

HERSTORY PROJECT

Mrs. Duggan interviewed by Helen Lovekin

- Q. Mrs. Duggan, can you tell me when you were born?
- A. May 18, 1891.
- Q. And you have been a lifelong Thunder Bay resident?
- A. No. I was from Renfrew County in Eastern Ontario near Ottawa. I was born there and I lived there until I was 21.
- Q. What made you come up to Thunder Bay?
- A. I came to live here in 1937, prior to that for 21 years I lived in Schreiber and how I came to be in this part of the country; I went to normal school in North Bay and under a grant that we got we were obliged to teach in the districts instead of the counties. The districts started east of North Bay and so I went to normal in North Bay and I taught near Sudbury for four years and then I came to Schreiber to teach in 1916. I was married in 1920 and I lived in Schreiber until 1937.
- Q. So when you moved to Schreiber the war was on in Europe and Schreiber must have been very much a bush town.
- A. No, but it was strictly a railroad town. I recall there were six trains a day at that time.
- Q. What was it like coming from Eastern Ontario into Schreiber?
- A. Well, naturally it was a complete change because in the area where I had lived in Eastern Ontario it was mostly farmland whereas Schreiber was strictly business connected with the railroad. It was an entirely different environment.
- Q. Were the people there homesteaders there at that time?
- A. Not in Schreiber, anyone who lived in Schreiber, who had come from the east as the majority had, the men came there because of the railway. There was good work and the pay was good. Naturally they brought their wives and families with them.
- Q. Instead of getting land grants they lived within a town.
- A. Yes, the majority owned their own home, not on a large area of land though, just on a lot and a garden.
- Q. When you came up in 1916 you had had previous experience teaching, how did you have to modify your lessons for the children up here? It would be a completely different atmosphere they were living in.

- A. We had the Ontario Curriculum we had to follow and I can't say that it was a great deal different from what it was in other places. The only thing is that my early teaching days before I went to normal school, I was in rural schools where I had the full compliment of children, from grade one to grade eight. That was very difficult. After I went to normal school I always had senior classes and I taught grade seven usually and later grade eight.
- Q. Did you marry in Schreiber?
- A. No, I married in my home town in the east but I married a man from Schreiber. A railroad man. The romance was all in Schreiber.
- Q. What was it like for you to leave everything that you knew and branch off into Northern Ontario?
- A. Well, it was certainly very different in many ways - the customs were different. For one thing the people had more money to spend, there was more social life, although it was a small area. One thing that perhaps was a bit outstanding, the men were by far in the majority so of course the school teachers were rather popular at dances and so on. At least we always had a good time. Usually we went out a great deal throughout the week.
- Q. After you were married were you allowed to go on teaching?
- A. You didn't have to stop, but I did stop, I don't know why I did. At least I thought I stopped - I resigned - and when we were on our return to Schreiber after our honeymoon, we met a railroad man quite a distance down the line, and he said to me that they were waiting for me to get back there. I asked why and he told me that they wanted me to take the principal's job because the principal had been sick for quite some time. There was a clergyman in charge of the classroom and he didn't like it and I don't think he was much of a compromise. When I went back, it was the pupil's that I had had in former years and of course they knew what to expect. There was no trouble with discipline.
- Q. Was that quite unusual to have a woman as a principal?
- A. Well, it was there. The principal who had been there must have been there from the eve of time. He was there for a long time and was there until he died. At times after he died I was once again replacing the principal after I was married. After the original resident principal died, two principals at least took sick at different times so I replaced them.
- Q. But you were never given the position officially?
- A. No, but I didn't want it because I had young children after a few years and I wouldn't have been able to handle it.
- Q. What sort of social activities were present?

