

Addie 1

HISTORY
of
The Family of ADDIE M. (Neilson) Thomas.

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A series of letters written to her oldest son, Amos Thomas.

Lincoln, Nebr., Aug. 9, 1918.

A brief sketch of the history of your maternal family.

The Honorable John Neilson, M. P., your great, great grandfather, the founder of the Neilson family in this country, was born and educated in Scotland. The county in which the Neilson family lived was named Kirkcudbright, in the extreme south of Scotland. In your Uncle Walter Neilson's travels in Europe a few years ago, he visited this place and succeeded in finding the spot on which our earliest ancestors, to our knowledge, had their home, - a knoll and a pile of stones, - are all that remains of our ancestral home. He visited the farmer on the place and found that he had the Neilson coat-of-arms, the original stone slab that had been on the old house, above his door. Your Uncle secured a photograph of it. He has had it copied in leather and it adorns his dining room above the fireplace, where I hope you may see it some day in his Milwaukee home. To return to your great, great grandfather, in his early manhood he came to Quebec, Canada, and established the first newspaper ever printed in Quebec, printed half English and half French. He also owned a bookstore in the city and was a member of Parliament from the Province of Quebec for years. He received grants of land from the Government, and was requested by King George to be knighted for services done for his Government, but as the story goes, he would not kneel before the King to be knighted and so he remained Honorable John Neilson instead of "Sir John", as he would have had he complied with the King's request. He married Miss Marie Hubaire, an accomplished French girl of one of the leading and oldest families of Quebec. To them were born five children, William, John, Samuel, Isabel and Margaret. The daughters never married and lived in the ancestral home at "Neilsonville", a suburb of Quebec, until their deaths. William, your greatfather and the oldest son, was sent to Edinburgh, Scotland to be educated. He was educated for the law, but never followed his profession. On his return from Scotland his father gave him a large tract of land in Val Cartier township, 18 miles from Quebec, which he rented out receiving a large income from rentals and leading the life of a "country gentlemen". He married a young Irish girl of the neighborhood, Margaret Cassin, a beautiful woman in character as well as physique, it has been said. A bit of romance in her family, is, that her mother ran away from Ireland with her father's coachman. They came to Quebec and located on a farm in Val Cartier and lived happily and raised a large family of brawny men and women, of which your great grandmother was the daughter of the family. Nine children were borne to this union of whom your grandfather, my father, was the oldest son. Your great, great grandmother dying when he was sixteen, and she at the age of thirty-eight years. Your great grandfather married the second time, after a number of years. His second wife being Miss Eliza McAdams. No children were born to this union. Corneilius Brown Neilson, your grandfather, was married at the age of twentyone years to Margaret Ireland, who was seventeen years of age. She was the daughter of Hopper Ireland and Mary Watt Ireland of Val Cartier. Your great grandfather, Hopper Ireland, was born in England and was a school teacher in his early years and later a farmer, in which line of work he made a comfortable competency for his old age. Your great grandmother Ireland was born in Scotland and was a wonderful woman, a hard worker, and a woman of fine strong character, - a pioneer of lower Canada. She was a great butter maker, she and grandfather keeping a large

