the morning.

We did not happen to see that article about Mrs. Sharp and we don't know anything about it. Your father walked over to the Smith place this afternoon and could see the surveyors working on the survey for the northern rail road you see so much about in the papers, there are seven or eight men and a team camped out there, and it must be quite expensive. I didn't believe the road will ever be built and I don't see why they want to be spending so much money on it.

Mrs. Allen was here canvassing for the Ladies Home Journal. Mr. Wharton was here yesterday he is thinking some of borrowing a thousand dollars from you father for Sece to pay on his place. He says Dick Ingram is here yet, he and Vic are just living with the Autins and Ingrams. Mr. Wharton does not think Dick will ever get another job on the rail road, he says he has been black balled, and he will not get any more work from them. It seems too awful bad don't it?

Old man Combs told your father this afternoon that Bill Young had moved onto his own place. I don't know whether Mrs. Bingham went with him or not. Take good care of yourself and keep well. We all send love, Mother



March 2, 1900

My darling little girl, I suppose you have not got my Wed. letter yet. We did not get either yours or Dora's yesterday, and your father did not get the draft from Jim that he expected. We hope to get a through mail tomorrow. Yesterday and today have been rather fine days, not very warm but clear.

Your father and Gordon took the turkey hens to town yesterday, they brought twenty seven dollars and fifty cents. Your father could not find Gordon yesterday when he wanted to come home, he waited awhile and came on without and he had to walk home, and he had the leg ache after he went to bed. Your father heard in town yesterday that Mrs. Strayer [spelling not clear] was married again. She married a farmer, and has gone to Oklahoma. She got a divorce from her other husband and was married again in less than six months, poor old woman. I calculate there is lots of trouble in store for her. I should think her children would be disgusted with her. She has sold her property in town and I doubt whether she has a dollar that old Mr. Strayer left her.

Mr. Hogg took your father out to look at the old O'Donnell place yesterday, it has fallen into the hands of the Ringlands and they want to borrow two thousand dollars on it and your father was thinking some of letting them have it, but I don't know as it would be best. A loan co. would not let them have that much money on it. They are asking six thousand dollars for it, but they can only get three thousand offered for it. I am afraid that if your father lets them have it we will have to take the place and it will not bring much of an income. Its an old house and would not sell for much and don't suppose it would rent for more than ten dollars a month. Old Mr. Ball died about a week ago. I hope the weather and roads will get good before you get home, and stay good while you are at home. Your father could hardly get through between here and Mrs. Dietze's yesterday. We all send love, Mother

The fourth event in the lecture course comes of the 9th of this mo. I suppose you will be here by then. Gordon



March 28, 1900

My darling little girl, What a comfort you are to me. What would I do without you?

I drove old Dollie over to Dysarts yesterday afternoon and Mrs. Dysarts and I went over to Nashes. Ella has fallen off fifty pounds the old man looks just about like he did the last time I saw him. Mrs. Nash looks much the same. The young folks came here last night to practice their dialogue and they staid until almost midnight. Walter Nash was planting potatoes I told him we had our potatoes planted a good while ago and he said he wanted to plant some late potatoes. Ella Nash has sixty young chickens, but she has no turkey eggs yet. Your father just got through planting a patch of early corn. Emma Stout is going to come home with your father some Sat. soon and stay all night some time soon. Minnie Bybee is home now I would have been glad to have seen her if Emma had not been sick. I am glad anyway for I am always glad to see Minnie Bybee. Neither Maggie nor John Kidd were to church last Sabbath, though John was better the last time we heard from them. Bernie Long was sick last Sabbath with grip. They seem to have a real time with sickness.

We are having such pretty spring weather now so warm and dry. The leaves are beginning to come out. The girls all had early spring flowers on last night. I gave the girls a dish of apples and gave them our new knives to pare them with. We had a real pleasant time. Now I hope you will be feeling real well when I hear from you again. We all send love. Mother

Martha Gordon Bell Obituary

Died - On April 25th, '00, Martha, wife of Alexander Bell, in the 60th year of her age. Mrs. Bell was born in Milledgeville, Ga., and when quite young came with parents to Illinois. At the age of eight years she united with the church at South Henderson, Ill., then under the pastoral care of Rev. Robert Ross. In 1869 she was united in marriage with Alexander Bell and with her husband moved to Springfield, Mo., in 1890. She was one of the charter members of Springfield congregation, a woman greatly beloved by all who knew her, an earnest consistent Christian, abounding in generosity, the poor finding in her a ready helper. A woman of rare intellectual gifts and good judgment, deeply interested in the welfare of the Church and Cause of Christ. The congregation of Springfield deeply feels its loss. But the greatest loss is felt in her family to whom she was unusually devoted. But she has entered the blessed home, where there is no more death nor separation from loved ones and the God of all grace comforts and sustains the bereaved husband and children.

APPENDIX D

SIBLINGS OF BERTHA BELL WHITELAW

Bertha had one older sister and three younger brothers. The sister, Eudora Bell Jones (1870-1957) married a Presbyterian minister, had four children, and lived most of her adult life in Springfield, MO. The brothers, Robert Gordon (1874-1906), Ralph Alvin (1876-1887) and Normon Osmond (1878-1885) all died young; Robert in early adulthood, in Springfield, and Ralph and Norman as children, while the family was living in Nebraska. When the family moved from Nebraska to Missouri, they brought Ralph's and Norman's coffins with them. All four of Bertha's siblings are buried in Hazelwood Cemetery, Springfield, Missouri, as are their parents, Martha and Alexander Bell.

Bertha also had two older half-brothers, William and Alexander Rankin, children of her father Alexander and his first wife, Sabina Rankin. These children were raised mainly by their maternal grandparents in Illinois after their mother's death, and Bertha would have seen them only on visits.

Documents in this section:

- Ralph Bell, obituary.
- Robert Gordon Bell, letters and obituary.
- Eudora Bell Jones, notes and chart of descendants.

Ralph Bell

Obituary of Ralph Bell, from *The Oxford Standard*, Oxford, Neb., April 7, 1887, No. 20

"Died—At 2 o'clock a.m. April 1, 1887, Ralph, son of Alexander and Margaret Bell, aged eleven years. The deceased has for more than two years suffered from a tumor on his neck, and for some time past the family has had but little hope of his recovery. At five o'clock on March 31st, he was taken to convulsions, and from that time until released by death remained unconscious. Funeral services were held at the residence at 10 a.m. on Saturday the 2nd, and were conducted by Rev. Denlo. The subject of thought being the hope and comfort given to Christians in such time of affliction, with an earnest appeal to the young people to prepare for such changes. The remains were interred on the homestead by the side of a little brother who was accidentally killed a year ago last harvest. Thus these parents within the past two years have been called upon to part with two dear boys. We extend our sincere sympathy to the parents and children in this, their hour of sorrow. May they find comfort and consolation in the scripture chosen for the foundation of Rev. Denlo's remarks: "Fear not! For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

Letters from Robert Gordon Bell to His Sister, Bertha Bell Whitelaw



As these letters indicate, the Bell children inherited various rental properties in Springfield from their parents. At the time of these letters, Bertha was married and living in Kidder, Missouri, and Robert, who lived in Springfield, was apparently managing her rental properties for her.

