

CHILDREN OF THE STORM

The Story of the Wood's Christian Homes



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATIONS	(i) to (iii)
PROLOGUE	(iv)
CHAPTER I: A MAN AND HIS MISSION	1
CHAPTER II: INNISFAIL: THE BEGINNING	2
CHAPTER III: OLDS: A NEW HOME	6
CHAPTER IV: CALGARY/BOWNESS: SETTLED AT LAST	10
CHAPTER V: THE MAN PASSES AWAY...BUT THE DREAM CONTINUES	11
CHAPTER VI: THE DEPRESSION YEARS	13
CHAPTER VII: THE WAR YEARS	35
CHAPTER VIII: THE POST-WAR YEARS	37
CHAPTER IX: THE FIFTIES FAMILY	62
CHAPTER X: THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES SCENARIOS	82
CHAPTER XI: THE HOME CHANGES	91
APPENDICES	98
Appendix A: List of ‘Memories’ Contributors	
Appendix B: Sources of Reference	

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The assistance and cooperation of the Calgary Glenbow Museum Archives, The Innisfail Province and The Calgary Herald are greatly appreciated.

The Board of Directors of the Wood’s Christian Home would like to take this opportunity to ex-press its deepest gratitude to all the clubs, groups, organizations and individuals who contributed in any way to the betterment of the lives of the ‘children of the storm’ over the almost seven decades of existence of the Wood’s Christian Home.

Our sincere apologies for any errors or omissions in this history which may have occurred due to missing records or incomplete documentation of certain events.

G.W.E.

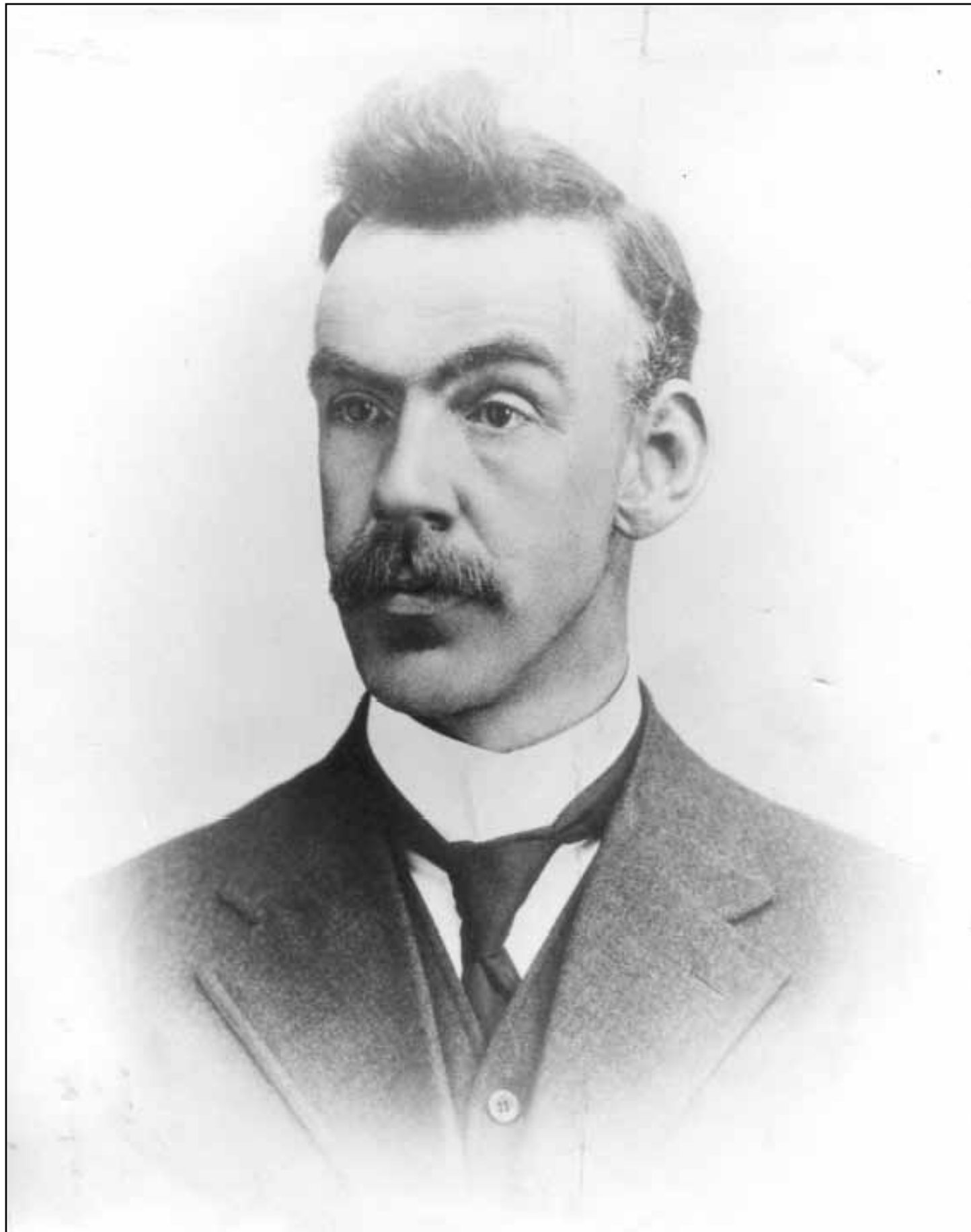
DEDICATIONS



L.L. (Dick) Gaetz

This book is dedicated to Linton Leonard Gaetz, teacher and principal of the Wood’s Christian Home school for 16 years, who cared enough to spend several of his retirement years contacting former “Home” residents for their memories and pictures for inclusion in this history.

This book is also dedicated to the memories of the late Reverend George Wood and Mrs. Annie Wood, and to all those who passed through the portals of the Wood’s Christian Home over the last 68 years.



*Reverend George Wood, Founder of the Wood's Christian Home
Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta.*

(ii)



*Annie Jarvis Wood, Co-Founder and Matron of Wood's Christian Home
Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta.*

(iii)

PROLOGUE

They were lost — stranded in the midst of the great and turbulent upheavals of human existence. There were no strong, sure hands to lead them through the sudden storm which enveloped them. They had naught to sustain them but their young indomitable spirits and the innate desire to survive. They were like derelict sailors aboard unseaworthy vessels caught in the maelstrom, their ships sucked down and thrown back up onto the crests of pounding waves, the masts splintering and the sails rent by the wild winds. Darkened skies were split by shafts of lightning whose thunderous echoes sent them scurrying for shelter, but there was none to be found. They were surely lost, torn from their anchors and moorings of an earlier time. Beset and bedeviled by forces beyond their comprehension, a few were destined to sail the surging, scathing seas forever. But most clung tenaciously to the tenuous threads of hope and faith that the sun would rise again. These survived the storm and, on the dawn of a different day, found themselves washed ashore upon a safe, secluded island where sanctuary beckoned and awaited them. The children of the storm followed the rainbow home.

CHILDREN OF THE STORM

CHAPTER I
A MAN AND HIS MISSION

The Wood’s Christian Home was founded by the late Reverend George Wood (1878-1928) who immigrated to Canada (under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church of Canada) in the early 1900s from his native Scotland. As a young man in Scotland, George Wood worked as a supervisor of a boys’ dormitory in the famous Quarriers’ Orphan Home at Bridge of Weir. Undoubtedly, this is where the seeds of compassion were planted in his mind and in his heart for homeless, hapless and harried children.

After a brief stay in Ontario, George Wood moved west, settling down in the small town of Melfort, Saskatchewan, with his young wife Ann (nee Gilchrist) and his wee daughter Annie. It was here that a terrible tragedy struck the Wood family. While the Reverend Wood was out ministering to some elderly people in the farming community, Mrs. Wood was lighting her lamps in the dusk of evening. Unknown to her, a careless grocer had sold her gasoline instead of coal oil, and when she set a match to the lamp, there was an explosion and fire which consumed her. Little Annie (just three years of age) was rescued from the burning house by a passing farmer. George Wood, devastated by his loss and suffering extreme mental anguish, begged the church hierarchy for a transfer away from the scene of his wife’s death and his agonizing memories. In the late summer of 1914, he was granted a transfer to Innisfail, Alberta, where the story of the Wood’s Christian Home really begins.

*“Unlock the door this evening
And let your gate swing wide,
Let all who ask for shelter
Come speedily inside.”*

- Joyce Kilmer

CHAPTER II INNISFAIL; THE BEGINNING

The Reverend George Wood and his daughter Annie moved into a small house near the old Innisfail CPR station, and the reverend took up his assignment as minister of a new congregation, George's recently widowed mother arrived from Paisley, Scotland, to keep house for her son and motherless grandchild.

The onset of the Great War saw Canada's young men go overseas to fight for King and Country. These circumstances precipitated the formation of the Wood's Christian Home. A Mr. Porter, a young father and husband who was drafted into the army, was home on leave prior to embarkation when his wife died from pneumonia. The soldier, due to ship out, found himself a widower with three children and, in his hour of desperation, took the children to Reverend Wood. Reverend Wood agreed at once to take the children under his roof and his care.

