

Grieve

Grieve, Thomas & Maud
Children: Dorothy, Brian
Hearst Relatives: Woodward

Hearst in the 1920s and '30s by Dorothy Grieve

My father, Tom (Thomas Leslie Hatchell) Grieve, was born in Lincolnshire, England, in 1897. At seventeen, he enlisted in the British army, serving during the Great War, including two years in France and Belgium. Back in civilian life in 1919, he worked for the United Steel Company, first in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire, and then in Workington, Cumberland, where he first met Maud Bacon, whom he would later marry.

Possibly inspired by other young Workingtonians who had emigrated to Canada, Tom sailed to Quebec City in August 1923 on the *Scythia*, continuing to Saskatchewan on a "Harvest Excursion." (Canadian railways offered cheap fares to workers willing to help with the western harvest.) The harvest over, and having discovered that the streets of the west were not paved with gold, he headed back towards England on the Canadian National Railway, stopping in Hearst to see old Workington friends, Nell and Bill Woodward. Doubtless with their encouragement (Nell was Maud Bacon's sister), he found employment as a bookkeeper with the Hearst Lumber Co., owned by H. E. Powell. Over the winter, he stayed with the Woodwards and their sons, Gordon

and Billy, in their bungalow on Prince Street that was still standing in 1997, Hearst's seventy-fifth anniversary.

In May 1924, Maud arrived from England to marry Tom. Their wedding on May 5 was followed by an afternoon honeymoon at Johnson's Lake. That night, to my mother's astonishment, they were shivareed (loudly serenaded by local people to the accompaniment of noisy banging of pots and pans!). She had been to Canada before, but was unfamiliar with this Canadian custom. Another surprise was the bridal shower, when she was "showered" with gifts from welcoming strangers who would become friends.

The young couple settled into Hearst, the community that had been so recently incorporated (1922) with a population of 523. By the time I was born in 1926, my parents were living on Prince Street in a new bungalow next to the Sprickerhoffs and across the road from the Woodwards. My brother Brian arrived in 1928.

Hearst had no road connection to southern Ontario (the Ferguson Highway, later Highway 11, didn't

come to Hearst until 1930). Doubtless the “pioneers” from other parts of Canada and Europe were optimistic about the future, building homes and raising families (and coping without public utilities).

People made their own entertainment, socializing, getting together for dances, picnics at the “Big Lakes,” etc. Churches were focuses of activity. When children came along, Christmas concerts became big events. The highlight was the arrival of Santa Claus, carrying his load of presents up through the trapdoor in the floor of the stage. Men joined service clubs/lodges and women the non-denominational Woman’s Institute, or church groups, such as the Ladies Aid. My dad enlisted help to build clay tennis courts behind the station and encouraged young people to play. In the winter, broomball, a sport requiring little equipment beyond the player’s broom, was popular. Pool rooms opened.

In 1927, my dad left Hearst Lumber to work for E. O. Allen, who had a general store and farm machinery agency. The next year, he moved again for employment with Vital Brisson, who ran a lumberyard, hardware store and pulpwood operation. Finally, by 1930, my dad had bought E. O. Allen’s business, taking on the International Harvester agency, and operating under the name Grieve & Powell. Our family was now living in the flat above the store.



Snowplane made by Tom Grieve
in Hearst about 1937

The property on the northeast corner of George and 8th Streets stretched back to Front Street. The main building contained the shop at the front (dry goods on one side and groceries on the other), with a work area, office and warehouse behind. A vegetable garden separated it from the ice house, containing sawdust-covered blocks of ice cut from the river in winter. Adjacent to the ice house, against Front Street, sat the garage. Our home above the store could be reached either off 8th Street, or up an outside staircase on the opposite side of the building, where a small balcony looked over the lawn and flowerbeds where glorious blue delphiniums thrived. A mountain ash anchored the corner by the house and, in due course, my dad planted willow saplings along the street side that quickly took root. It was my mother who had the green thumb in the family, however, co-opting us children to help with weeding the vegetable garden. The woodshed, with its piles of chopped wood, housed in turn our two dogs, both named Peter. When our second beloved Peter, a large, amiable Newfoundland, died—probably under the wheels of a car—Dad ruled, “No more dogs!”

Two youths, Donald Stanfield and my cousin Gordon Woodward, helped in the store initially but, eventually, Mother filled in when necessary. A French dictionary was handy to help communication with French-speaking customers. Weekday hours were 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., aside from Wednesday afternoon closing, and Saturday night opening. Saturday nights would find my father, Uncle Bill and Brian huddled around a radio behind the shop, the noise of the Delco silenced, listening to Foster Hewitt describing the hockey games in Maple Leaf Gardens.