Springfield, Missouri March 16, 1903

My dear Bertha – well as pa is gone it is a case of “conpushency” that I write. He left Fri. morning for Chetopa. I had a letter from him this a.m. He got in on time Fri. eve. and went by way of Ft. Scott. So you see that makes everything rather quiet around here. I am getting along swimmingly tho. Lucy was over today and cleaned everything up nicely for me again. Lucy is mighty fine – I would have a hard time if it wasn't for her work once a week. Fred was out and stayed over night with me last week, and Walter Shockley stayed Sat. night and August comes up every once in a while and I see Ed Norbury nearly every day and Mr. Coombs saunters up once or twice a week. So you see I don't lack anything for company.

We are talking of trading this place off for a house and lot on Peare St. and \$3,000 difference. If we do that I suppose I'll have to move this spring. The folks say they want to get out here in time to make garden. We bought three houses on the corner of Walnut and Doloson St. there on the N.E. corner. Two of the houses front on Doloson the other on Walnut. The two on Dal. St. are four room cottages and have bathrooms and inside closets, and rent for \$17.50 and \$12.00. The one on Walnut tho is a daisy, and no mistake it is brand new cost of \$3,500.00 has seven rooms and is I think one of the finest modern houses I ever saw. The inside is simply beautiful has a grate and a beautiful mouth – draft grate – like yours. I wish you could just see the bath room. Bathroom and closet are separate. We pay \$5,200 for the three and they rent for \$54.50. Mr. Hogg rented the large house Saturday for \$30.00 per month.

Fred and I were down to Lois's Sat. night, playing finch, and they tell us that they are going away in June. Mrs. Lair has handed in her resignation. It was quite a surprise to us. We supposed that Lairs were one of the permanent fixtures of Springfield. Mrs. Lair says she has lived here for thirty years. That's quite a while isn't it?

I wish you could see the sofa pillow Blanche made and gave me for a birthday present. She says it isn't a birthday present but I can call it one if I want to, I guess. It is about the size of those large sofa pillows you left here only much lighter. I don't know what kind of cloth it is but it is buff colored and has the following inscription embroidered on it in brown silk letters about one inch big, with capitals two or three inches long. "May you always live in clover." Then it has clover leaves and blossoms, ten blossoms embroe'd (I can't spell that) all around on it "promisens" you know. I tell you I think it mighty fine.

I was out and called on Myrtle Calhoun last night, and as they live out by the Normal I of course obtained the information you wanted. He is a widower and 42 years old. I mean Prof Taylor. I got the music and the chess book and I am very much obliged for them. Well it is getting late and I must close for this time. Your loving bro, Gordon

2/16/03 Blanche Lair was the girl who signed herself "Tenderly Yours." I suppose you saw in the paper about Dr. Longs going to leave.



Springfield, Missouri

March 21, 1904

Dear Bertha and John [Bertha had married John Whitelaw in 1903], Well this is a beautiful spring, isn't it. Pa and I have just come from dinner at Mr. Culey's old restaurant. Went to the funeral this morning at 10:30. He was buried at Maple Park. I got the birthday present alright in your last letter. Many thanks – I can wear lavender and look mighty fine I assure you.

I am thinking of going down to Chadwick tomorrow – they have the Mill nearly complete now and will start if nothing happens the 10th of April. Then I hope to be getting some good dividends. Louis Legure showed me the copies of 27 assays that James A. Bishop has just been making out at the Wolcoft Mine. They are simply fine – run from \$943.60 the lowest to \$5,449 per ton and will begin shipping right away to the Smelters and raise money for the Mill which will undoubtedly be built this spring. I heard of some man or Pa did rather who was offering 5,000 shares of Wolcoft for 12 ½ cents that says now he wouldn't take 50 cents for. Every one here is feeling mighty good. Mr. Meyers left last Monday night for New York City to be gone about a month. Fred Freeman's still in St. Louis and is working for the Traction Co. as conductor – says he is getting (rest of letter missing; it is from Gordon.)



Springfield, Missouri

July 11, 1904

My Dear Bertha, I suppose long before this you have got home from the fair, and wishing it would quit raining. [The 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis?] It looks here now as tho' it had, and I most sincerely hope it has for awhile our way. I should have written to you Saturday, or I intended at least but I had company that night and couldn't get around to it.

I am going out to your house on W. Exter this morning to put up a new screen door and put new wire on three more – and put new wire on the windows. Then I will have all of the houses fly proof. Mr. Graig hasn't sold Mrs. Fisher those notes yet but says he thinks he will get it done up all in good shape by tomorrow. I hope so, for none of the funeral expenses have been paid yet and I hate to have them run on so long.

Meyers is in Chicago now and if you will have John send me that 5000 share certificate that isn't divided up yet, and make out a list how the new certificates are to be made I'll send it to him with our stock that Pa had.

Mrs. Thompson won't move till the fifth of Aug. So until she goes I can stay here. I saw Nell and Ida Long Sat. and had quite a talk with them. They spoke of seeing you and John at the fair. Those people that live in your Water St. house haven't been at home for a month. Their father is very sick and they are staying with him. They owe \$20.00 rent now and when they come so I can get the money I'll send you a draft for all your rent up to date. Well I must stop, must go now. Love to all your loving bro. Gordon



Springfield, Missouri

August 11, 1904

My dear sister, Well at last I have gotten around again to writing to you. It is awfully hot and dry here now, the first dry weather we have had this summer. Yes I am greatly relieved now to think that I have all of the creditors paid up. Dr. Anderson's bill was only \$15.00. I thought that was awfully low. Dr. Von Truboe's bill was the same. I.N. Anderson's the undertaker's bill was \$80.00. And the other doctor's bill was six dollars. Mr. Paxson's bill was \$28.50.

Well I have at last moved and am all settled in good shape. Mrs. Thompson rented her house here where she and I were living to Mr. Underwood a Frisco engineer so of course that threw me out but I finally prevailed upon Mrs. Underwood to let me have the south front room. So I got Fred to help me and moved from one room to another. They are awfully nice people and treat me just lovely. I went out to the country and got the parlor carpet and put it on instead of that old rug. But it is about eight inches too wide and fourteen inches too long for this room.

Mr. Freeman has a brother visiting him from Ohio. And yesterday was the forty second anniversary of the Wilson Creek battle, and Mr. Freeman suggested that he, his two brothers, Fred and Charlie and myself all go. So we got a three seated carriage from the Pickwick livery stables and the six of us went to the battle ground. It is fourteen miles and some of it is over awfully rough country – but we all enjoyed it very much and tho't we had a good time.