His nephew, Kerry Wood, tells of how his uncle used to explain that important beginning. "Ah felt keenly for them," he used to say. "Ma ain wee Annie lost her mother, and ma heart melted at soundo¹ the kiddies crying when their daddy brought them tae me."

By Marilylle Soveran (Reprinted by permission of The Innisfail Province)



**BELIEVED TO BE THE PORTER CHILDREN-
INNISFAIL, ALBERTA**
Glenbow Museum Archives Calgary, Alberta

The Porter children were to be the first of many to come under the sheltering, ever expanding umbrella of loving and caring proffered by Reverend Wood and members of his family.



WILLIE PORTER, AGE 4, AND MARY PORTER, AGE 2—WOOD'S CHRISTIAN HOME, INNISFAIL, DECEMBER 1915
Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

In the months following, Reverend Wood found himself inundated with requests to care for more children and all were accommodated even though space and help were scarce. Granny Wood assumed the responsibilities of cooking, sewing, cleaning and generally attending to her charges, but soon the number of children exceeded her stamina and determined efforts, and George Wood realized that he would have to give up his ministry in order to devote all his time to the needs of his ever-growing 'Family'.

As Kerry Wood tells it, "Uncle George removed his clerical collar, tied an apron around his lean waist, and learned the mysteries of changing diapers and blowing small noses"²

During this phase, George moved his charges into the old abandoned Innisfail Hospital in order to accommodate them all. George knew he would need permanent help and continual financing for his 'Family' if he were to provide and properly care for all.

Marilylle Soveran, Ibid.



**CHILDREN PLAYING IN FRONT OF FIRST WOOD'S
CHRISTIAN HOME IN INNISFAIL—1916-18.**
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

**MISSING PHOTO
OPENING OF WOOD'S CHRISTIAN HOME
(FORMER HOSPITAL) AT INNISFAIL**
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

George’s brother and his family resided in Calgary at this time. On one visit to his brother’s, George Wood was pleasantly surprised to find a childhood friend from Scotland visiting with the family.



ANNIE JARVIE
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

Miss Annie Jarvie, a social worker in her native Scotland, was enthralled by George Wood’s stories of his pride (the Family) and his predicament (providing proper care). It was obvious to all that Miss Jarvie and George Wood were enjoying each other’s company as they renewed acquaintances.

Miss Jarvie was very sympathetic to George’s efforts to establish and maintain a home for unfortunate children in central Alberta, and this must have made quite an impression on George, for while Annie Jarvie was aboard the train for Halifax, which was a departure point for Scotland, she received a telegraph which was a proposal of marriage from George Wood. Annie Jarvie, petite, fair and charming, returned immediately to Innisfail where she became the wife of the smiling, curly-haired and moustachioed Reverend George Wood. Mrs. Annie Wood was a concerned, spunky little lady who eventually became known as the ‘Mother’ of the children in the Home. Today, former residents of the Home still refer to this remarkable woman as ‘Mother Wood’.

Mrs. Annie Wood was given no time to adjust to marriage and her new life; she was almost overwhelmed by the numerous children of varying ages and the resulting responsibilities of not only performing the basic household tasks, but also trying to cope with everything from the needs of babies to the high-spirited, sometimes irrational behaviour of teenagers. There were myriad little problems, such as not knowing how to sew a rather important little opening in boys’ pyjamas, which Annie soon learned with the help of a Mrs. Varty who was a professional seamstress. Annie Wood was beginning to realize the enormity of her new role in life which would involve both minute and gigantic responsibilities.

Meanwhile, George Wood was beset by administrative problems. Having given up his pastorate, he was now without any income. When asked how he planned to provide for his Family, he answered fervently and with faith: “The Quid Lord will shairly provide!”
Marilylle Soveran, Ibid.

Some help was indeed forthcoming; the kindly merchants of Innisfail sold him meat, groceries and clothing at cost and on credit. Warm-hearted women from various clubs and associations of Innisfail donated their spare time to helping with the mending and darning in order for Mother Wood to have an occasional respite from the demands of the Family. Though grateful for the support of these individuals, George Wood was concerned about his mounting debts; at times the cash on hand was practically nil. So George took to ‘barnstorming’ the churches of the surrounding district, including Red Deer, with stories of his Family and his needs and plans for them. The various communities welcomed him warmly and supplied gifts of food and clothing and whatever cash they could spare in those difficult times. George paid whatever debts he could; his hungry charges quickly consumed the food and made good use of the secondhand clothing.

In later years, when George Wood recalled those days, he would say, “Ah never met an unkindly man, nor a wumon that ⁴ wasna motherly.”

⁴ *Marilylle Severn, Ibid.*



GEORGE AND ANNIE WOOD (SEATED IN CAR)
SURROUNDED BY PART OF THE “FAMILY”.
- Courtesy of The Innisfail Province

The ever-growing Family now numbered 30 children, and it became obvious that a new residence would be required to house them all. But there was no available building in Innisfail for such a purpose, and George Wood realized he would have to search elsewhere for the proper home for his Family. Rev. W. G. Brown, a Presbyterian minister in Red Deer and a staunch supporter of George Wood’s cause, wanted the Family to relocate to Red Deer. The old Indian Industrial School buildings on the Burnt Lake road outside of Red Deer were suggested as being suitable for the Family, but George was concerned about the nearness of the Red Deer River which could be unsafe for young children, and he felt the distance from town would also be a drawback in an emergency. There was also a great deal of red tape involved in leasing the property for this particular purpose, so that site was rejected and George resumed his search.

CHAPTER III OLDS; A NEW HOME

In 1918, a grant was received from the provincial government. George was delighted to be able to pay off the debts he had incurred with the patient merchants of Innisfail. Shortly after, a suitable location for the Family was found just north of the Town of Olds, Alberta, which consisted of 30 acres with several buildings on the property which was close to the CPR tracks. George had one large building moved to a better location and, with the skills acquired as an apprentice carpenter during his youth in Scotland, helped build a new dormitory. George's brother and his family were residing in Red Deer at this time and the whole family aided in building and setting up the new premises.

By now, the organization for the care and upbringing of home-less children had an official name: Wood's Christian Home.

By the time the Home moved to Olds, the number of resident children was nearing 50, with the number steadily growing. Mother Wood instituted a new method of caring for the children. The older children, especially the girls, helped to look after the younger ones. The older girls also shared housecleaning chores and kitchen and laundry duties.

Marilylle Soveran, Ibid.



GRANNY WOOD AND CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY TO CHURCH—
OLDS, ALBERTA, 1916-18.

- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

George Wood decided he would like to make the Home as self-supporting as possible and, toward this end, he purchased a few milk cows, and some chickens and pigs which he planned to raise for food and possibly for sale. The large acreage was very suitable for gardening, and it wasn't long before George had planted a huge garden, one that would supply the Family with vegetables for most of the winter. George believed in 'people doing for themselves', and he felt that a garden provided good training for the boys in elementary farming, and the opportunity for the girls to learn preserving at the elbow of Mother Wood. The boys would, however, tend to shirk their gardening responsibilities occasionally when a glorious summer day called them to the woods to hunt for birds' eggs or to a stream or pond for a quick dip. Or, on occasion, the summer doldrums would set in.

However, George Wood, with his understanding of youth and his wry sense of humor, could always cajole the boys back to work. Kerry Wood, who often played with the Home boys, recalls how his uncle got the boys to hoe the potatoes one day.

"I still remember Uncle's cheery voice when he came into the boys' dormitory . . . My uncle would stand in the centre of the room, scratch the back of his head, stare around in a comical way and say: "Come on, laddies; there's taties oot there that need ticklin!"⁶

Occasionally, there were problems with runaways. A child (usually a boy), who may have been brought to the Home after the death of a parent and who had not yet adjusted to his new circumstances, might seek to recapture the past and happier times by trying to find his way back to his old home. Some-times these runaways would get 30 to 40 miles away before they were found by George Wood, usually with the help of the local police. Kerry Wood vividly recalls one such case.

Kerry Wood, freelance writer, in a special feature to The Innisfail Province - February 1976.

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EDGAR A. (KERRY) WOOD - 1966

Photo by Russ Fisher- Foto Arts, Red Deer

"... the boy had reached Calgary before being apprehended, and my uncle had gone down on the train to fetch him back. On the day he (the boy) was due back at the Home, the 50-odd children then populating the Home were buzzing with talk. The runaway had some dramatic interest for us every child in the Home was out on the front lawn waiting, when my uncle returned with the boy. I still remember the picture they made, man and boy walking hand in hand, both sucking on penny all-day suckers and each carrying, in their free hands, hefty bags containing more suckers ... my uncle and the boy scattered the contents of those bags all over the lawn while my uncle shouted 'Scrrrrramble!' In the excitement of trying to get our share of the paper-wrapped 'cherry-pops', we forgot all about the runaway boy's adventures — that boy was down on the lawn with us, also grabbing for suckers! This scene provides a good example of the practical psychology my uncle used in dealing with his little problems."