- A. Card playing was very popular, in fact I was really bored with having to play cards. If you didn't you were a kind of an outlaw. Afternoon teas were also very popular, in fact many of the ladies had their visiting cards that was usual in those days and then dances occurred at least every couple of weeks. Then in the summer there was a lake very close and many people had cottages there, and the lake was a great source of enjoyment there.
- Q. When you came to Schreiber it was 1916, there were still two more years left in World War I. What kind of effect did that war have on a small town?
- A. I think I should tell you that in 1918, the year the war ended, that was one of the years that the flu was very prevalent. We had an excellent doctor in Schreiber and there was only one person who died of the flu, but there were very few nurses and schools were closed for a while and we were asked to go on a volunteer basis to different homes especially if the mother was sick and the young children had to be attended to. So we went in fear and trembling and everybody that was strong and husky felt they should do their duty. The doctor certainly couldn't have managed without the help. I recall that the weather was dull and school was closed for about six weeks. In that time we went to various places - the teachers and women without children. I think there were one or two nurses and there were some women who had some nursing experience and they rounded us up and got us going on the project.
- Q. So it was a rather important contribution.
- A. Somebody had to do it and after all, we were as able to do it as ^{well as} anybody else and we didn't have anyone depending on us as did the people with children.
- Q. In the First World War was there a lot of activity in the church groups, women's auxiliary etc. towards the war effort?
- A. Yes, knitting and that type of thing. Making of bandages. I don't recall that I had very much to do with that but then it was perhaps because thankfully there were others with more experience along that line. We were quite active ~~in~~ practically everything that was put on in a social ^{line}. There wasn't too much going on socially because it wasn't wise for too many people to be in groups. I do recall one boy came home from overseas and the doctor had issued an order on account of the flu that there were to be no group meetings. This boy's mother had planned a big party for her son's return from overseas and she was very indignant to think that that was interfered with. The doctor was quite strict about the rule and he was right of course.
- Q. In your teaching career, what salary did you start off with?

- A. You'd be surprised - \$300 a year.
- Q. This of course would be less than the men would be making?
- A. I suppose, but there were very few men teachers in those days. No man in his right mind would take on teaching unless he was just going to earn some money and then go on to something else. Because if he planned on getting married how could anyone live on \$300 dollars a year?
- Q. How did you manage?
- A. The first year I paid \$10 a month board and then I went to a different school in a farm area and I paid seven dollars a month for three years. Later I got a raise of \$325. It seems like an impossible way to live but you have to consider that it wasn't only the teachers who were poorly paid, it meant that nobody was making big wages and what you bought was not as expensive, anything like as expensive...I remember buying blouses for .25¢ or .50¢ and a young girl who was quite a dressmaker would go and stay at a house for maybe two or three days and do all the sewing for that season and she would probably be paid a dollar a day and room and board. It was all relative.
- Q. Did the climate affect you in any way? The long winters.
- A. I did find the winters in Schreiber exceedingly cold. On the way to school, quite often you had to face north and another thing, I had a cold classroom and often we would have to close in the morning because the heat didn't circulate as it should and besides I was on the cold side. This didn't hurt the feelings of the children any.
- Q. In your early years of marriage and having children, had you become quite climatized to Schreiber and Northern Ontario?
- A. Yes, I got accustomed to it and people's habits were a little different you know. In the east where I came from there were more relatives living in the same area whereas in a place like Schreiber it was mostly a young people's town with hardly any third or second generations. Naturally the older people preferred to live in the east where the climate was better.
- Q. You came to Thunder Bay in the '30's you said.
- A. Yes, 1937 and that was the time of the Depression.
- Q. Could you tell me a little about that?
- A. Personally we never suffered very much from the Depression because of the fact that my husband had steady work, which very few people did have. Railroading is determined on seniority and my husband had enough that he always stood for work but quite frequently he would decide to take a day or a couple of days off and that gave somebody else a chance. The railroad people are rather

clanish and also very interested in , and sympathetic towards those who are not able to get along.

Q. Did you resume your career?

A. Periodically. I don't know how many times I went back between 1920 and when I moved here, but I was back several times. As I say I was back right after we came from our honeymoon for three months and then I was back several times and then we came here in '37 and I think about two years later I was at the boarding school for a while, somebody suddenly became sick and I was there replacing. I did go back in '43 for a year down at the East End at a separate school - St. Joseph's. In 1945 my husband died and I went back steadily from then on until 1968. I went to the sanitarium to teach in 1945 - a tuberculosis sanitarium on the outskirts of town - and there were a great many children there, mostly Indian children. The odd white child but not too many. Then the adult Indians were just like children because many of them came from places where they had no education and many of them I taught to write and to do arithmetic etc. I stayed at the sanitarium for seven and a half years and then I was out on Arthur St. for six months waiting for the building of a new school on the Indian reservation. I went there in '53 and I stayed seven years.