Mr. Hogg wants to know if you want to sell the Water St. house. If you do what do you want for it. I wouldn't take less than \$1,000 for it if I was in your place. Let me know what you think best about it when you write again. Well I must stop now and go to town. I have some rent to collect today. Write soon, your loving bro – Gordon



Springfield, Missouri

Oct. 10, 1904

Dear Bertha – Well this is now night and I suppose you wrote to me this morning so I thought I would have to write to you tonight. I expect you think it is time you were getting something in the way of a draft for forty some odd dollars. But if you think you can spare me some of it for a month or so I'll be very much obliged to you. Your houses are all rented now. The Pearl St. house was vacant for awhile but is rented now. Mrs. Welborne who was living there moved when her time was out the 7th of Sept. but Mr. Hogg rented it the 1st of Oct. to another family who think they will stay. The Water St. house is rented now for \$10.00 a month – and that is due also on the 1st. If you think you can spare it I'd like to use all of this month's rent. My house on E. Walnut is vacant and has been since the 10th of Sept. and I don't know when I will get it rented and I had to spend all of the Oct. rent on the Long property on repairs, back on it. So you can see I am pretty short on money.

We re having some awfully hot weather here now, the warmest I think I ever saw this time of the year. No I am a little like you about writing to Mina. I had a crazy letter from her about two months ago and she didn't want me to ever mention getting it to any one

and didn't want me to answer it. Well you may be sure I didn't answer any sooner than she wanted me to. I just simply couldn't see a thing in it. She certainly can write some of the "looniest" letters I ever had in my life. If I had a wife like her I would sue for a divorce or kill myself one.

I got the money today from Dora's renter for the wheat and will send it to her tomorrow. Landon Shockery is staying with me and helping me with the work up at the store.

I forgot to tell you that I will have to put a new roof on the barn on the Elm Street place – it will take about six thousand shingles to do it. I think I will get to work on it about tomorrow afternoon or Wed.

Well it is ten thirty and I must quit and go to bed I am pretty tired. Oh yes I was out and stayed all night Sat. night at Mr. Shockley's with Landon. Oldie is there now keeping house for them she came back here from Los Angeles Cal. and brought five children with her. Isn't that [illegible] children tho.

Mr. Coombs had a kind of a paralytic stroke about a week ago or so and is just getting around a little now. Poor old man I am afraid he will die there by himself sometime and no one will know a thing about it. Well I must close for this time. Your loving brother
Gordon



Springfield, Missouri
April 7, 1905

Dear Bertha, Your letter received yesterday and I was awfully glad to hear from you. Yes I am like you we certainly do miss the good times we used to have. Sometimes I stop and think what wonderful changes time does bring around. It seems like it has been so short a time go since we were at home on the farm. Now Mother and pa are both dead and you and I are married and in homes of our own. Nell and I are living at 1454 Clay St. just two doors north of the store now, and we think we are fixed mighty nicely. We have five nice rooms (the cottage is new) and we have two nice new rugs on the Parlor and dining room. We put that velvet carpet we had on the parlor at home on our sitting room, and we have a new gas stove in the kitchen and have gas lights all over the house. And also have a very nice bath room. I am sending you a draft for \$26.00 today less the exchange or 25.95. I would send the other ten dollars, but I have to build some fence across the back of the lot at 640 Pearl St.

You asked me how I looked. Well Nell says I look mighty fine but then she may be a little partial. Can't you get away from home some time this summer long enough to come down and make us a visit. You know you can get away better than I can and would like so much to see you. I also had a letter from Rankin [Bertha and Gordon's half brother, who lived in Chetopa, Kansas, by their father's first marriage] wanting me to take Kenneth. I told him that I couldn't use him in the store at all but that I would help him to get work but I couldn't promise him anything at the store. Well I must stop for this time. I am writing this letter on the top of the cigar case and waiting on customers between times. Write soon from your loving bro Gordon.



Springfield, Missouri
June 7, 1905

Dear Bertha, Your letter came this morning and I don't wonder at you poor girl feeling a little impatient about your money. I will get the last of your money for June today. I had some bills to pay out of last months rent amounting to \$16.97. \$8.00 wall paper on Water St. 2.50 for water on Water St. \$3.62 for lumber for repairing the fence on Pearl St. \$1.00 for work on fence, .35 for nails. 1.50 for screws. I am sending you a draft for \$34.00. Mr. Hake who lives at 640 Pearl St. is a plumber and some of the water pipes froze up and I had him to do the repairing on them which cost \$2.00. Otherwise I could send you \$36.00. After this I can send you the rent regularly about the 10 or 15th of each month whenever I can get it. I have to wait sometimes from a week to ten days on some of the people to get the money. The places are all insured in good companies. I've forgotten what the names of them are. I can send you the policies tho.

Mr. Cain who lives at, or did live in the Elm St. house has moved out. Carsons who lived across the St. from Jn. Kidd you know have

been having the small pox so I guess they got scared and moved away. I have Mr. Hogg getting me a new tenant. I don't think it will be vacant long. The weather is awfully hot here now, as I suppose it is in Kidder.

We are having a carnival here now at the old show grounds and Fred Freeman and his wife, Nell and I all went over a little while. The same old shows that they always had. Well I must close for this time and eat dinner. Nell and I are well and are going to try if possible to get up some time this summer or fall to make you all a visit. Hoping the draft will be a little encouragement to you. I can send it regularly now. Love to all. Nell sends love. Lovingly, your bro Gordon



Springfield, Missouri
July 11, 1905

Dear Bertha, I received your letter a few days ago and I guess you think that I am never going to write to you any more but we are moving and have been or have been getting ready to move for the last week. The tenants in the Walnut St. house moved away to Ft. Scott, and the house was being so badly used that I thought the only way to take care of it would be to move into it.

I sold out the interest I had in the store and I think I am going to get the truant inspector appointment for the city schools. There has been a new law passed here compelling all children between 12 and 16 years of age to be in school. It will be my duty to see that all children of that age white and black in Springfield are in school. It will pay sixty dollars a month.

I am awfully sorry to hear of John's afflictions. What do you suppose was the cause of it? We certainly do hope that it will be better soon.

Bertha I can't send your draft this time. The Frisco has changed their pay day now so I can't get all your money before the 21st this mo. I will send it then. I rented the Elm St. house again to some man who had been living on the O'Day place and is now working in the old Gulf shops. And as he just began working there the first of June he couldn't pay me any rent till the 21st of July as they hold 21 days back on their pay. There will be two months rent due then. Mr. Cain's left the house in an awfully bad condition and I had to have four rooms papered before I could get any one to go into it. But the repair work is pretty well done now, and I don't think we will be at any more expense for a good while. I have one house that the people are back six months on their rent and I don't know what in the world I am going to do with them. They are an awfully nice old couple and take splendid care of the house but he has been sick and not able to work scarcely since Jan. If I turn them out they couldn't get another house.

Well I must close for this time. Will write more when we get moved. Let us know how John is getting along. Lovingly, Gordon

Obituary of Gordon Bell (died Jan. 21, 1906)

Obituary

Gordon Bell died at his home at the corner of Walnut and Dollison streets Sunday morning at 4:45 o'clock, age 32. Tonsillitis and resulting complications caused his death. The funeral will occur tomorrow afternoon with internment at Hazelwood Cemetery.