Although problems arose from time to time, the children were generally content and happy. They were kept busy doing various chores in the house and dormitories, and in the yard and garden. There was no modern equipment at the Olds Home; water had to be fetched from a well, for example, and this became a major chore on bath night. There was a handyman by the name of Mr. Pickett who lent a hand with some of the heavier chores and kept what old equipment there was in running condition. At this stage there was still no organized means of financing the Home, and the biggest problem continued to be 'where was the next dollar coming from?'. Charitable donations were still used to feed and clothe the children. Ladies Aid groups, Farm Women's groups and community associations did all they could in that regard.

⁷ *Kerry Wood, Ibid.*

Catherine (nee Grant) Olsen recalls how her family tried to do their share for the Home. The Grant family lived on the Wood's Home property and became good friends as well as neighbors to Rev. and Mrs. Wood. Catherine says, "I remember so well riding my pony around to the neighborhood homes in a five to six mile radius about Christmastime, asking for small donations towards the Home. I can't remember ever being refused, but 50 cents was considered a big donation. Some of those rides were made in very cold weather; there were probably many more children who tried to help out, particularly during the Christmas season."

The local Board of Trustees, composed of Rev. J. S. Short, Dr. C. C. Hartman and Dr. H. P. Penny, did all they could to help out; more than once these men found it necessary to temporarily accept Wood's Home NSF cheques for their own personal cheques in order to keep the operation afloat.

Rev. Wood's Oddfellows Lodge endowed one dormitory and the Masons furnished another, so that helped, but the problem of feeding such a large group of children remained.

The Family daily consumed wash-tub sized pots of soup, Mulligan stew, rice pudding with raisins, or something similar. And, of course, there were the inevitable breakfasts of porridge made in the same cauldrons.



... MARBLES
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

Annie Wood was constantly occupied; in addition to supervising the cooking, cleaning and laundry, she was busily wiping noses, bandaging skinned knees, refereeing arguments or boxing some young lad's ears for tugging too strenuously on a lass's pigtails. The atmosphere in the Home was usually one of din and organized chaos. While the older children bustled around with their chores, the younger ones would be playing with their toys in the playroom or be swinging or see-sawing outside, their yells and laughter drifting in through the open windows. Some of the boys would be occupied with the age-old games of marbles, run-sheep-run and hide-and-seek. And, of course, by the end of the day there would be numerous pairs of pants with grass-stained knees and mud-caked shoes to contend

with. Dozens of pairs of hands had to be scrubbed before dinner was served in the dining room. Visitors to the Home often remarked on the happy, shining faces of the children gathered around the dining table singing 'Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow'.

George Wood, meanwhile, would be on the road, appealing to different groups to help keep the cauldrons bubbling for his Family. George was a very colorful speaker and related many amusing and sometimes poignant stories of his Family. With his inimitable gestures and Scottish burr, George would tell church groups and service clubs of the children's doings — little Jane's heartfelt desire for a new dolly; Jimmy tearing the seat of his only pair of unpatched pants; the sobbing of a newly-orphaned child on his first night in the Home, and how many loaves of bread it took to feed so many growing children.

George Wood's almost ceaseless efforts in canvassing for donations were interrupted by a most unfortunate accident involving a runaway team of horses. George had his back in a cast for some time, and never fully recovered from the accident, although he doggedly carried on as much as his health would permit.

Kerry Wood recalls one of his uncle's last efforts at canvassing for funds.

"... I was 'batching' in a little shack on the hill east of the fair grounds. I was then about nineteen, embarked on a precarious literary career, and sometimes ... typed out thou-sands of form letters for my uncle, soliciting support for the Home ... uncle could no longer 'barnstorm' as tirelessly as before. But one evening he banged thunderously on my door.

¹¹ 'Is the kettle boilin, Wee Feller?' he shouted.

"It was supper time, and I was having ruffled grouse. My uncle made a wry face.

" 'Listen, Wee Feller — On Monday Ah wis oot canvassing an' the minister's wife took me home an' fed me chicken. For supper, Ah wis at an auld friend's house and the guid wife fed me chicken. Tuesday Ah wis in another toon, where Ah got two feeds o' chicken. Wednesday, chicken again, an' Thursday wis the same. Yesterday I had both fried chicken an' roast chicken. Here it's Saturday night, an' noo you're trying tae feed me wild chicken. Ah'¹¹ no' have itJ Come along doon toon an' we'll get sausage'.

"That was the last time I saw my uncle." ⁸ Kerry Wood, *Ibid*.

THE SEARCH IS ENDED



HEXTALL ESTATE
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

By 1926, it became evident that, once again, larger premises were needed to house the Family. On a trip to Calgary, George Wood spied a large vacant mansion on the banks of the Bow River which piqued his interest.

This mansion, built in 1912, had been part of the original Hextall Estate which included the area now known as Bowness Park. The Hextalls were originally from England and their heritage was reflected in the Elizabethan-style mansion which overlooked their ranch--most of today's Bowness area.

John Hextall donated the Bowness Park site to the community on the condition that street car service would

be provided to that area. The Seventh Day Adventists took ownership of the mansion and the property on which it was situated, 66 acres of beautiful woodland, just across the river from Bowness Park. When George Wood took a tour of the mansion, he decided at once that this would be the new Wood's Christian Home.



JOHN HEXTALL'S REQUEST FOR STREETCAR SERVICE WAS GRANTED ... CITY STREETCARS WERE MAKING SEVEN TRIPS DAILY BY 1912.
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

Mrs. E. Laurie (nee Shouldice) recalls the lifestyle of that era: "The ranch house, as it was commonly known, had wide, solid oak stairs leading to the many bedrooms above and to the huge ball room below. For a time, lodgers were accommodated with the hope that they would buy lots when the ranch was subdivided. Lodgers joined in gay parties, waltzing to strains of an orchestra playing in the soft light of the coal oil lamps. Guests from Calgary had to take the long way home as there was not, as yet, a bridge at Shouldice."

CHAPTER IV CALGARY/BOWNESS: SETTLED AT LAST



THE OAKROOM - Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

George Wood was elated at the prospect of acquiring the old Hextall estate; he felt in his heart that he had at last found a permanent home for his Family.

The Seventh Day Adventists had originally asked a price of \$18,000 for the property, but when they discovered the intended use for the mansion and land, they dropped their asking price to a reported \$12,000 cash. However, at that time the Wood's Christian Home had only \$200 in its coffers, so George Wood offered as collateral the only security he had—his life insurance. The representatives of the Seventh Day Adventists were kind and generous in their negotiations with George Wood, and to them belongs some of the credit for the establishment of the permanent Wood's Christian Home.

The Family moved into their new premises

in November, 1926. The first year in Calgary was one of struggle and hardship; the community of Bowness and the City of Calgary were not yet aware of the great work that was going on in this new venture and so provided very little support. At the time, the Home had an indebtedness of over \$23,000 which included the balance owing on the Bowness property, monies owed to a bank, plus several outstanding accounts. This was considered a very large debt in those days.

TURNING POINT

The following year saw a turning point in the financial aspects of operating the Home. One Calgary organization, the Scottish Rite Masons, upon hearing of the financial plight of the Home, appealed to its members to contribute to the cause, and thereby raised \$2,000 which they handed over to George Wood. George, encouraged by this show of generosity, approached some citizens of Calgary to act on the Board of Trustees of the Home. W. J. Snaddon of Calgary became Chairman of the Board and subsequently devoted 25 years of service to the Wood's Christian Home in that capacity. Other Board members included: Dr. J. V. Follett (vice-chairman), A. J. Bartle, A. D. Gunning, J. W. Dingle, T. F. English, A. Stewart Irving, N. M. Jackson, H. M. Jenkins, A. F. Little, H. B. MacDonald, Dr. J. S. MacEachern, A. McGivern, K. J. Morrison and Dr. A. D. Patric.

In October, 1928, the Board launched a campaign for funds and succeeded in raising \$12,624. Various groups and clubs jumped on the bandwagon and raised or contributed varying amounts of money toward the cause. Some of these organizations included: the Knight of Pythias; the Order of the Eastern Star; the Orange Lodge, the Oddfellows; the Daughters of the Empire, and the Kiwanis Club.

By the end of 1928, the Home indebtedness had been reduced by \$16,000 and the remaining debts continued to diminish steadily.

CHAPTER V THE MAN PASSES AWAY ...



*GEORGE AND ANNIE WOOD -
THE DREAM COMES A REALITY.
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta*

With the Family ensconced in its new spacious Home and the debts thereof reduced considerably with genuine prospects for complete solvency, George and Annie Wood felt gratified at the substantial progress that had been made since the inception of their charitable venture 13 years before. George Wood's dream had come true and his prayers had been answered: his Family had a permanent home and he no longer had to worry about where the next dollar was coming from to maintain care of the Home and its residents.

But the years of toiling, worrying and ceaseless canvassing for funds, plus the accident with a runaway team, had finally taken their toll, and after a brief bout with pneumonia, the Reverend George Wood passed away on November 28, 1928 in the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary at the age of 50. The man who was known as 'Father' to hundreds of children was gone but his dream endured. George Wood's last words to his family were: "Carry on!"

... BUT THE DREAM CONTINUES

Annie Wood, bereft by the loss of her husband but proud of his accomplishments, hoisted the yolk of responsibility onto her own shoulders and carried on.