herd of cows and making the butter in pound and half pound prints, which she sold to customers in the city of Quebec, - driving through the deep snows of the long Canadian winters the eighteen miles to town. Wild animals were abundant in those days, but with a good horse and sleigh she made the trip once a week, leaving home at three and four o'clock in the morning and returning at night. They raised a family of eight children who were a credit to their good Scotch and English ancestry. Four years after your grandfather Neilson's marriage, he with his wife and two children, emigrated to Granville, township, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin and located on a farm about seven miles from Milwaukee, where he lived continuously for over fifty years. He died in May 1918, aged 82 years. Your grandmother preceded him one year at the age of 79 years. Nine children were born to this union, - Doctor Walter H. Neilson being the oldest of the family and the head of the Neilson family now being the fourth in direct line and his son George Neilson, M. D., will be the next in line. I, your mother being the oldest daughter living. Doctor Hubert Neilson, the oldest son of your great, great Uncle John Neilson, the second son of your great, great grandfather, was for many years the Surgeon General of the Canadian Army. He is retired now and living in the ancestral home at Neilsonville, Quebec, which he fell heir to at the death of his father. A brother of his, Harry Neilson, has bought the old home at Val Cartier where your grandfather Neilson was borne and is living there when not in Europe, - Scotland principally. He is an artist of some note. The John Neilson family were very talented and brilliant. Your great, great Uncle was a surveyor and surveyed a great deal for the Canadian Government, especially in the northwest, in Manitoba. He was a great lover of nature and all wild things and wrote a book on "The Birds of Canada" at one time. The sons of this family were very talented in the arts, especially in music, literature and art. Your Uncle Walter H. Neilson has a complete history of the Neilson family, back to the time of the Covenanters in Scotland. Our earliest ancestor that we have a record of was hung for his religious beliefs, being a Covenanter. His name was John Neilson.

November 18, 1926.

Just a line this cold, blistering morning, hoping you are all well and everything going good. I haven't heard from you in ages. George expects to be up there sometime this week and you'll probably see him.

News of general interest seems scarce. Here among the different families everyone is plodding along about as usual. Harry has been at home the most of the week working on his reports. Ethel wrote that Aunt Bessie had sold her farm for \$39,500.00 to a company of wealthy Jews who intend to make a golf course of the place, and have a club house out of the Thomas house where you and Maude were born. The house has been modern for a number of years. Uncle Walter spent a lot of money on it. They had their own light and water and sewage system and bath. There are thirteen rooms in the house, besides halls upstairs and down, front and back stairs, built in wood boxes up stairs and down, porches on four sides, altho they do not go clear around. Then there is another suite of rooms that were for the farmer, made out of the wood-shed and milk room, which adjoined one corner of the main building, four good sized rooms. Uncle Walter never let the tenant occupy the main building, but used it themselves as long as Aunt Clara lived. She enjoyed living out there so much better than in town, and Aunt Bessie was the opposite, never wanted to go out there. Now since Aunt Bessie has had charge of the place, two families have been living in the big house, her tenant ran right over her, and it is well she has sold it. Then there is a 100 foot barn with basement under the whole thing. When your grandfather (Thomas) was in his prime this basement was full of cows and horses and above full of hay and grain, besides that they had a two story granary, where they stored their wheat from one year to the other, holding for better prices, a blacksmith shop and forge where they did much of their repair work, and carpenter shop full of all kinds of tools, a big machine shed to store the farm machinery, which represented the latest and best of all labor saving machinery, and in the

eighty acres adjoining of heavy timber, sheep got their summer living and hogs grew and thrived on nuts and moss. When you think about it that farm would have been a wonderful inheritance and would have been your father's, had he stayed there, but we came west for more freedom and an easier living, and the whole thing was practically sunk in that wretched undertaking in Tamora. I am glad to know that it did not pass into the hands of some commonplace farmer. The farm will now be well taken care of and made a place of more beauty than it now is. Ethel and Bessie were out there for a farewell look a few days ago and while they were down in the woods, which is beautiful at this time of the year, a pack of hounds came baying and yelping, followed by two riders with scarlet coats on splendid mounts, tooting their horns, and they were followed by a dozen or more men and women in gay riding habits on beautiful horses. The Milwaukee Riding Club out for a day, - whether a fox was sighted is not known. This is the only large piece of timber any where near Milwaukee. By holding on to the farm Bessie got \$10,500.00 more for it than she was offered a year ago by a farmer, even so, I think she has sold it cheap, but she was not getting more than taxes out of it every year, and the place was running down, so I guess she has done well to sell it. Uncle Willie sold the Neilson farm for \$32,000.00 and last year the buildings and about twenty acres of the surrounding grounds was sold to a private party for \$25,000.00. The former owner, the treasurer of the Tripoli Club died. He had made some improvements to the house and grounds, but not many, and the widow got almost as much for it as the whole 80 acres was sold for two years before. The Tripoli Club house is on the adjoining eighty, which was the old Small place, owned by your great uncle, now our thirty acres, owned by Grace, Ethel and I, - ten acres each, lies right between those two golf grounds. I may not live to receive the benefit from this land, but it will be valuable some day, - farms are platted to within a half mile to the east, and we are only about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile from the old Thomas place, and just across the road and a little west from the old Neilson farm or the Tripoli golf club grounds.