Q. What was it that made you choose the mission schools in particular?

A. For one thing, I wasn't as young as some of the other teachers, when I taught at the mission school I was a civil servant and the government generally pays better than the separate schools - and of course being a Catholic I couldn't teach in a public school. It was quite attractive to me because by that time my family were all away and I was able to live there due to living quarters. I must say that it paid me in the long run because ever since I left there I have been getting a pension.

Q. Aside from the monetary aspects of teaching at the mission, you were there for a good part of your career..?Was there something that attracted you to that type of work?

A. Yes, I enjoyed it. I found the Indian children very easy to teach - some of them were more brainy than others - you find that every place you go. Some of them were more mischeivous than others too. On the whole, I had wonderful support from the parents - naturally because I was a government representative and nobody interfered with my discipline. I feel that I gave them something that perhaps nobody else was willing to give - nobody was interested. The

majority of teachers, when they start in a city school they stay there, but I was free to change if I wanted so the - Mr. McIver who died some years ago was the member of Parliament here and so he told me that this new school was being built with all the modern accomodations and that if I was interested, he would help me get it. I suppose my record was fine or else I wouldn't have got it. I was there for quite a few years and the one thing I found when I went there was that many of the Indian people had a defeatist attitude that because they were Indian they couldn't get anywhere. I drilled into the children that anybody of any nationality can get anywhere but it has to be through their own efforts. All you have to do is drive out to Chippewa and see the lovely homes and many of those homes are occupied by some of my former pupils.

Q. So there is a great deal of satisfaction?

A. Yes, I do feel satisfaction. The chief is a former pupil and so is his wife. They invite me to their different activites etc. I feel that I had a good relationship with them and of course it's like everything else, you get the kind of treatment you deserve. If you go out there with the snobby idea that you are so much better than somebody else, you won't get very far. I went there to teach the children and I did it as conscientiously as possible.

Q. You sound like a person who has a lot of energy and goes into something with a very open mind. A lot of people who did come up from Southern Ontario into Northern Ontario had a snobby attitude and it could be manifested more severly in teaching the mission schools. Insofar as women's activities went did you have anything to do with the women's organizations?

A. You mean the Indian women's organizations? The Indian women were not really well organized but what we did have were the Girl Guides. I got the Girl Guides - the women to come and start the group. We would have a tea every so often and the children learned how to set a table and I had taken a lot of my own things from my own home out there with me, so I had my tablecloths and my silver and the odd things. I showed them how to use them and serve and I think the children got a lot out of that. They got something out of it and they have shown over the years with - I've been invited to various activities and you certainly can tell that they know how to serve and act like anyone else. I don't take the full credit but I mean they do observe how other people do things and naturally they learn from others.

Q. You did belong to the Catholic Women's League did you not?

A. Yes.

Q. Could you tell me something about that?

A. Naturally I had belonged to the Catholic Women's League in a smaller town too, when it was initiated. Then when I came here - I think the League started in 1921 in this area - we had a League in Schreiber and then when I came here, I'm sure I wasn't here a year when I was nominated as secretary, no, treasurer of the League. I was on the board for years, and I was on the diocesan which means a larger area. In the league there is the local group and then a wider circle. I used to attend as a delegate the various conventions. At that time the head of our diocese was North Bay and now we have a Bishop here ; but then we didn't have a Bishop and I was the delegate appointed to go to conventions but I don't think I was appointed because I was smarter than anyone else, I went because I had a CPR pass.

Q. What was the function of the Catholic Women's League?

A. The slogan is "For God and Canada", so we tried to do anything we could to help the clergy. Many people teach catechism and I've done that quite a bit. In a small place like the reservation, one of our projects was to raise some money by carpeting the but that didn't have anything to do with the C.W.L. that was just one of our projects, that we did with the children. With the C.W.L. we had a hand in the Depression by packing clothes and we got a special rate on the railway and sent the clothing out west to the people who were desperately hard up. During the war, people made bandages and did quite a lot to help the soldiers, especially packing kits and parcels so that they got a treat from home every so often. We had the names of all the boys who belonged to the congregation and everyone of them got a parcel. Those were some of the things done in war time and of course there has been a great deal done in giving bursaries and awards to children who otherwise couldn't be able to go on to a higher education.