Form No. 1.

THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY.
INCORPORATED
23,000 OFFICES IN AMERICA. CABLE SERVICE TO ALL THE WORLD.

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This is an UNREPEATED MESSAGE, and is delivered by request of the sender, under the conditions named above.

ROBERT C. CLOWRY, President and General Manager.

NUMBER	SENT BY	REC'D BY	CHECK
Bhex	n	s	Spaid

RECEIVED at Kidder Jan 21 1906
Dated Springfield Mo Jan 21
To Ralph Whitelaw
Kidder

Gordon died at five
this morning tell Bertha
John Whitelaw Jr

Gordon Bell was brother
of Bertha Bell Whitelaw and
Eubora Bell Jones, son of
Alexander Bell and Martha
Gordon Bell.

At the time of Robert Gordon's final illness and death, Bertha was expecting her second child, and could not travel from Kidder to Springfield. Bertha's husband, John, went to Springfield in her place and sent this telegram to his brother, Ralph, asking him to tell Bertha of Robert's death. John and Bertha's first son, Neill Gordon Whitelaw, was born on January 29, 1906, eight days after Robert's death.

Eudora Bell Jones (1870-1957)



The following material is from the files of Sara Tamburrino, Eudora's great-granddaughter.

Valedictorian of class of 1894 - Drury College, Springfield, MO.

Hobby was Painting.

Middle initial "G" doesn't stand for anything. She just made it up since she did not have a middle name.

"Although the children attended school in Oxford, the advantages there were little different from those in country schools. The Bells were determined that their children should have a higher education, so Dora was sent to Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska, less than a hundred miles away. Here she entered the Academy and took up what would now be considered third year high school work. A year later her sister, Bertha also entered the same school. They lived in the girls' dormitory under the strict supervision of the Lady Principal.

Although the building was furnace heated, the system was not efficient, and the girls often found ice in their pitcher of wash water as they were cleaning up for breakfast... ..The Bell girls enjoyed life at Hastings College and had many friends there. Soon after becoming a student there Eudora chanced to notice one of the upper classmen who was often near her in one of the classes.

She was properly introduced to him at one of the college social functions, but did not often see him outside of class. One day she noticed that he stopped after class and bought two tickets for a certain lecture that was to be given at the college. He was waiting at the door for her when she left the building and she soon found that the second ticket was for her. This was the beginning of the romance that brought about their marriage on June 19, 1895, fifty years ago today. When the Bells were finally established in Springfield the girls entered Drury College, but they found the course quite different from that at Hastings. Eudora was assigned to the freshman college class, and Bertha to the senior year in the academy. Since they lived only a few miles from Springfield, they no longer stayed in the Girls Dormitory but made the trip back and forth each day with a horse and buggy. Eudora graduated with honors in 1894. she was the valedictorian of her class. Bertha had the same honors when she graduated the following year." (taken from "History of the Family of John Russell and Eudora Bell Jones")

Birth and death dates also verified by tombstone, 5/26/95.

The following information was taken from newspaper articles.

Mrs. Eudora B. Jones

Mrs. Eudora B. Jones, 87, died today at her home, 1918 South Hampton, after a lingering illness.

Mrs. Jones the widow of the Rev. J. Russell Jones, a Presbyterian minister in the Ozarks for many years, had been a resident of Springfield for 65 years. She was a graduate of Drury College in the class of 1894 and was a member of First and Calvary Presbyterian Church. Survivors are one son, Gordon R. Jones, Hutchinson, Kan.; three daughters, Mrs. Sydney Cook, Route 9; Mrs. C. C. Campbell, 525 South Kickapoo; and Mrs. Maurice Hale, Powell, Wyo.; one sister, Mrs. John Whitelaw, DeSoto, Kan.; nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Funeral arrangements are incomplete under direction of Gorman-Scharpf.

Mrs. Eudora B. Jones

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m., Friday at Gorman-Scharpf Chapel for Mrs. Eudora B. Jones, 87, with the Revs. A. J. McClung and Vincent Gray officiating. Burial will be in Hazlewood Cemetery. Pallbearers will be Guy Barnes, Fleet Holloway, W. D. Huff, Lawrence Lippman, C. Alton Russell and Charles Small. Mrs. Jones died Wednesday at her home, 1918 South Hampton, after a lingering illness.

Descendants of Eudora Bell and Russell Jones

Eudora G. Bell (1870-1957) married John Russell Jones (1866-1953)

Eula Ione Jones (1896-1979) married Sydney Cook, no issue

Aileen Bell Jones (1900-1977) married Cecil Calvin Campbell

Gordon Calvin Campbell (b. 1929) m. Forda Murray (b. 1929)

Sara Campbell Tamburrino (b. 1959); one child

Mark Campbell (b. 1962)

Katherine Eudora Campbell (b. 1933) m. (a) John Irwin (b) Tom Parker

Paul Irwin (b. 1954); one child

Laura Irwin (Meurer) (b. 1956); one child

Ruth Irwin (Sills) (b. 1958); one child

Nova Lucille Jones (1902-199?) m. Maurice Hale

Maurice Hale (b. 1926) m. Dorothy Grosvenor

James, David Maurice, Richard, Robert, Susan

Margaret Hale (b. 1929) m. Robert Bushnell

Delores, David, Charles, Margaret

Marian "Anne" Hale (b. 1932) m. Alphoso Marra

Neil, Nancy, Anthony, Amy

David Hale (b. 1936)