February 24, 1930.

While listening to the radio I'll write a few lines, altho listening to a radio and writing letters do no go well together, the letter is apt to suffer just now a very beautiful piece is coming in fine, a "Largo", very familiar, Maude often played it. The program has come in better tonight than for some time and I have had the radio on all evening. It is a lot of company. Also heard a terrible picture described of non-enforcement by a representative of the New York World, I believe it was. A supreme effort is going to be made in the next two or three years, before the next presidential election, to break down the enforcement law. The liquor forces are going to keep pounding away using every available means to weaken enforcement, and encourage lawbreaking of every kind, thinking that people will become disgusted, and think it is no use to fight any longer and let them have their liquor. However they may not be reckoning with their hosts.

* * * We are all well here and I hope you are too this wonderful weather. Every day I think it will be our last of such delightful days. It seems as tho we ought to be working on the land and setting incubators and having baby chicks on hand. I am saving eggs now for the incubator and hope to set the latter part of the week. The price for eggs has dropped pretty low for the past week. I sold 23 dz. today for 23 cents, per dozen, lovely fresh eggs, and gathered 76. Ann certainly would go wild, to gather a whole bucket full at one time. I would not be surprised she has inherited agricultural instincts from some of her English and Scotch ancestry.

A month or so ago I wrote to Aunt Barbara, who was my mother's second youngest sister, and one of the two remaining members of the Ireland family living of my mother's generation. She is now eightyfive and smart in mind and body, if she would write out, if not too hard for her, all she knew of the Ireland and Watt families, as far back as she could remember. The Watts were my grandmother

Ireland's people. Her name was Mary Watt. Well she sent a document of seven pages of fool's cap, a complete history of the whole family, sisters and brothers, who they married, the number of children and even what they have done. Not very far back tho, not much, but what I had heard my mother tell. I was sorry about that as I wanted to know who our English and Scotch ancestors were. Grandfather Ireland, your great, great grandfather came here from Hull, England. His people were farmers and freeholders. When he arrived in Quebec he got a position as mathematic teacher in an advanced school there. After a year or so the real estate sharks, then as now, got after him and sold him 300 acres of Valcartier land 18 miles from Quebec, all timber and all had to be cleared. They got Frenchmen and other foreigners to clear a place to build on. Later when he got married and a family on his hands and no school to send them to, he built the first school in that section of country almost by his own efforts. It is an interesting "volume" and when I can I intend to copy it and give each of you a copy, but the majority of the men of the family are farmers or stock raisers. Two cousins are engaged in raising Holsteins in the Ottawa Valley in Ontario, also two other brothers, sons of another sister, are in the same work in Oregon. One banker, one University graduate is a farm agent in Arizona, and so on.

George will soon have been a year at the dairy business. He seems to be doing very well. We were all out there for a short call Sunday. Three dogs came out to meet us, real typical farm place. The dogs, two of them, were left there by the former man on the place. They were miserable derelicts and Florence wanted them disposed of, but somehow no one ever had the courage, so the dogs stayed on and now they look fine, fat and shiny and good to the children and play and sleep with the calves.

Sunday the Kenneys and I and Helene Schemel ate dinner with Mrs. Cave and spent the afternoon. We had a very pleasant time, - Helene is such good company. Mrs. Cave is getting ready to go to Europe in May or June, she and an old friend, a teacher in the schools in Honolulu, are going together. I have another friend here too, a gold star mother, who is going on the gov't's invitation. Rather a sad journey I would say. I am thankful that that invitation does not include me. This mother probably is not over fifty, so she will get a great deal of good out of the trip, aside from the sadness of it. It is a wonderful thing the government is doing.

June 19, 1931.