My dad was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1930. He also served on the school board, being on it when the two-storey school was built in 1938. His projects included building a snowplane (a plywood cabin mounted on skis, powered from the back by a car engine with a huge propeller behind). In the winter he scaled wood. My dad enjoyed helping Brian build kites, and once, to entertain us, he created a violin-type musical instrument from a cigar box. My father turned his hand to such things as tarring a roof. On one traumatic occasion, the rim of a heavy barrel that he was unloading from a railway boxcar onto a truck sheared off the fourth and fifth fingers of his right hand and injured the third. The wounds healed eventually and the hand was again able to grip a tennis racquet and, years later, a golf club.

Most Hearst children could easily walk to school and come home for lunch. More remote out-of-towners, such as the Lapenskies and Bertha Reihe, however, came by dog team. Hannes Koski, impressively, skied several miles to school in the winter. In primary grades, taught by Miss Nancekieville, we sat at double desks. On Friday afternoons in Junior Red Cross meetings, we learned health rules, many of

which still come to mind: “Sleep with your windows open, or in open air, Sleep ten hours every night, etc.” After Halloween, we might see evidence of highjinks perpetrated by older boys—large objects hoisted onto the school roof, for example. Going home at the end of the day, we would encounter Separate School students, many in black with white collars, streaming up 9th Street by the Anglican church.

Outside school, Mary Knipprath (later Mrs. Fred Smith) offered piano lessons along with Saturday morning theory classes. Once a year, an inspector from the Montreal Conservatory would arrive to test us. (Mother, who had a good ear for music and loved to sing, had to suffer through Brian and me, in turn, painstakingly practising Beethoven’s “Minuet in G.”)

We children spent summer days swimming in the Mattawishkwia River. On the way there, passing the Experimental Farm, we sampled sweet young peas. In the evenings, pickup ball games were played in the field kitty-corner from our house. When strawberries were ripe, we would set off with tin pails to pick them, usually in the company of a supervising adult. Boys went fishing, on their own, at Johnson’s Lake. One year a gaggle of children raced excitedly down to the emergency airfield across the river, where a barn-storming plane landed. (I don’t remember whether anyone actually had a ride.) As we grew older, Sunday afternoon walks took us east along the railroad tracks. At the



bridge I would usually freeze, but braver souls walked across it.

The outdoor skating rink, with its dimly lit, cramped change-hut, was our spare-time destination in winter. For a brief time, when still wobbly on skates, I was on a girls' hockey team. (Hockey was really my brother's game.) We all watched grownup games from the rink side.

Brian Grieve -1941

While skating was a major winter recreation, there was also skiing, with the steep, snow-covered riverbank providing the only ski hill.

During the school year, girls twelve and up belonging to the CGIT or the Girl Guides attended evening meetings. (I still remember coming home one winter night made bright as day by a full moon shining on the snow and northern lights dancing in the starry sky.) In warmer weather, these groups sometimes picnicked by the river, and there was, too, the possibility of going to CGIT summer camp (Waskesiu) near Timmins.



Hearst Girl Guide Patrol –about 1940
Dorothy Grieve (*patrol leader*), Barbara Nichols, Grace Fulton, Anita Reid, Beatrice Girard, Sheila Wilson (*second*)

During the Depression, Brian and I perhaps didn't take in the full significance of what we were seeing in the distance from our kitchen window as we counted the men—hoboes—walking along the tops of moving freight cars. We were aware, however, of transients looking for food and/or work, and of chalk symbols on the wooden sidewalks identifying generous residents. There was known to be a “hobo camp” at the west end of town.

In June 1941, the Grieve family left Hearst. The store, which Mother had managed for a year after my dad joined the RCAF in the summer of 1940, had been closed and the property sold to Jim Patterson. My dad, posted to the Crumlin Air Station, had a house waiting for us in London. We adjusted to life there, but moved to Stratford, a much smaller town,

the next year, when my dad was transferred. Stratford remained our base until after the war. I moved away after high school graduation in 1943 for further education and employment, but came home often.

Demobbed in 1946, my dad opted for life in the West and became part of Unemployment Insurance Commission auditing teams, based first in Calgary and then in Moose Jaw. Mother continued to “keep the home fires burning,” making friends, joining church groups and gardening. Almost immediately after retirement in 1964, they moved to Victoria,

B.C., where Mother realized her dream of living by the sea, and my dad, his, of year-round golf. Dad died in 1971 and Mother in 1976.

Over the years, I worked in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and B.C., retiring in Victoria in 1989 after eighteen years as a reference librarian at the University of Victoria. Brian, too, is a Victoria retiree, enjoying year-round golf after a business-oriented career, chiefly in Calgary and lastly in Toronto with Scotia-McLeod. His son, Don, lives in Victoria now and is still in the workforce.