Gretchen, Julie

Shirley Katherine Jones (1903-1947) m. Harry Engel

Dale Lee Engel (b. 1929) m. Mary Swanson

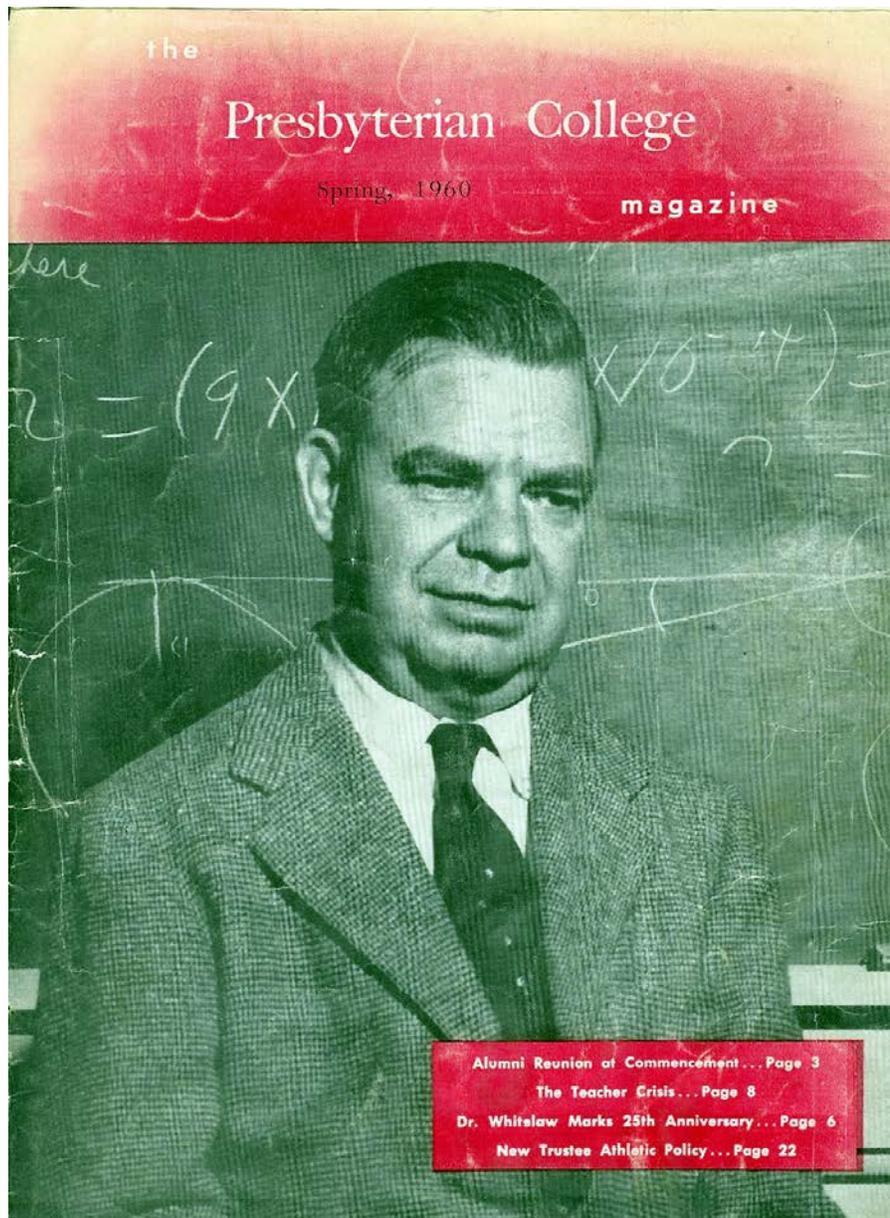
APPENDIX E

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON JOHN AND BERTHA BELL WHITELAW'S CHILDREN

This Appendix contains the following documents:

- Neill Gordon Whitelaw: Magazine article and obituaries
- Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford: Obituary
- Albert Whitford (Eleanor's husband): Obituary
- John Whitelaw: Obituaries
- Alvis Love Whitelaw (John's wife): Obituary

Neill Gordon Whitelaw





If Dr. Neill Whitelaw is

PC's Toughest Taskmaster

his methods have paid dividends in the field of physics during 25 years here

ASK any Presbyterian College graduate of the past quarter-century to name PC's toughest taskmaster, and his likely reply will be Dr. Neill G. Whitelaw.

Ask him to point to his most sympathetic campus adviser, and he may readily designate this same professor of physics—who this year observes his 25th anniversary on the Presbyterian College faculty.

There's no paradox here, for Dr. Whitelaw combines the great teacher's urge to make young minds stretch with a warm personal interest in each individual student. He follows every budding career after graduation, and most of his charges still return whenever possible to his laboratory in the basement of Jacobs Science Hall.

IN marking his 25th year this session, Dr. Whitelaw holds the distinction of being the senior professor on the PC faculty. And only President Marshall W. Brown surpasses him in length of tenure among all of the College personnel.

Through these years, this courageous individual has achieved a reputation for excellence extending far beyond campus bounds. His students have gone forth as testimony, for there has been no year when he has not had former members of his classes holding graduate fellowships and teaching assistantships at leading universities.

President Brown, in his appreciation of Dr. Whitelaw's work, points out:

"Skillful in the teaching of the ordinary student, Dr. Whitelaw has the rarer quality of being able to stimulate the talented student to work to the limit of his capacity."

On the basis of his reputation in the field

of physics, he was contacted by the government during World War II to work in connection with uranium isotope separation in the nuclear energy program at Oak Ridge. But he remained at Presbyterian to direct the extensive physics teaching required as part of the schedule of the 1,600 Air Corps cadets who received pre-flight training on this campus.

ALTHOUGH troubled by arthritis in recent years, he has never permitted this fact to effect his attitude, his full instructional schedule and his carrying more than his share of faculty committee duties. In addition, he exceeds the usual teacher load in the many hours given to student aid and counseling—during vacant periods in the daily schedule and often into the night.

His influence is that of a Christian scholar, for he is a loyal member of the Clinton First Presbyterian Church.

Neill Whitelaw, affectionately known as "Whitey" among his friends, first came to Presbyterian College in 1935. He had served as an instructor of mathematics at the University of Wisconsin after receiving his PhD from that institution in 1933. Although his doctorate was in the field of physics, he also taught mathematics the first year at PC, and he has continued to teach some math in addition to his duties as chairman of the physics department since 1936.

A native of Kidder, Mo., he grew up on a farm near DeSoto, Kans., where both his mother and father still live. Whitelaw was an active high school participant in both football and baseball, and of course, he starred academically at DeSoto High.

SOME of the older teachers there still recall the records compiled by him, his sister, Eleanor, and brother, John—all of whom fin-

ished as valedictorians of their respective classes. Eleanor Whitelaw is now the wife of prominent astronomer Albert Whitford, who recently became director of the Lick Observatory on Mt. Hamilton. John Whitelaw serves as executive director of the Council of Social Agencies of the Portland (Ore.) United Fund.

Bachelor Neill Whitelaw has a special fondness for the children of his brother and sister, and he prods his nieces and nephews toward continued academic excellence.

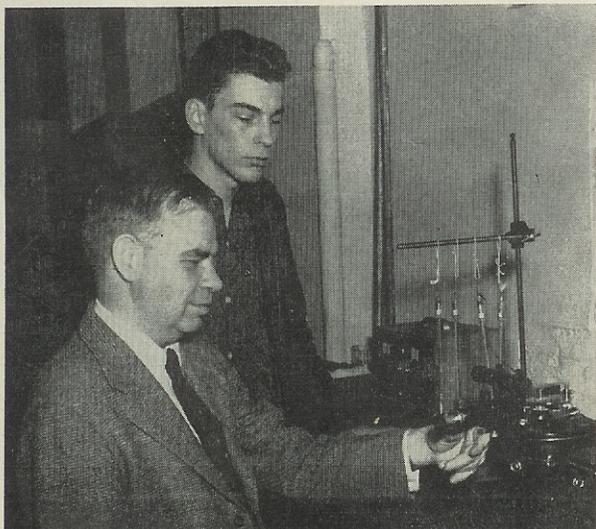
After graduation from high school, Whitelaw attended Park College (Mo.) for three years. He transferred to Miami University of Ohio when his esteemed professor, Dr. R. L. Edwards, went to that institution, and he received his BA degree there in 1927. Neill Whitelaw moved on to Wisconsin for his master's in 1929 and subsequently his doctorate. Scholarships being scarce then, he worked to help put himself through graduate school. One of his part-time jobs consisted of helping to obtain meteorological data for the local weather bureau, and he had to arise by alarm clock during the night to check his instruments.