I should have written you long ago and expressed my appreciation of the clippings you sent and the booklet with Dorothy's picture. It is wonderful what a good swimmer she must be. I showed the clippings to George, to everyone in fact who comes in, and am sending it to Ethel in a letter today, and he remarked, "Well. I think she gets that from me," - George was a regular duck in the water when we were at Milford. You all had such good times in the river. Your grandfather Amos Thomas was good in the water too, - probably learned it when he was logging in northern Wisconsin and floating the logs down the river, I don't know which river, anyone who did that work had to be expert in the water. Your grandfather was a man of parts, pioneered to Wisconsin from southern Illinois when he was sixteen and took up the homestead near Milwaukee, that remained in the family until after his death. This homestead was for his father and the family. They came on when he had located it. Then he went into the woods in the north of Wisconsin and worked until he was 21, that is now, or was, the "Thomas Place" 'till sold to a Jewish organization for golf grounds a short time ago. He was a successful dairyman, farmer, interested in all civic and state affairs, chairman of county board of Milwaukee County for six years, member of the state legislature, and he was executor and administrator of many of the largest estates in Milwaukee County, outside of Milwaukee. He was noted for his good principles, of honesty and efficiency and good judgment. He must have taken his good qualities from his mother. She was a Kentuckian born and raised, and a hard worker and good manager. I have heard my folks talk about the family. Great, great grandfather Thomas was more of a dreamer, taught school in Illinois and was captain of the company of militia in the home town, a veterinarian and a fine singer. Great, great grandmother Sarah Small Thomas, and your grandfather did the farming and managing, also great grandfather was a great orchardist and bee (?)

planter and landscaper. The "Old Thomas Place", as it was called, was beautiful, even after greatgrandfather and grandmother were gone. So in many ways you have quite a heritage from your pioneer ancestry. When your grandfather came to Wisconsin with a company of others, it was an unbroken forest. Every acre of ground had to be cleared. Your picture is the best I've seen of you in a long time. You are a good looking man and I am glad you are interested in affairs, but hope you won't tax yourself too much. Do not live on too high a tension and live longer. I hope Gay is feeling better and that you may all drive down sometime.

May 16, 1932.

I am enclosing this letter from Grace. We have not had a letter from Mr. Tutt yet, but probably will soon. I thot you might have some suggestion of what was best to do in the matter. I don't feel like taking the discount, and on the other hand I need a few hundred to pay up some small bills and to have something to draw on when needed. The banking institutions of Canada are more dependable than are ours here, and I might be favorable to leaving the money there, if I have a small amount for present use. Possibly there would be a less discount later on and our places for investment would be more stable. I want to be sure this money is placed where it will be safe. The Joint Stock Land Bank has paid no dividends for two years, and if there is no improvement in business conditions in the next few months, or a year, there is danger of my loosing the \$8,000.00 I have invested there in stock. Of course it may not happen, but you know how things are. The first of May Harry had to take on a \$50.00 cut in salary, besides the loss he had to take when he was taken off the road and placed in the office. He then had to stand the loss of the use of his car, which was furnished by the bank. The Lincoln Trust I believe it is, has taken over George's West O Street farm, the old Leubben Place, you know, so he has not that to worry about, only the loss of several thousand he put into the place and hard work the first years he had it. I hated to see it go from a sentimental point of view, but the farm would never be desireable until an artesian well was put down or a well that gave a steady supply of water. George has not been well for sometime and went thru Dr. Welch's clinic a week or so ago. Not anything was really found, unless some thyroid trouble. He is taking treatment for that. I think myself the trouble is worrying over finances for the past ten or more years, is breaking him physically. He has made so many bad moves and lost so much money for us all,- but no one could stop him as long as there was a cent to be had, trying to retrieve the losses by spending more, which is a policy that should rarely be followed.