During 1929 further satisfactory progress was made; the property was repaired, painted and generally put into shape. That year, the "tag day" (fund raising campaign) was directed by the Kiwanis Club. A total of \$6,660 was raised, and at the end of the year the annual financial statement showed a surplus for the first time. It was decided that if sufficient funds could be raised the following year, a new boys' dormitory would be built. The 1930 canvass realized the sum of \$11,363 and the boys' dormitory became a reality.

There were 95 boys and girls in the care of Annie Wood and her staff at this time. The main building (the mansion) had small dorms for the girls, plus staff rooms, administration offices, playrooms, craft rooms, workshop and kitchen and dining facilities.

A two-room school was established in the basement which, under the capable direction of Mrs. Ty Campbell and her brother, Leslie Watkins, produced results which compared favorably with other schools in the province.

The involvement of various clubs and church groups in aiding the Wood's Christian Home speeded progress considerably.

In addition to successful fund raising efforts, these organizations plus many private citizens provided furnishings, bed linens, towels, clothes and other gratefully accepted gifts.

A refrigeration plant was installed and proved to be a great boon, as the Home was able to accept such contributions as sides of beef and pork, chickens, eggs, butter and other perishables. A root cellar was built to house contributions of potatoes and other fresh vegetables and fruit.

The health of the children was given careful attention by doctors and dentists from Calgary who donated their services at no cost to the Home. Private citizens, who were ‘friends’ of the Home, often left legacies to the Home in their wills.

UNIQUE FUNCTION

The organization of the Home became more formally structured, with the Board of Trustees establishing principal aims and policies for the operation of the Home and the care of the children.

The Wood’s Christian Home was unique amongst other child caring institutions, such as orphanages, juvenile detention homes or other public institutions in the province. One of the basic policies of the WCH was to care for whole families of children, that is, to admit all the children from a single parent home, or children completely orphaned. Children admitted to the WCH were seldom placed in foster homes. True orphans were sometimes placed for adoption, particularly if they were wards of the provincial government or local public authorities.

Children placed in the Home by single parents or close relatives were normally admitted into the Home after lengthy discussions with the parent or relative concerning the individual needs and/or problems of each child. A profile was then drawn up for each child, outlining family history, emotional or physical problems, general health, educational history and other pertinent data. The normal age range for admission was 6 to 16, but exceptions were made where a family member was younger than 6 in order to avoid breaking up the family unit. Parents or relatives were encouraged to visit their children as often as possible, and children were allowed to go ‘home’ every third weekend if the parent or relative had sufficient lodgings and means of looking after them for short periods of time.

“Some of the children have lost only one parent, others have relations who are interested in them, but many are orphans and have to be taken care of and kept in touch with after they are over the age (16) for the Home. One of the principal aims of the Home is to try to keep families together until such time as their home can be re-established on a satisfactory basis. The Board of Trustees has a special committee which advises and cooperates with Mrs. Wood, the matron, and Mr. Robertson, the manager and secretary, in placing in foster homes outside, those children who have passed Grade 8 in school or have reached an age where they can no longer be taken care of in the Home, and where they have no relatives who can take them. Assistance is given in their further education where considered advisable, and an effort is made to keep in touch with them until they are of an age when they can be expected to take care of themselves.”

⁹Wood’s Christian Home Annual Report, 1932.

CHAPTER VI THE DEPRESSION YEARS

‘True’ orphans were a minority, over the decades, in Wood’s Home. During the early Thirties, the Evans children were the only true orphans in the Home. Upon the death of their parents, the children found themselves under the loving care of Mrs. Wood and her staff.

Hilda Evans entered the Home in the fall of 1929 with her sister May and her brother Harold. Hilda and Harold remained in the Home until 1939 while May left in 1934.

Hilda spent grades 7 and 8 in the Home. The school teachers at this time were Mrs. Campbell who taught grades 4-8 while her brother, Les Watkins, taught grades 1-4. Mrs. Campbell, herself divorced, brought her daughter Ruby with her when they moved with the Home from Olds to Bowness. Here, they all lived in the staff headquarters. A short time after this move, Mrs. Campbell was on holidays when she was stung by a bee and died.

The Home school was on the lower floor of the main building and at this time only went to grade eight. Hilda well remembers the long bus ride from the Home in Bowness to the Calgary Technical School on 16 Avenue N.W. to write her grade 8 depart-mental examinations. This school is now the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology.

During the early years in the Home, Hilda recalls a Mr. and Mrs. Burton supplying the milk to help feed the many mouths. This donation was gratefully appreciated by Mrs. Wood and the children. However, for Hilda it was a different story as Hilda had a dislike for milk. This, as well as having a small appetite, found Hilda passing food and milk on to her family partners who had larger appetites as well as a liking for milk. There was never a shortage of the latter.

Dr. J. V. Follett donated many hours to care for the physical needs of the growing Wood’s family. The Christmas of 1929 stands out well in Hilda’s mind, because there was an epidemic of scarlet fever. In those days this was a dread disease—often fatal. Hilda was one of those who caught scarlet fever. Hilda remembers Mrs. Wood having tears in her eyes as she did not think Hilda would pull through due to her weakening condition. Mrs. Wood decided to give her some bland foods, a wise decision, as it was then that Hilda started gaining strength.

Since five or six others were caught in this epidemic, a portion of the girls’ dormitory was partitioned off, creating an isolation ward. Mrs. Bellew, one of the Home helpers, was given the specific responsibility of maintaining the isolation ward and keeping the children amused during their recovery period. The children made doll clothes, with Mrs. Bellew’s help, while recuperating.

Sunday School always played a very important roll in Hilda’s life. Mr. Bartle, a businessman and volunteer minister, did an excellent job of teaching the Bible and loved giving the children Bible quizzes. One of Hilda’s fondest memories is winning one of those Bible quizzes, receiving a wicker sewing basket as the prize. As a treat, Mrs. Wood or Mrs. Campbell loved to take the children to evening services at the Knox United Church. The girls considered this a real privilege. Hilda thus learned at an early age of Christ’s love for humanity and how His strength helps His children to endure the hardships of life.

HOME MANAGEMENT AND THE MANAGER

During the Depression years, there were only minor changes in the Home. The Board kept a tight rein on financial expenditures and was therefore able to continue adequate maintenance of the Home and its residents which, by now, numbered over 100. The main source of income continued to be the annual fundraising campaigns, but the times were hard and the amounts of money raised were proportionate to the community’s ability to contribute to charitable organizations.

The Home manager, D. B. Robertson, with a crew of six, captained a tight, well run ship. He organized the staff, cut corners where possible, disciplined the children when necessary, and acted as general advisor and councillor to all.



D. B. ROBERTSON
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

“If anyone got into real trouble, Mr. Robertson’s office be-came the court of last resort. I remember one instance where another girl and I had sneaked out into the woods to watch the boys fry spuds and play poker (which was a no-no) and, unfortunately, we got caught. We wept, we cried, we pleaded it was our first offence and promised never to do it again, all to no avail. We waited in mute humiliation and absolute terror for the call to go to “The Office”. We tip-toed up to Mr. Robert-son’s door and softly tapped on the door jamb. He bid us enter, then commented _on the beautiful day the Lord had sent us. Then he said, ‘Girls, I want you to promise me that you’ll never marry the first man who asks you. He might be the right man for you but never say yes the first time. If he asks you again, and you’re sure he’s the right man, then say yes and marry him’¹.

“Not once did he mention our disregard for the rules. I remember to this day his kindness and tact. He must have known we would be models of perfection for a long while because our con-sciences were working overtime. He made me stop and think then and still does.

“He was a father figure to hundreds of boys and girls over the years. I remember the many trips we took, especially to the Stampede. There would be more than a hundred kids and eight or ten staff, with Mr. Robertson leading the way, holding up his cane to stop traffic while we trooped across streets and avenues. Upon arrival at the Stampede grounds, we were given 10 tickets each for the rides plus our lunch. (Many a lunch ‘came up’ during some of those wild rides.) After our craving for excitement was assuaged, we all met at the grandstand to see the evening show. Then, tired but happy, we all trooped back, again with Mr. Robertson in the lead, to our special buses and headed back to our Home.”

DUTCHIE AND HIS BROTHER

Norman Davison Casson (“Dutchie”) recalls in detail his years at Wood’s Home.

My brother, Thomas Edward Casson, and myself entered the Home in 1930 and were residents for approximately 6 years. Mr. Watkins and his sister Mrs. Campbell were the only two teachers. They were also responsible for supervision of the big boys’ dormitory. Mrs. Campbell’s daughter also lived at the Home and received her schooling there. Mabel, the cook, and May, who worked in the laundry, had also grown up and received their education at the Home. Mrs. Gall came a little later and supervised the girls’ residence. With the help of the older girls, Mrs. Gall took care of most of the mending that had to be done. During the period of time I was en-rolled at the Home, the largest number of children living there was approximately 115.

Elaine (Phillips) High, although not a resident of the Home until the 1940s³ recalls the manner of the man and the general images he projected to children over his quarter-century tenure in the Home.