The service of Dr. Whitelaw is measured not in his own work alone but in that of the students he has helped to develop. Some of these include:

Dr. Colin Hudson '36, now a leading physicist in the Office, Chief of Ordnance, the Pentagon, involved in secret missile development; Dr. Jack Vreeland '49, in nuclear reactor research with Westinghouse; Dr. Ed Burke, Jr. '47, professor of physics at King College and just returned from a year's leave to help the Chilean government improve its physics work at the University of Chile; T. O. McKeown '42, one of the top engineers in the South Carolina division of Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Co.

The list also includes: David H. Martin, '43, assistant professor of physics at North Carolina State; Andrew Howard '54, assistant professor of mathematics at PC; Herbert Hunter '53, of the Southern Bell engineering group; Robert

Dr. Whitelaw gives personal laboratory supervision to Robert N. Jeanes, a junior from Easley, S. C., and the son of Dr. Robert P. Jeanes '28.



Nelson '51, at the Air Force Research Center at Charlottesville, Va.; Chris Patte '56, with the USA Ordnance Missile Command at Redstone Arsenal; Richard Childers '53, completing work on his doctorate at the University of Tennessee, where he shares in the development of a giant microscope for nuclear studies.

STILL others continue to pursue graduate work; for example, George Jacks '58 at Clemson, Paul Chandler '59 at the Institute for Textile Research and Jimmy Suttles '58 at Duke University.

These are some of the men who are proving the measure of Dr. Whitelaw's effectiveness as he goes about his daily task of teaching at Presbyterian College. They and the many others who have sat under him share the sentiment of a current senior class member, not a physics major, who said recently:

"Every student, no matter what his major, should take at least one course under Dr. Whitelaw. It's a real privilege to know him—not only because of his brilliant mind but because he is such a fine person."

Across the Plaza . . .

(continued from page 5)

Other Class Presidents, besides Billy Haggood, are: junior class—Billy Betchman of Summerton, S. C.; sophomore—Joe Davis of Lawrenceville, Ga.; and freshman—Joe Harvard of Columbia, S. C.

And Martin Chitty of Denmark, S. C., is the newly elected editor of *The Blue Stocking*, to serve throughout the next two semesters as the successor to Evin Varner of Bennettsville, S. C. Bob Smith of Atlanta was named business manager.

Fourteen Seniors Completed Requirements for their degrees with the close of the first semester of the 1959-60 session in January. They are: Bachelor of Arts—Alvis Glenn Coble of Columbia, S. C.; Gerald Wood Crawford of Gray Court, S. C.; Allard Tribble Douglass of Whitmire, S. C.; Davis Rutledge Holland, Jr., of Clinton; Alan Robert McKie of Alexandria, Va.; Warren Fanshaw Rollins, III of Decatur, Ga.; Arthur Donald Summer of Enoree, S. C.; and James Earle Woodward of Graniteville, S. C.

Bachelor of Science—James Henry Bradford of Charlotte; William Paul Chastain of Central, S. C.; John Everia Gossett, Jr., of Pauline, S. C.; Johnny Barnwell Granger, Jr., of Lexington, N. C.; Donald Hutchison Segrest of Tuskegee, Ala.; and Nak Hyun [unclear] of Seoul, Korea.

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Dr. Whitelaw

Dr. Neill Whitelaw, who died Saturday, was an inspiration.

Physics professor at Presbyterian College for 32 years, Dr. Whitelaw inspired students and colleagues alike, some with his knowledge, some with his life but most with a combination of the two.

We think two comments we heard recently—one from a student, the other from a faculty member—sum up Dr. Whitelaw's knack for inspiring others.

Last April, PC paid tribute to Dr. Whitelaw in a "Whitelaw Day" program and named the auditorium in Richardson Science Hall in his honor. After the program, a PC student commented, "You know, before the program, I figured it would be dullsville. It couldn't be too interesting. But when Dr. Whitelaw spoke, he reachd me and the others. It was moving and Dr. Whitelaw made it interesting and entertaining. He's quite a fellow."

Dr. Whitelaw fought a battle with crippling arthritis. It bent his back but it couldn't change his smile.

A fellow faculty member commented Saturday after hearing of Dr. Whitelaw's death, "I never heard him complain. He must have suffered very much, but he never complained about his lot. He was an inspiration."

Dr. Whitelaw ^{7/22/68}

CLINTON — Dr. Neill Whitelaw, 62, physics professor at Presbyterian College 32 years before his retirement last year, died early Saturday morning at a Greenwood hospital.

Revered by hundreds of PC students as both teacher and friend, Dr. Whitelaw was termed a "courageous individual" by President Marc Weersing, who lauded him for his reputation which extended beyond the college community. Last April, alumni and Clinton residents joined students in a "Whitelaw Day" program to pay tribute to Dr. Whitelaw and to name the auditorium in Richardson Science Hall in his honor.

A native of Kidder, Mo., he grew up on a farm near Desota, Kan., and earned his B.S. degree from Miami University, Ohio, and his Ph. D. at the University of Wisconsin. He came to PC in 1933. He was a Presbyterian.

Surviving are a brother, John Whitelaw of Portland, Ore.; and a sister, Mrs. Eleanor Whitford of Mt. Hamilton, Calif.

Funeral services were to be conducted today at 3 p.m. at a First Presbyterian Church. Burial was to be in Rosemont Cemetery. *GREENVILLE*

Professor Whitelaw Dies

CLINTON — Neill Whitelaw, who served as physics professor at Presbyterian College for 32 years before his retirement last year, died Saturday at a Greenwood hospital.

Funeral plans are incomplete. Presbyterian College students found him to be both a stern taskmaster and a warm personal friend. Marc C. Weersing, President of PC commenting on Whitelaw, said he has achieved an excellence "far beyond our institution."

Last April, Alumni and Clinton residents joined students in a Whitelaw Day program to pay tribute to the teacher and to name the auditorium in Richardson Science Hall in his honor.

A native of Kidder, Mo., he earned his B. S. degree from Miami University of Ohio and his P.H.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1933. He joined the PC faculty in 1935 after two years as an instructor at Wisconsin and remained active until retirement for health reasons in 1967. At that time he became Professor Emeritus of Physics.

The federal government sought his services during World War II to work with uranium isotope separation in the nuclear energy program at Oak Ridge, but chose to remain at Presbyterian.

Surviving are a brother, John Whitelaw, Portland, Ore. and a sister, Mrs. Eleanor Whitelaw Whitford, Hamilton, Calif. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church.

Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford

The Life of Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford

Written by her husband, Albert E. Whitford, at the time of her death in 1986.