The country is looking so beautiful this year. Never I think have trees and grasses and blossoms been so luxuriant in foliage and general richness. We are in almost perfect seclusion here now. Cannot see the road and the pines are almost meeting. The snow and rain of the past winter and spring have done wonders for the soil. I have 200 chicks and 260 eggs that are due to hatch in ten days. All doing well so far. I hope Dorothy has entirely recovered from her ear trouble. John was quite sick last week and looks very peaked yet. Children all around seem to have been affected by this flu or whatever it is even more than those who are older. I am glad you are so well, also Gay. I am sure she is enjoying her mother's visit. How is Dr. Owen? I hope real well, and also Mrs. Owen and Blossom. My love to them.

Aunt Maggie's passing was more or less a shock. I think I had not seen her for two years, until the day before she died, then she was not awake,- seemed to sleep herself away. Her heart was the cause of the loss of mind,- had been a great care for a year or so. Joe stayed there thru it all and only for a lapse once in awhile has been a great help. Margaret had to earn the living, office nurse for Dr. Clark of Seward,- and Joe took care of the house and Aunt Maggie. They had a nice funeral in the church in Tamora. It is about the only building that has not deteriorated, and our place looks good. The church is kept painted and repaired and Maggie Seaman, who owns our place, has improved it a lot, and keeps it in neat shape. The Lambdin Place is also pretty well kept, but Grandmother Thomas' old place looks bad. Has been rented and let run down. Margaret, I believe, has been willed all of the property, which includes the sixty acre farm adjoining the town, the homeplace and Grandmother's place and those vacant

lots right north of us, you may remember, three I believe. Aunt Maggie told me once after Uncle Frank died, and before her mind began to fail, that she had willed everything to Margaret, personal and real. I have heard nothing since her death.

Well I must hasten.

June 25, 1932.

I have been trying to write every day this week, but have been so busy, finished picking and canning the cherries. Not a very large crop, just divided them among the family and used what I could for myself. The old orchard is about gone, trees rotted and blew down. I had several young trees planted from year to year to take the place of the old ones and they are now bearing, tho not heavily like the old ones. I have been wondering what you have decided to do in regard to the trip to Wisconsin. July is now almost here and I am not ready. Until school closed and the girls got away I was not able to accomplish much but the general routine of work and since they've been gone, cherries and chickens have taken my time. Let me know what your plans are and if possible I will try to comply with them, or if you have other plans that do not include me it will be perfectly alright with me, do what is to your own best advantage. I should have written before. This month has gone so fast and I've rather been expecting word from you too. I hope you and the family have been real well all spring. Maude and children were here for graduation of Barbara from high school for three days. Virginia finished her sophomore year, but has no school for next year, as she hoped for, so many applicants for every opening.

July 22, 1932.

As usual I am slow about writing. Have been wondering what I ought to do about going with Gay the first of August. George said she was expecting to go then. If I consult my own comfort and pleasure I'd stay at home, but it would seem such an easy way to get home I feel as though I ought to take the opportunity. It will be five years, I think, since I was there and there are things that ought to be seen to personally about the land, and of course, it will be a pleasure to see everyone, and the old places. Two weeks is my limit and the time could be cut shorter if Gay was returning before that. Should I go I would certainly bear my part of the expense of the trip and even at that it would be a very cheap trip in comparison with going by RR. Ethel is no doubt at Pewaukee Lake where she takes a cottage every year. It is about 20 miles west of Milwaukee I believe, or N.W., and I should want to go there first as I believe that would be nearer to Green Lake than Milwaukee is. I have not written any of the folks of our intentions, but will do so as soon as I hear from you. If my going will be inconvenient to Gay in any way I hope you will not hesitate to say so. The weather has been so warm that home seems the best place in which to keep comfortable. It may not be so warm after this spell is broken. It is not quite so warm this A.M., and lightening and wind last night cooled the air and it has been quite comfortable this morning. I have picked 37# of plums from a tree here in the yard and there are quite a lot more on the top to be picked. I am getting some boys to pick them. Apple and plum juice together make very good jelly. I have already made several glasses from the fallen plums and apples. Those I'll can and preserve. There seems to be some extra work on hand all of the time. Have been selling spring chickens and lots of eggs this week, have been to the dentist two or three times. If I should go with Gay I'd want her to tell me what to wear on the trip. I have been so busy with the necessary work here have made no extra preparations. If we should go the folks will be delighted to see Gay and she must plan on seeing them all sometime on her trips back and forth. I hope the little girls are having a wonderful time and are well, also yourselves.