“You didn’t have to see him to know that Mr. Robertson was in his office. The whispers ran through the Home like wildfire: ‘D. B.’s here! D. B.’s here!’¹

“He was to us the supreme authority, higher in our minds (and just as formidable) as those persons who composed ‘The Board’¹. He was a short, portly man with silver hair, a nice smile and a catchy brogue. I never once heard him raise his voice, but then we were speechless just knowing he was there.

The Home at that time consisted of two main buildings, a combined garage and workshop (that was later torn down) and an old house where the Scout meetings were held. The largest of the main buildings housed the classrooms, the girls’ dormitory, the younger boys’ dormitory, the kitchen, dining room, laundry and the ‘Oakroom’ which was used for worship services. Generally at these worship services, Mrs. Wood would read a few passages from the Bible assisted by some of the older children, and a hymn or two would be sung. The smaller of the main buildings was the dormitory for the older boys and the residence for my brother and I. There was a tennis court in front of the larger main building. In the winter this would be flooded to make a skating rink. It was not very satisfactory, however, as the floor was cement and when the sun came out, the ice would melt down to the cement in some places and we would find ourselves skating on the cement ¹

When I arrived at the Home I was wearing a pair of heavy leather boots that made a noise like clogs when I walked. Consequently!, the other children named me ‘Dutchie’. Most of the other children wore running shoes at that time.

A couple of years after my arrival at the Home Mrs. Campbell passed away. Mr. S. K. Macleod took her place.

Hiking was a popular pastime for the older children at the Home. Victoria Day weekends especially come to mind, when lunches were made up for all those who wanted to go hiking. We often hiked back to the caves which were in the vicinity of what is now Bears paw Dam. Sometimes we hiked back to the area that was later to become Happy Valley. There was a sheep farmer back there named Mr. Penman on whose farm we would pick saskatoons, some-times as much as a whole big tubful at one time. We decided we would try to sell them so we found some old fruit baskets at the Home, filled them with the berries and sold them to the neighbors for 15C a container. We thought we were millionaires! The Happy Valley area was referred to as the ‘Flats’ and us boys often hiked down there in the heat of the summer to swim in a secluded water hole we knew of, where we would swim in our birthday suits.

Sometimes the boys would go up to the golf course, just above the Home, and look for lost golf balls which we would try and sell to the golfers.

There were a few sets of twins staying at the Home while I was there. I remember George and Tom Walker who looked so much alike I had a hard time distinguishing which was which. George is now a policeman in Calgary. Glen and Bruce Wheeler were an-other set of twins and I chummed around with them quite a bit.

I remember especially one very frightening episode when Bruce Wheeler was tobogganing down what was referred to as the girls’ hill on the south side of the Home. There was a hole in the floor of the toboggan and as he rode down the hill, a twig penetrated the hole and severely injured Bruce. Luckily the man who delivered bread to the Home every morning was there and carried Bruce into the Home. From there he was taken to the hospital and after a few days was sufficiently healed to be allowed to return to the Home.

My saddest recollection was the time Arthur Francis and Jim Doyle, with the help of three or four others, were building a tree house near Bowness Park. Arthur stood on a stump to build the ladder to the tree house when he lost his footing. A piece of rotting wood on the stump pierced his chest. He was taken to the hospital but died a few days later from blood poisoning. We were a very sad bunch of children for a few days after that.

There was a lagoon down below the Home to the northeast. A couple of years after we arrived at the Home, it was decided to clear all the trees and brush around the lagoon and make a skating rink. All of the children eagerly participated. Mr. Watkins was the only male teacher at the time and he took charge of the operation. We cut down trees, dug out shrubs, and even dug out tree stumps. Pulling out the stumps was the hardest. A rope was tied around the loosened stump and a large number of the kids would pull on the rope while others dug at the roots and chopped them off where they could. The only machinery was a plough, pulled by two horses, which was used to roughly level

the area after all the trees, shrubs, etc., were re-moved. The project took most of the summer but that winter we had our skating rink I The first winter we piled snow around the edges to hold the water.

Flooding the rink was a real job. The pump, which was bolted to a plank, had to be dragged down from the laundry room to the lagoon by four stalwart boys. A hole was chopped in the ice in the lagoon for the hose from the pump. Then it required two boys on the pump at a time, pumping steadily. We would all take turns until the rink was flooded. After the flooding, the pump had to be dragged back up the hill to the laundry room (so it wouldn't freeze) which was even more difficult than taking it down. It took many of the kids, pushing and pulling, to get it back each time.

Some of the logs from the trees that were chopped down were used by the boys to build a small log shack that we used for changing our skates. It was very rough but served the purpose. A fire would be built just outside the shack where we could warm ourselves while we were skating. There was enough wood and shrubbery from the area we cleared to last two years for our fires.

Another rather foolish episode that comes to mind is the time a number of the boys went for a hike on the north side of the Bow River up to the Bearspaw Dam area. It was a nice Sunday after-noon and we kept on walking until we realized we had hiked farther than we intended and would not make it back for supper (it was a strict rule that if we went hiking, we had to be back for supper.) We decided to try and cross the river at what was then the Ice House. We rolled up our pants and carried our shoes and started across. The water was very cold and the currents were much stronger than we anticipated. It was hard going at times and we were pretty scared. We hadn't realized when we started out how dangerous our adventure was, but luckily we all made it and were back at the Home in time for supper.

We, of course, weren't allowed to have pets, but when I first entered the Home there was a nice old dog, a sheepdog cross, that chummed around with all the children for years. It was a sad day when he ate some poisoned meat and passed away despite everything the staff tried to do to help him. Later on, a stray fox terrier attached himself to the Home and would follow us on our hikes. One day when crossing the railway trestles, the dog was hit by a train. The boys carried him back to the Home and tended the dog, who lay unconscious, for several days. He finally regained consciousness and seemed perfectly normal but he always walked crooked after that.

We often visited Bowness Park which, of course, was not developed to the extent it is today. There used to be a large dance hall in the location of the present concession booths, where dances were held every Saturday night. Just about every spring when the river was high, it would flood all the Bowness Park area and cover the dance floor with water and ice. Great fun! In the summer the street cars would bring loads of people to the park on Saturdays and Sundays (we thought it was a lot of people though it probably was nothing compared to the numbers attending these days!). The Home would have an annual picnic every summer at the park. We were given free tickets to go on the merry-go-round which was the only ride down there at that time. That was the highlight of the picnic as far as the children were concerned. Mr. Crombie, who was the superintendent of the City of Calgary street railway at that time, would always dress up as a clown for the picnic. One year the merry-go-round broke down and Mr. Crombie, in his clown suit, made a big impression on all the children when he helped to fix the ride so that we were able to take advantage of our free tickets!

So many interesting little episodes come to mind. There was the time a whole truckload of apples from B.C. was donated to the Home and the only place there was to store them was the furnace room. The apples had to be dumped as the trucker had to take the boxes back. The apples had to be eaten rather quickly, otherwise they might rot, so we were given two or three at a time each day for several days. The apple cores became great ammunition for dormitory fights, etc. Often tables, chairs, etc., would be turned on their sides to make forts and avoid the barrage of apple cores aimed at us by the opposing sides.

On occasion, Mr. Robertson and Mr. Watkins would take a bunch of the boys, in their respective cars, to Mewata Stadium to watch the soccer games. We thought this was great and looked forward to our turn. A big bag of peanuts was always supplied.

The Home possessed an old Model A Ford and one day Mr. Watkins could not get it started. He asked some of us older boys to give him a push and a few of us dashed out enthusiastically, not bothering to put on coats and hats although the weather was very cold. Consequently, some of us ended up with frozen ears.

On Hallowe'en night there was always a party for the older boys and girls in the boys' dormitory and one for younger children in their own area. We would bob for apples and play other games. It was always lots of fun. (We were never allowed to go out Hallowe'ening from door to door.)

Christmas also produced happy memories with Santa Glaus knocking on the school room window and ringing his bells in the morning. Some of the children would run outside and bring Santa in. He would give all the children a present off the tree along with a bag of candy (a real treat in those days). Later in the day there would be the traditional Christmas dinner with all the trimmings.



TOP RIGHT - MAY MILDREN; TOP LEFT - LESLIE WATKINS; OLDER/MAN - HANDYMAN; MRS. WATKINS IN MIDDLE LEFT; A. J. BARTLE AND ANNIE WOOD IN LOWER RIGHT CORNER. - Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

I would like to end my trip back to this memorable period in my life with a tribute to a very wonderful woman who did so much for so many unfortunate children in those very troubled depression years.

I remember especially the times in the summer when she would sit out under the trees in front of the Home, with us children spread out on the lawns around her, and read us stories.

A LADY OF FAITH

Annie "Mother" Wood, matron, continued to be the pillar of strength and stability, the symbol of unity and a surrogate mother to the children. It was she who soothed fevered brows, wiped away tears, or shared

a child's joy. It was she who set the standards for work and behaviour for the staff and children. In return, she received their unfailing respect and devotion.

Mother Wood was respected not only for her kindness and understanding, but for her abiding faith in the Almighty which was as unalterable as that of her late husband, George Wood.