Q. Does the C.W.L. set itself any goals that it wishes to achieve for society? For instance , you must have had a lot to do with St. Joseph's Hospital.

A. Yes, quite a number of the ladies who are members of the C.W.L. and are on the Auxiliary for St. Joseph's Hospital. Naturally they made contributions and helped with teas etc. Right now the C.W.L. are very active in the abortion problem - they are very opposed to that of course, it is against the teachings of the Church and so the C.W.L. are strong in opposition to abortion. In every group or in every town there are poor people and the poor are helped. We

have rummage sales and people who have a lot of children and haven't much money can come and get a whole box of clothes - the clothes might be worth \$15 and they would pay a dollar. When I was on the Indian reservation, the clothes that were left over from a couple of the churches were sent out to me and then we'd have a ten cent sale. We felt that having the people pay a little gave them a little more dignity, than to just say "here, have this". There again they would probably get a box full of clothes for a quarter.

Q. When you were teaching on the reservation and at the same time you were involved in the C.W.L. did you feel a lot of distance between yourself and the Indian women?

A. It's a bit hard to get very close to some, fortunately I taught at the sanitarium previous from going to the Indian reservation and one woman from the reservation was a patient at the sanitarium and I got to know her quite well. She had gone to school in town and when I went to the reservation, I felt that there was somebody I knew and her husband was very, very good as far as any repairs or anything like that, I just had to send someone to bring him over to look at the problem. I am completely useless when it comes to repairing anything. One particular item I always noticed about him, he never came to the school alone, he always brought one or two of his children with him. That was for my protection because there were neighbors around who didn't have the best thoughts and no way would he expose me to their criticism. I admired him so much for doing that, I didn't ask him to do that, I never told him that I noticed it, but I certainly had a great deal of admiration for him. He was a lot younger than I was and he and his wife used to come over in the evening to the school and he was very brilliant in mathematics and I would get him to do rational problems on the blackboard, which I knew he enjoyed doing.

Q. What was his wife like? Were you close at all?

A. I was fairly close to the wife and she used to do my hair. She was a very nice person and very socially inclined and friendly. We had a beautiful entertainment at Christmas We covered the barrels with red and then put an imitation flame on it. The people really enjoyed our Christmas parties and another thing about the Parks Board, Mr. Art Widinol? especially, he was in charge of the Parks Board at the time and he used to bring the treats for everybody. They came from Squaw Bay, from that school and our own, we had two schools in the mission.

- Q. How much co-operation was there between the women - you told me about Schreiber and about how the women managed to ward off the flu epidemic by the healthy ones taking care of the sick, you mentioned working with the C.W.L. and you mentioned you worked as a teacher in the reservation. Would you have wished for more determined co-operation?
- A. No, I really was surprised by the amount of co-operation. Sometimes - Indian women won't push themselves - so sometimes you might have to suggest, but they were very willing. They would have their children dressed the way I want etc., so no, I can't say that I ever lacked help.
- Q. The C.W.L. was quite a unified group?
- A. Yes. We also had a group that would put on skits every so often. It took a lot less time to put on a skit than to put on a real play so often for our purposes we would use skits. We would have a skit with very little rehearsal but many laughs. Certainly were given great encouragement and always asked to come back for more.
- Q. You found lots of avenues to explore.
- A. Yes, perhaps I should tell you about the boy when I was at St. Joseph's Boarding School, after I left the reservation. In 1960 I thought that well, I was getting on in years and I really tire, but the sisters had been asking me to go to St. Joseph's Boarding School on account of my long connection with the Indians. They knew I would understand the children. I went and stayed there eight years after I was supposed to retire, every year the Westfort Kiwanis in order to encourage children, and make them aware of the forest, they offered a prize for the best piece of art that showed how to protect the forest. Children of all the schools were asked to co-operate so at the school they had never heard of that before, so I talked to my superior about it and she agreed. We did enter the competition and out of over 2,900 entrants, one was chosen as the best. The name of the child who did it and the school he attended was on the back and it was not visible to the judges so nobody knew whose work it was. The next day I had a call from a man who belonged to the Kiwanis and he told me that one of my pupils won the prize. The boy had drawn a man sitting, and protecting the little animals and he did an excellent job and so they chose that. The prize was a trip with an adult to Toronto and the Exhibition. I was the adult. This boy came from a reservation way up by Armstrong and he was the eldest of a very large family and it just didn't seem the thing to do. For some reason they decided that if he was going to get