November 18, 1932.

I was looking thru my letter paper and found this addressed envelope with the

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enclosed pictures etc. Tho't I'd better send them to you. The photos were taken at Madison when your grandfather was attending the legislative session of that year which must have been in '89, according to that letter from the pres. of the Railway Co. Each of the members of the state legislature were given passes on the different lines of the railroads. A great bribe it was, and one way whereby companies won favorable legislation. In two years from that time your grandfather was running for the state senate, and was in the early part of the campaign stricken with paralysis, from which you know he never recovered. Grandmother T. stayed with him at a hotel in Madison during the session, rather a red letter day for her, altho she would not admit it, but you could see by little things she'd say that she had enjoyed the few months there, and they were planning on spending the winter there again if he was elected.

We are recovering from colds here. George was in bed a couple of days and I have had a cold for ten days or more, but have kept going and doing the work as usual. George has quite a few applications from the Finance Company to look after. I don't like to see people have to borrow money, but I am glad George is getting the work to do. Harry has been using some of his legacy to put the dairy on its feet. Bo't 4 Guernsey cows and fixed up one of the barns.

August 30, 1933.

A hurried line of good wishes for many more happy returns of your birthday anniversary. You were born about 11:00 A.M. in the large cream colored brick farm house of your grandfather Thomas. We were occupying one-half the house and the grand parents the other half, upstairs and down. The bedroom was large with outside door leading onto a porch and a hall connected it with the kitchen and another porch. In building the house grandmother Thomas had this room added especially for sickness, so that it would not be necessary to go up and down a long flight of stairs. This was the only bedroom of seven down stairs. The weather was nice and bright as it is now as I remember very much the same. In the big orchard the trees were hanging full of apples and pears were ripening. I remember of having gathered an apronfull a day or two before. At that time your grandfather had one of the finest places in the township and there were many fine places there then. The natural beauty of the location was enhanced by some landscaping, a pond at the foot of the hill fed by springs, and three or four terraces from the pond and the driveway to the house, steps and a sidewalk all around the house was unusual in those days,- wide porches, three of them, window shutters on all of the windows painted gray, to match the trimmings of the house,- and those were shutters, not tacked on as they are now-a-days just for ornament. My father's house had the same that we opened and closed at will. Before we left there you were running everywhere and used to lead me a merry chase sometimes. You had an express wagon that went with you in all of your goings and comings. One time you and the wagon were found away down in a wheat field where the men had been harvesting. When you were found you immediately climed into the wagon to be drawn home. Of course who ever found you did not have the heart to make you walk back. Another time you were half way on your way to Grandfather Neilson's before we caught up to you. Grandpa Neilson you know always said grace before eating, a fine old habit that I wish had been used in our family, then after you had been there for a meal or two thereafter at home you would try to say grace, cover your face with your hand and make up words. The hired man, Fritz, sat next to you at the table, and he would pinch you or pull your hair or something. You would look up from your devotion and say, "Fritz, ou top at!" and go on with your devotion. Those are reminiscences which the occasion bring to mind and I find it is mail time. We are all well and I hope you are enjoying this fine weather. So with many good wishes, I am your Mother.

P.S. I should have inserted where you were born, Granville Township, Milwaukee County, Good Hope Post Office

John Neilson - Scotch Presbyterian
My great, great, grandfather

Educated in Edinburgh. An oil painting - portrait - hangs in Parliament.
Owner, editor and publisher, of first newspaper published in Quebec.
Printed in English and French.
Later became a member of Parliament.

Performed some favor for King George III, who gave him a large grant of land on
BalCartier River, 18 miles from Quebec.
Established his son William on the land.

A grandson, of John, Hubairs, Neilson, became Surgeon General of the Canadian Army.
John's wife was French, born in Paris, Ursula Hubaire, Catholic.