⁴ANNIE WOOD IN GARDEN
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

Mr. Robertson, in trying to teach the children the meaning of faith, would often describe incidents where Mother Wood's faith would be justified when everyone else was sceptical. Following are just a few of the stories the children heard from Mr. Robertson over the years:

There was one day when all the bread had been used at supper, leaving none for breakfast to go with the oatmeal porridge. Mr. Robertson wracked his brain trying to figure out how to get money at six in the evening to buy bread. Mother Wood came in and said, 'Dave, don't worry; we'll pray and God will provide'. He said she went away to pray, and a little later the phone rang. It was a man from the National Bakery who said they had 15 white and 7 brown loaves of bread left over and could the Home make use of the bread? That was just what was needed until the bakery made its normal delivery the next day!

Another time Mother Wood decided that the parents and children would be more comfortable if there was a couch in the oak room for visiting. She purchased one wicker couch and a table from Eaton's which were on sale. Mr. Robertson said that was fine, but money was scarce and they couldn't spare \$100 for

furniture. All Mother Wood said was 'David, the Lord will provide'. The next day a letter arrived with a \$100 donation for furnishings.



ANNIE WOOD WITH R. B. BENNETT, FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA, DECEMBER 1937. - Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

There was a girl at the Home who was rather slow, and some of the kids were teasing her one day and she ran away. Mr. Robertson was driving east on Ninth Avenue at 5:00 p.m. when, for no reason he could think of, he made a U-turn and started driving west. There on the corner of First Street and Ninth Avenue west stood the girl. Mr. Robertson took her back to the Home. Later, as he was telling Mother Wood about the rather strange incident, she said: 'David, we discovered she was missing at 4:45 and at 5:00 I was asking God to help us find her, and you did through Him. The Lord provides, David, the Lord provides.' Now there was a lady with unshakable faith and belief.

WARM WELCOME

Laurence L. Black recalls his short stay at Wood's Home.

To the best of my recollections, I was in the Home for just over one year, in 1931 or 1932. I was moved back and forth between Medicine Hat and Calgary so many times after my mother died in 1928 that it seemed like a dream. However, when I went to the Home, Mrs. Wood was there and she took me in hand and made me feel welcome and secure.

I recall some amusing incidents and some sad ones during my short stay in the Home.

Some people who lived down the road between the Home and Bowness Park kept cows and supplied the Home residents with milk. A couple of boys and myself often used to bring in the cows from the pasture for milking and feeding. Being curious, we sampled the bran that was fed to the cows, not realizing that it was actually good for us! Needless to say, we didn't re-quire 'an apple a day'!

A man named Mr. Ward gave us one-cent suckers which were placed by our dinner plates every Friday night. He had a daughter named Ada, and I considered her my girlfriend.

Some weekends, I would travel to Calgary to visit my Aunt. In those days it was a trip of about 10 miles and quite an adventure for a young fellow. The boys and girls at the Home were often taken to Calgary to see movies or other special events.

Although I was in the Home only a short time, it was basically an enjoyable time.

'VARIETY OF INTEREST

Over the decades, the children of the Wood's Christian Home participated in a wide variety of activities and belonged to many clubs and organizations. They at-tended many special events sponsored by well-known organizations and/or groups, as well as by many caring individuals.

Prior to moving to Bowness, when the Home was still relatively the operation of one man alone, George Wood, there was little in the way of organized activity outside the Home due to the location and financial restrictions that existed at that time.

However, once the Home became established in Calgary-Bowness, the children were afforded many opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular activities, both inside and outside of the Home. Subsequent stories relate a wide spectrum of activities as they are remembered by Home children and staff or recorded for posterity by newspapers and Wood's Christian Home Annual Reports.



HOWARD SMITH

SCOUTING

Howard Smith recalls his involvement with the Scout movement in 1922.

Tuesday was Scout night. I really enjoyed those times. Lester Smith was our Scout Master. We would vie with each other's patrols to see who could come up with the best ideas, and tried to have the best displays of wood lore and birds' nests, etc. I was leader of the Buffalo Patrol. We learned how to make ceremonial and general working staffs. Our overnight hikes to the caves were made especially thrilling by the story-telling art of Scout Commander Spiller who told Indian stories so vividly it seemed the warriors were ready to pounce on us from the darkened woods. Those caves are now covered by the waters of the Bearspaw Dam, but were quite an adventure in themselves in those days.

Our Scout troop put on a display of bridge-building and other scouting arts for Mrs. Wood’s garden parties. Girls who were members of the Guides and Brownies served the guests at these teas. I remember conducting visitors through the Home and the grounds of which we were so proud, and I recall I often got a few tips for my ‘tour guide’ act.

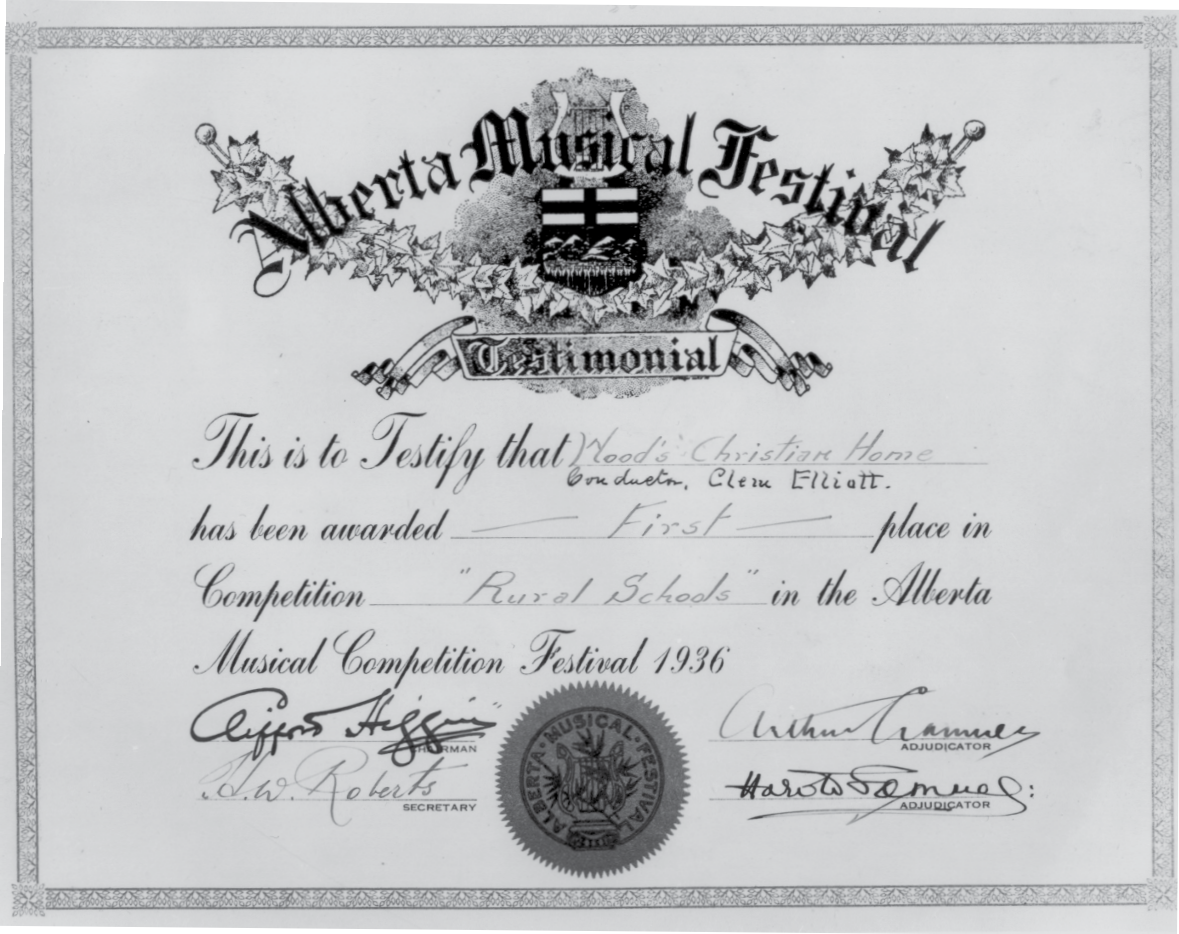
Our Scout troop also participated in the huge Southern Alberta Scout Jamboree which was held in Victoria Arena. In attendance was Lord Baden Powell, chief of the world wide Scout movement.

WELL-ROUNDED UPBRINGINGS

Not only was the educational, emotional and physical well being of the children maintained, but their spiritual needs were also met by regular attendance at Sunday School. Mr. Bartle was the minister for many years and he is well remembered by some of his students for his sermons and spiritual guidance.

The in-house school at the Home provided education to the eighth grade and, upon graduation therefrom, if a student wished to continue his/her schooling, he/she would attend Bowness High School and continue living in the Home. Every effort was made to provide as much education as possible to those children who showed promise and had the drive and initiative to further their achievements.