very much out of the Exhibition, that I should go with him. They phoned and asked me if I would go and I said that if it was going to be for his welfare I'll go. Mr. Badani was our member at the time. I wrote to him because I was working for the Federal Government, and I told him what the situation was and the conditions and he alerted somebody in Toronto and next to the Queen, we had the best service. We were at the Exhibition, everything was handed to us, we stayed at the King Edward Hotel, we had our pictures taken, and we were on T.V. there. We got plenty of publicity and it was an achievement which I am sure made the Indian children aware of their own potentialities. I did something for the whole district, to know that one of them could do that.

Q. Do you think that women's roles in society have changed very much, and if so do you think that the changes were for the better or for the worse?

A. They've certainly changed and of course women are better educated now than when I was growing up. On the other hand, if you judge by results, I think that the women of fifty years ago produced better children, more responsible children.

Q. But surely that is not their only function - to produce children.

A. No, I don't mean that but if you were to judge them that way I think that well, discipline has changed and that has an awful lot to do with the way the child turns out. I think many women of today are doing an excellent job socially, I don't mean in society, I mean in trying to benefit the underdog. The underprivileged etc., I think the younger women are to be greatly admired for the way that they really are trying. Naturally you are going to find a certain number who are self-centered, there will always be that. I think on the whole, women are very conscious of their obligation to their fellow men.

Q. That is refreshing to hear. Quite often, we have received very negative comments as to how young women are today. Circumstances have changed. Criticism of working mothers for example, young women can't afford to stay home if they are able to work.

A. I think the majority of older people have a tendency to talk about the good old days. I've lived a good many years and the good old days weren't so good at all. Women naturally didn't get out and do things as today but you see, they didn't have the equipment in the home to make things any easier for them. It took them all day to do their work. I have no patience with women

who spend their afternoons in the beer parlor. But I think that is a minority. When I see my own daughters, they'll drive their children here, and drive them there, so that they can take part in worthwhile activities and other women are doing the same thing. There are a great many women who are giving a great deal of time to, volunteer work. That certainly is very commendable I think. I do find that it is generally older women who sit back and won't do anything, of course you have lots of time to criticize then. Criticism should be constructive and if you can see that things should be different why not go and suggest that you will have time and give them help to do it?

Q. If you were to become involved as a young woman in a project right now, in something in society right now, what would you like to do?

A. As long as it wasn't work - I'm not fond of work. I like to work with my brains and I like to make people happy. There are a lot of serious things in this world and I think if you can do something to make people happy that's good. Some women have a pretty tough time, they work all day and perhaps work at home and often don't get any co-operation, I think that if I had any choice it would be entertainment - but it wouldn't cost anything to produce or attend.

Q. Did you know that there was a play just formed recently and it was an all-female play and all-female audience as well. That was just two weeks ago. It was a group of women who had just decided to do something, and I think they are doing it again in August.

A. We just recently had the C.W.L. convention here and I was one of the characters and it was really just a show of hats but they introduced me as an 87 year old. I feel that I am young at heart - everybody has pains and aches whether you are young or not so what is the use of talking about them if somebody else has them too. I think that senior citizens today never had it so good. It annoys me to hear them say that they don't get anything for this or that. There is plenty funded to senior citizens to live on if they are not spend-thrifts and foolish with their money. As far as income for senior citizens is concerned, you have to realize whose pocket it's coming from - my children and grandchildren are paying for the comfort that I have here. Everybody else's children and grandchildren are doing the same thing. All you have to do is hear of conditions in other countries and think how fortunate we are. The pension is \$145 monthly - they say that the basic salary should be about \$300 but you can apply for increases and then of course the rent in these subsidized buildings is geared on income. After all, if you have reached retire-

ment age and have never saved any money, you're not going to start saving it after that either. You take the wages in the last twenty years or so, they've been good and surely people of 65 must have something ahead of them. My parents had to live without any old age pension and they had to save for their old age. If they are absolutely irresponsible with their money well than naturally the cheque isn't going to last long.

Thank you for talking with us.