Eleanor Whitford, nee Eleanor Bell Whitelaw, was born July 9, 1908, in Kidder, Missouri. She was the daughter of John and Bertha Bell Whitelaw. Her Whitelaw grandparents had come to America from Scotland in the 1850s. She grew up on farms owned and operated by her parents near Lawrence and DeSoto, Kansas and attended rural and village schools. Her mother's iron determination sufficed to see all three Whitelaw children through college, in spite of a very meager income during the farm depression years. Eleanor graduated from Park College, Parkville, Missouri in 1930.

While employed in the Admissions Office of the University of Chicago, she went on to graduate work in Education leading to a Master's Degree. In 1937 she married Albert Edward Whitford and moved to Madison, Wisconsin, where Albert was a member of the staff of Washburn Observatory at the University of Wisconsin. Their first child, William, was born in Madison in 1940. Their daughters, Mary and Martha, were born in Boston in 1942 and 1945, while Albert was engaged in war work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Following the postwar return to Madison, she devoted herself to the upbringing of the children and to community activities; these included active participation in local and state politics. In the latter part of the Madison years, she worked in the offices of the Wisconsin legislature.

In 1958, Eleanor Whitford moved to the mountain community of Mount Hamilton, California where she took on the responsibilities of the wife of the Director of Lick Observatory, centered in the Director's residence. After eight years, she moved to Santa Cruz at the time of the relocation of the Observatory headquarters to the Santa Cruz campus of the University of California. In Santa Cruz, she continued her interest in community work, which included participation in organizations like the League of Women Voters and the Red Cross. These were curtailed after a serious illness in 1979. After her complete recovery, she kept her interest in the lives and activities of her children and grandchildren. This involved travel to their distant places of residence. Plans for future travel were ended by her death on March 9, 1986, following a cerebral hemorrhage.



Albert and Eleanor with Bertha

Eleanor Whitford's two brothers preceded her in death. Dr. Neill Gordon Whitelaw, Professor of Physics at Presbyterian College, Clinton, South Carolina; and John Moreland Whitelaw, Director of the Portland, Oregon Community Chest. She is survived by her husband, Albert, Astronomer and Professor Emeritus at Lick Observatory, University of California, Santa Cruz, and by their three children: Professor William C. Whitford of the Law School of the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Mary Whitford Graves, wife of Nicholas M. Graves, Winnetka, Illinois; and Martha Whitford Barss, wife of Dr. Peter G. Barss, of Baltimore, Maryland. There are nine grandchildren, in whose lives Eleanor always took great interest.

My Mother as a Parent

Excerpts from remarks by Bill Whitford, Eleanor's son, at her Memorial Service in 1986.

Family was an important value to Mother. Throughout her life she attached great importance to maintaining ties to the family of her upbringing. She was especially close to her Mother and her eldest brother. In her later years she took great interest in genealogy.

Mother had a deep belief in one's responsibility to the greater society as well as to family. I remember adolescent discussions with Mother about the meaning and purpose of life. Two views of hers stand out in my memory. Being happy is more important than gaining prestige or wealth. The world should be a better place because of my time in it – I have a duty not only to be happy but to help others be happy. Mother's commitment to helping others was expressed in numerous ways. Her passion for politics, and her participation in organizations like the Red Cross, reflected her concern for others.

Mother was not an elitist. She was a democrat with a small "d". She picked her friends according to their character, not by their station in life. Because of these values, Mother was a feminist far before it became fashionable.

Mother's attitudes in this respect were passed on to us children at an early age. Children's societies are very status conscious. There are popular kids and there are icky kids. Mother never wanted us to choose our friends on such bases. We were urged to pick our friends because we shared interests, not according to who was the most popular.

Mother was a rationalist. Proposed behaviors were judged on whether they seemed practical. My sister and I have always known that of all possible justifications we might offer, "that everybody else was doing it" was least likely to win our Mother's approval. We children have clearly benefited from absorbing some of this disrespect for convention for its own sake. It has been very liberating. We have all made life decisions that many would consider unconventional. In doing so we have come closer to realizing another of Mother's values – leading happy, socially useful lives.

In these remarks I have chosen to emphasize the attitudes and values Mother bequeathed to her children. Certainly I do not want to ignore other aspects of being a parent and a mother. As we were raised, she was the one who was there. She fixed the meals (very good ones, I might add), she took us to the doctor, she helped us with our homework, she disciplined us as the occasion demanded. All these are important, and Mother did them well. In my middle age it is the values and attitudes that Mother transmitted that are most easily recalled. It is those that I have chosen to reflect on.



Bill, Martha, and Mary Whitford

Albert Whitford (1905-2002)

Husband of Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford

Obituary from the *New York Times*

Albert Edward Whitford, 96; A Mapmaker of the Heavens

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Dr. Albert Edward Whitford, an astronomer who helped map the Milky Way galaxy and measure the brightness of stars in it and beyond it, died on March 28 in Madison, Wis., where he had returned in retirement six years ago. He was 96.

Before moving back to Wisconsin, he was an emeritus professor of astronomy and astrophysics at the University of California at Santa Cruz and directed its Lick Observatory on Mount Hamilton from 1958 to 1968. Earlier, he headed the old Washburn Observatory of the University of Wisconsin for 23 years.

Dr. Whitford was best known for his work with an instrument used to measure the intensity of light, the photometer. By enhancing the sensitivity of the instrument, he helped obtain the first precise measurements of the magnitudes and colors of faint stars, clusters and galaxies.

He developed what became known as the Whitford reddening curve, which gauged interstellar light absorption and was a vital tool in mapping the distribution of stars in the Milky Way. He also explored the structures and dynamics of the spherical blobs of stars known as nuclear bulges at the centers of galaxies.

As part of his role in the growth of astronomy in the United States, Dr. Whitford presided over several commissions on astronomical research and a 1953 conference that led to the national observatory system. He also headed the 1964 Whitford Report from the National Academy Sciences, which became the first of a series of 10-year plans for the field.

In 1959, he oversaw the installation of what is still the Lick Observatory's primary research instrument, the Shane telescope, atop Mount Hamilton, near San Jose, Calif. Its 120-inch reflector gathers light from stars so distant that it takes their



University of California at Santa Cruz

Albert Edward Whitford

light a billion years to reach Earth.

Dr. Whitford was born in Milton, Wis., and graduated from Milton College in 1926. He received his Ph.D. in physics at the University of Wisconsin in 1928, and after several years as an astronomical researcher in California and Wisconsin, he joined the astronomy faculty at the university in 1936.

He directed its Washburn Observatory from 1948 until Wisconsin replaced it with its present Pine Bluff Observatory in 1958.

Dr. Whitford was a past president of the American Astronomical Society and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Whitford is survived by a son, William C., of Madison; two daughters, Mary Graves of San Francisco and Martha Barss of Baltimore; and nine grandchildren. His wife of 48 years, Eleanor Bell Whitelaw Whitford, died in 1986.