The cultural and social aspects of the children’s upbringing were also given due attention. The children were frequently taken to movies, the circus, live theatrical performances and other social events, most of which were paid for by public spirited citizens or clubs. Private music lessons were provided for talented individuals at a local music studio. The Home also had a musical instructor, Clem Elliott, for the children and, in fact, the musical classes were so successful that in 1936 the WCH won first place in the rural schools section of the Alberta Music Festival.



YARDSTICKS AND LEMON DROPS

Bill Webster, another resident in the Home during the Depression recalls receiving equal amounts of love and discipline.

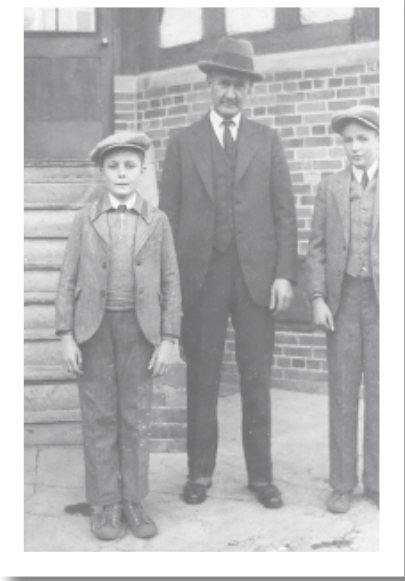
My brother Gordon and I lived in Wood’s Christian Home during the years 1931-1937. Our mother died when we were too young to really realize it and our dad was everything to us. Our dad, being a travelling salesman, couldn’t look after us by himself so when the WCH offered us a place to live, he took us there.

I suppose it must have been a teary-eyed few weeks for us and our dad when he left us at the Home, but those earliest days are very vague. All of a sudden we had a “bunch” of kids to play and fight with, a giant dining room, and a bedroom on the veranda with a bird’s-eye view of an evergreen tree-covered valley and overlooking the Bowness Park. We shared this bedroom with 20 or more other boys of whom we grew fonder in the days and years that followed. Above all, all of a sudden we got a ‘mom’ whom we called ‘Mother’ in the person of Mrs. Wood. Looking back, I also suppose that if it hadn’t been for a heck of a lot of love coming our way, and a belly full of good food, we would probably have ‘run away’ to look for our dad. So we stayed and lived, loved and shared with around 100 boys and girls, some of whom were orphans before Mother Wood became their ‘adopted’ mother.

Everything sure wasn’t perfect for us kids, though, because we found that we had to do chores like darning our socks, shining floors and all that oak panel-ling, peeling spuds and making our beds; oh, it was awful!

If we were late for supper, we would have to go without and maybe snatch a turnip or potato from the root house to tide us over until breakfast.

Our appetites were always voracious in those days and whatever Mabel (Mabel Gwinn, the cook) made for us, it tasted like more. Good ol’ Mabel — our tummy never forgets I



**BILL AND GORDON WEBSTER
WITH THEIR FATHER**

Discipline at the Home was strict — it had to be for Mother Wood to keep order over all the chaos that all her kids could cause. Our favorite fun after lights went out at bedtime was pillow fights; we found out many times that there were feathers in those pillows. Anyhow, we never expected Mother Wood to catch us but she did sometimes and that would make her screaming mad, and in her Scottish brogue would scream at us “it’s a bedlam, it’s a bedlam” — we didn’t know what that meant at that time but we eventually got the message. At other unexpected times, Mother Wood would come around our dormitory just after lights out and would drop an orange or lemon drop into our mouths — it was a loving moment.

Our teachers were strict and efficient. During class, our daydreams were often interrupted with ‘get out and go up to my bathroom, take down your pants and bend over the bathtub and I’ll fix you’ — and it was one of our ‘tender’ moments. And I know that they loved us!

Besides the school work, the teachers taught us tennis, sports, swimming, sports of all sorts and a fondness for chicklet chewing gum. Mr. Macleod, our senior grade teacher, would continuously chew a half a chicklet at a time and during his

takeoffs into Calgary, we urchins would sneak into his room and snatch the other half of the chicklets that were lying about. It was a great joke on ‘Mac’.

One day in school while I was dreaming, my other teacher, Mr. Watkins, asked me a question he knew I couldn’t answer and, of course, I gave him the wrong answer. He had this yardstick in his hand and tried to fracture my head but it was too hard and by golly if it didn’t break the stick in two right on the 18” mark — was he mad. But we

respected and admired Mr. Watkins who, I believe, portrayed a guiding and fatherly image to many of the kids. We were also impressed with the flower gardens and lawns on which he spent much of his free time keeping up. He also taught us how to play tennis, even at that early age. I have often wondered of the destinies of all the staff and residents of the Home, the ones that were there during our stay.

The following are bits of fond memories that I will always cherish and which I'm sure will jog a few memories of others who had the same experiences.



ANNIE WOOD, STAFF AND CHILDREN - 1937
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

Annual Burns Picnic at Bowness Park — we were not invited but they knew us by our short pants and bare feet. We were given all the ice cream, eats and merry-go-round rides that we had the time for. Charlie, Murray, and Jerry Comba were good friends to all of us kids. Picking Jackson's dandelions — 5* for a complete job. Horse radishes — from the garden of Charlie Ellard who lived just outside the park gates. He was good to us kids. Burton's milk — brought by a '29 Chevy direct from the cow. Big box of candy donated by Mr. Bartle's Jewish friend, Mr. Epstein — this happened every year. Miss Bess, our nurse during a scarlet fever epidemic, and her 3" long needle. Golf balls we sold for 5\$ each to a street car conductor named Mr. Davidson. Chokecherries and saskatoons sold for \$1.00 for a big bucket full. Mother Wood's rice pudding topped with syrup — this was a special served with her famous scones. Saturday morning chores and bag lunches with an orange-aid cube for our hikes to the caves. Swimming a-la-nude in the backwater of the Bow where Happy Valley is now. Logs and lumberjacks on the Bow on their way to the Revelstoke Sawmill in Calgary.

Skating rink and hand pump at the bottom of the hill by the canal. The stairway which we built all the way down to the skating rink. The moonlite skating we had with the girls and the smell of the warm fires we burned with spruce and poplar.

The sweet agony of accomplishment when we didn't have many re-sources except our imagination to work with. Garden parties on the lawn by the summer house on a Sunday afternoon. Beautiful flower beds, Sunday visitors, collection box with slot on top just a wee bit too wide. We could also find money under the main front stairway by

using a stick with gum on the end of it — probably a well-chewed half chicklet. Glen Wheeler in the hawk's nest and wing tips zooming past him trying to knock him out of the tree. Wild mint patch on way to the flats and mossy covered spring of ice cold water on way to the 'Three Sisters'(Douglas fir trees).*

Stealing a chicken from the dairy farm above 'the flats' and getting caught with it under my jacket — "guilty, your honor" but he didn't turn me in.

Christmas party every year given to us by the Shriners in the Al Azhar Temple — candies, magic, eats and drinks and the happy street car ride back which was usually on a cold, snowy night.



A STAND OF DOUGLAS FIRS ON WOOD'S HOME PROPERTY

where they go for bows'. It is believed that one of those major waterways, the Bow River, thus derived its name.

The only other noteworthy stands of Douglas fir trees (the province's largest tree) in Alberta are located on the Morley Reserve, the Porcupine Hills area and the headwaters of the Athabasca, Clearwater, North Saskatchewan and Oldman Rivers.

The Douglas fir on the Wood's Home property, while not unique to the province, are very scarce elsewhere within the Calgary city limits. In 1981, the Alberta Department of Transportation dis-closed plans to build an access road through the property which would have necessitated removal of some of the Douglas fir. These trees range in age from 95 to almost 300 years, and have a potential life span of 400 years.

Former residents of Wood's Home and many public spirited citizens of Calgary, as well as naturalists and conservationists, protested the possible destruction of any Douglas fir and urged the City of Calgary and the Alberta government to declare this area a natural historical site,

At this writing, negotiations are continuing among the groups involved (Wood's Christian Home, City of Calgary, Alberta Dept. of Transportation and the Historic Sites Board) to arrive at a mutually agreeable alternative to the proposed land expropriation and subsequent road-building which could affect the Douglas fir trees in the area.

**Editor's Note*

The Douglas fir trees referred to and pictured above (and mentioned throughout this history) are just one of several stands of Douglas fir growing on the Wood's Home property.

There is a legend that the Indians of the foothills traversed the major southern Alberta waterways in their canoes, searching for young Douglas fir trees from which they made their bows be-cause of the flexibility of the outer layer of wood. These are-as of Douglas fir stands were referred to by the Indians as 'man-ah-shah-ban' or 'the place

Hamburger steak and onions, dessert and milk, all for 25£ at a Chinese restaurant on 8th Ave. E.I think we used 10£ worth of ketchup on those rare occasions!

Tracing paper -- little kids made their own by rubbing candle wax on paper that was held on a hot radiator or steam pipe. All day suckers at Mike’s store. Stilts much taller than we were. Arrow guns, slingshots, bows and arrows all homemade. New long Johns every fall.

Henry Gerlitz — teacher and organist.

Christmas time in the schoolroom downstairs — we cut and carried our own tree — could see all the presents around tree from the windows on the north side of home. Letters to Santa: sleighs, jackknives, flash-lights, skates, skis, dolls were favorite requests and we always got the present we asked for.