John Moreland Whitelaw (1911-1974)

A TRIBUTE to John M. Whitelaw (1911-1974)*

By Gordon Hearn, Dean, School of Social Work,
Portland State University

I have been asked to take a few moments to talk about John M. Whitelaw. He has been a colleague and a friend of almost everyone present.

John was born in Lawrence, Kansas in 1911. His undergraduate education was taken in Missouri and Wisconsin, his professional social work education at the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago and he has done post-graduate work at the University of Southern California, the London School of Economics and Portland State University.



John and Alvis Whitelaw 1959

As a social worker he was County Director with the Kansas Emergency Relief Administration and then came to Oregon as a Child Welfare Consultant and field representative, Oregon Public Welfare Commission.

In 1955 he became Director of the former Council of Social Agencies in Portland and served at the time it was transformed into the Community Council.

John Whitelaw was Director of the Community Council during its growth states. At that time, the Council was a department of the Community Chest. It became a separate organization in 1958 and was incorporated at that time. This was done largely as a result of John's activity.

This was a growth period for many of the agencies also. For a number of years the Council did reviews of the agencies periodically, and through this process John helped set the course for many of them. There was much stress on standards and improving quality of service during this time.

John took leadership in developing numerous new services also. It was primarily through the Council that the C. V. Morrison Mental Health Center was established and the Metropolitan Family Service, which was formerly the Family Counseling Service.

John was particularly concerned with institutional care of normal infants. There were at that time, three institutions in the Portland area that provided this kind of care. In 1958 and 1959 the Council did a study of the children in these agencies and eventually, as a result of this, institutional care of normal infants was abandoned in favor of foster home care.

It was under John's leadership that the Council made its first priority study. This was in 1962. The report was used extensively and provided the base for later studies.

One of the first meetings I was privileged to attend after coming to Portland was a tribute paid to John when he retired as Executive Director of the Council. Two things characterized that gathering: a great deal of good humor and an abundance of good will and affection for John.

He capped his career as a social work educator. He was a founder of the School of Social Work at Portland State University and an active member of its faculty from 1964 to 1972. While many remember him as a fine teacher others valued him particularly as an extremely helpful academic and personal advisor. He was the social welfare policy authority and the historian on our faculty.

If I may be permitted a personal comment, I can say that John Whitelaw has been an invaluable counselor to the Dean. He was the kind of person with whom I could share my concerns, my fears, my feelings of inadequacy and receive the kind of help and reassurance I needed.

He was a good friend, a great colleague and a dedicated community servant.

This is also the occasion to announce the establishment of the John M. Whitelaw Fund. Friends of John are being asked to contribute to the fund which will honor his memory and his tremendous contribution and will be used to assist social work students as well as recognize outstanding scholarly accomplishment.

*Presented to Annual Meeting, Tri-County Community Council, Portland, Oregon, May 29, 1974.

"A social work historian who believed that the present and future can only be understood in the light of past experience."



Social work practitioner, planner, educator.
Born in Lawrence, Kansas, June 4, 1911.

County Director with Kansas Emergency Relief Administration; Child Welfare Consultant and field representative, Oregon Public Welfare Commission; Executive Director of the old Council of Social Agencies in Portland and beginning in 1955, Executive Director of the Tri-County Community Council.

A founder of the School of Social Work, Portland State University; Associate Professor Emeritus; member of the faculty from 1965; coordinator of the social welfare services and policy, community organization, and administration sequences.

Always intellectually alive; a life-long learner at Park College, Missouri; University of Wisconsin, B.A. 1932; School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, M.A. 1937; University of Southern California; London School of Economics; Portland State University.

Wise counselor and true friend.

Alvis Love Whitelaw

ALVIS LOVE WHITELAW
1911-1998

Alvis Whitelaw, a long-time Oregon social worker, died May 12, 1998, at her daughter's home in Royal Oak, Michigan. She was 86 years old. Through a career that covered a span of nearly 50 years, from the beginning of public welfare during the New Deal of the 1930's through her retirement in 1981, Alvis Whitelaw contributed greatly to the development of social work in Oregon,

She retained throughout her life the idealism and commitment to social welfare that she developed during the 1930s, when she worked as a caseworker and later as a county administrator in Marion, Benton, Columbia, and Linn Counties. She believed deeply that social workers of that time were on a mission to implement President Roosevelt's New Deal policies and to alleviate the social unrest caused by the Great Depression. "We had a sense of purpose, and were united by the feeling that we could make a difference in this horrible situation. We were a part of the Roosevelt effort to bring jobs and relief to people. Welfare service delivery in those years was a rugged affair. So many people were out of work. The men needed jobs, so the federal government hired them and made work of building roads and so on."

She will be remembered for establishing homemaker services in Oregon during the 1960s and 1970s. As Director of Homemaker Services and later as Associate Director of Metropolitan Family Service, she developed an extensive program which enabled the elderly to remain living independently at home rather than in institutions. She developed a similar program to help parents who risked losing their children to foster care because of abuse and neglect. At Metropolitan Family Service and later at the State of Oregon Children's Services Division, she established homemaker programs to prevent foster care in nearly every county in the state. Her work was a precursor of the in-home services that exist today to preserve families. She loved working with the homemakers, whom she said had a special gift for supporting and helping very difficult families.

The former Alvis Ruth Love was born in 1911 in Woodburn, Oregon. Her ancestors were English and French Canadian pioneers who homesteaded in the Willamette Valley. She attended grade school in both Oregon and California and graduated from Grant High School in Portland. She graduated from Willamette University in 1933 with majors in French and in Philosophy and also studied Social Work at the University of Washington.

Alvis married John Whitelaw in 1938. Also a social worker, John became executive director of the Portland Community Council and later was a professor of Social Work at Portland State University. During the 1940s and 1950s, while Alvis stayed home to raise three children, she served on PTAs of Chapman Grade School and Lincoln High School, was a member of the League of Women Voters, and was a board member of Friendly House Community Center. In 1957, she returned to work as a social worker for Boys and Girls Aid Society.

Alvis Whitelaw opened her northwest Portland home to numerous young people. Yanti Kartasasmita, an exchange student from Indonesia, spent a year with the Whitelaws. Josef Bako, a refugee from the Hungarian Revolution, lived with the Whitelaws for several years in the 1950s and remains a part of the extended family. Through her strong interest in the theater, Alvis, in retirement, housed travelling actors and directors who were in town for temporary engagements. She took great interest in the careers of many young actors, and maintained correspondence with them until the end of her life.

In 1993, Alvis moved from her home of 45 years in northwest Portland, to Michigan to be near her daughters.

Alvis Whitelaw is survived by three children, her son, John Whitelaw, M.D. of Sacramento, daughters Susan Whitelaw, Ph.D., and Nancy Whitelaw, Ph.D., both of Michigan, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. The family suggests that memorial contributions be sent to any of the organizations which she supported: the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, the National Abortion Rights League, the National Organization for Women, gay rights groups, AIDS organizations, local theaters, Friendly House Community Center, Spaulding for Children, and Henry Ford Health System Hospice Program.