Crystal set with cats-whiskers and earphones to listen to Foster Hewitt and root for the Leafs. We loved The Shadow_, Amos and Andy & Charlie McCarthy. Those were the days of Kattzen jammer Kids 3 Harold Teen and Major Hoople^ Tarzan of the Apes, Nanoy and numerous other comics.

‘Stall, stall, stall’ was a favorite expression of Mr. Macleod’s as he grabbed our skinny little shoulders with his big bony fingers (ouch) and shaking us, all that just for day-dreaming in class. Do you remember the time we were just making hydrogen? He lit the match to the end of the tubing and everything disappeared in a cloud of smoke and acid all over the room! Luckily nobody was hurt and I never saw him perform that experiment again.

Going through pockets of pants in laundry room and finding stamps mostly (most of us had stamp albums), egg collections or butterfly collections.

Rabbits, all colors, we kept as pets — we picked a certain kind of vine that we fed them in place of hay.

Didn’t the woods smell nice just after a rain?

Oh, those are just some of the fond memories of which I am proud to relate and proud to have had a part in at the Wood’s Christian Home. There could never be any words that could ever express my deepest feelings of love and appreciation for those who cared and looked after us all in those ‘dirty thirty’ years.

Mother Wood’s motto ‘FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY’ surely made its mark on all of us who knew her.



GORDON AND BILL ON
FRONT LAWN OF HOME



HOWARD SMITH AND FRIEND

THE NEW BOY

Howard A. Smith describes how the dedicated staff of the Home restored ‘normalcy’ to the life of a frightened child who had been shuttled from institution to institution.

I was desperately afraid, clinging to my mother as Mr. Robert-son, the Home Manager, drove us through the gates of the Home on a summer day in 1932. At the age of 11, I had already spent too many years of my boyhood in other institutions or in foster homes.

I had good reason to be afraid of yet another ‘home’. My memories of the first two still give me dark and terrible nightmares to this day. Would I be treated as an outcast here because I was protestant? Would I have to sleep in a damp basement, so cold I had to warm my hands on a hot water pipe before my small fingers could manipulate the buttons on my clothes in the shivering gray dawns? Then rushed off to long Masses without a chance to go to the bathroom, and then beaten when the inevitable happened?

Would I be given warm water to drink instead of cold? Would I be told

St. Peter’s piercing black eyes were always watching me, a sinner? Would I be beaten, again and again, for God knows what?

I had, in the first institution, contracted such a severe skin disease that I was hospitalized and quarantined. Then, with a clean bill of health, I was sent to another home in southern Alberta. Four months later, my mother was wired to come at once if she wanted to see me alive.

Taken back to the hospital in Drumheller, where my mother was on staff as cook, I lay close to death for a long time. My eyes were swelled shut, running pus. My toenails and finger-nails fell out and I was having recurring bouts of delirium with high fever. Three doctors combined their skills to re-store my health. A good part of my trouble must have been malnutrition, as I remember being forced to eat teaspoons of raw chopped liver and quantities of Scott’s Emulsion (cod liver oil).

After nine months in bed, still skin and bones, I was able to get about in a wheelchair. When I regained my strength and the use of my legs, I had a few years of a normal child’s life: going to public school, roaming the hills of my home town, having friends, learning to skate and all that. But my mother could not keep me there, as her job left her no time to care for me personally. So she arranged for yet another boarding home for me.

While waiting for my mother to register me at the Wood’s Home, I was left outside where a group of boys crowded around me — shoving and poking, asking pointed questions. Soon it was time for goodbye to my mother once more. As the car sped away, I stood shaking the bars of the big iron gates, crying my heart out...I was crouched in the gravel driveway when I felt gentle hands on my shoulders, lifting me up. I looked up into the kindly face of Mrs. Wood, who was to become my real mother in the years to follow.

Although it took awhile to get accustomed to the Home, I soon felt like a part of one big family. The other children were as my brothers and sisters. Discipline was strict but fair under Mrs. Wood’s wise and kindly supervision. I spent the best years of my childhood there.



MRS. CAMPBELL (LEFT) AND
MRS. WOOD

LEARNING

During the first month of my stay at the Home I was free to do as I pleased, except I was shown how to make my own bed and to do it right. By the time the first month went by I was fully part of the Family. Then came the time for the jobs to be handed out; I remembered being given the responsible job of seeing to it that all beds on my floor were made correctly and floors kept clean at all times. Also, I was to peel a bucket of potatoes every day and clean the entire front side-walk.

I hated peeling spuds and soon wrangled another job. This landed me in the kitchen where, for the next three years, I washed 700 dishes a day. I do believe Mable Gwinn, the cook, had a lot to do with my staying in the kitchen, as we got along real well. The only kitchen duty I didn't like was to wash out the big kettle in which the porridge was cooked, as it was like trying to get off glue. The pots were so big, a small boy had to crawl inside to get them clean. Every Saturday we had to take everything out of the cupboards and clean them. The girls, whose weekly job was to wash the silverware, had to polish it all on Saturdays. The windows and woodwork were done as well.



HOWARD AND FRIEND
NEAR '3 SISTERS'
(DOUGLAS FIRS)

One day Mabel had left about 10 pounds of raisins in a bowl in the kitchen. When she returned, over half of them were missing. We were all called into Mrs. Wood's room where she asked who stole the raisins. No answers.

Then she said, 'How many of you passed through the kitchen and took a handful as you passed by?'¹ Then several hands went up.

For this and other types of misdemeanors, we were as-signed the dirty job of cleaning the Johns, a job we all hated.

WEEKENDS

Every child looks forward to weekends — no more school for two days! Saturday mornings meant a general clean-up. Several children would be on their knees waxing the spacious oak floors and stairway. They were polished by hand also, and they really had to shine to win Mother Wood's approval. In summer, the gardens and lawns were trimmed as well. Everyone who had done his or her work well received free passes to Calgary on the old Bowness street car and a ticket to the matinee at the old Variety theatre.

Sometimes, on a shopping spree, we would go into Woolworth's and buy a bottle of cheap perfume for our girlfriends. I missed many of these trips, as I had to go to Mrs. Cuthbertson's music studio for lessons. Several of the others had to practice singing as Mr. Dingle was preparing them for the Festival, which they won.

On rainy days, we read comics which were contributed to the Home. Remember Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers and Tiny Tim?

Sunday afternoons we would hike into the west hills to the caves, now partly covered by the big dam at Bearspaw. The trails wound through the woods along the river. On a spring day the fragrance of those big pine trees was so refreshing.

My special friend and instructor in wood-lore was a Metis lad named Donny Paix. He taught me how to enjoy the woods, where the birds nested, where the rabbits ran and how to snare them. He would gather spruce gum and a wild mint plant, combine the two and make a really delicious chewing gum.

Miles from home with no watches, we knew we had two hours to get back in time for supper. At three o'clock every day the big orthophonic in Bowness Park would start playing and its gay music could be heard for miles.

SPIRITUAL LEARNING

Before we could go out hiking, we had to attend Sunday School. Mr. Bartle was our minister and we all liked him. We all had to learn a verse from the Psalms. If you learned a whole chapter you received a gold medal.

Worship was usually held Thursday evenings. One boy was selected to read from the Bible. One time we kids were quite bored with singing Onward Christian Soldiers. Miss Gall was leading the singing. We older boys changed the words to this:

Onward little bed-bugs
Marching down the sheet
When you get to the bottom
Please don't tickle my feet.

Well, she caught us, and ten of us were given good reprimanding. We also got the strap from Mr. Watkins.

SPRINGTIME

'Line up, Boys! Come and get your candy!'

'Candy?' How we got fooled! It consisted of a heaping table-spoon of sulphur and molasses. This did nothing for our morale but was supposed to be a spring tonic. Old fashioned housewives were not satisfied cleaning everything in their houses — it seems the children had to be cleaned out too! Some of us tried to hold it in our mouths until we got outside to spit it out. But no chance! One of the teachers stood behind us to give us a good slap on the back and gulp! Down it went!

'Next!'

'What? Ain't we through yet?'

'No, darn it!'

'Line up for the dentist!'; came the command.

'Dentist!'; we'd groan. That was one time we hated, but it was soon forgotten.

Another memory comes to mind. In springtime, we all wore our shirt sleeves cut off at the elbow, and our pants cut off at the knees. Neither did we have shoes or socks to wear in summer unless it was rainy and cool. We looked like a bunch of Tom Sawyer characters.

We couldn't wait for warm weather to go swimming. We would sneak down to the canal even before Bowness Park was open for a swim; strictly against the rules. We would follow lovers who sneaked up into the woods, and as unseen observers, learned about sex first hand. At a signal we would all rise, yelling, from our hiding places, and chase the couple from our woods.

Every boy likes to build huts and we were no exception. We built our huts up by the big Douglas fir trees, about 20 feet off the ground. We would chink the holes with moss so they were cosy and wind proof. On one big fir tree at the end of our property, we built a platform with railings, and a hut, too. We fixed a pulley and a cable to this platform running it up the hill where it was anchored to another smaller tree. We put a seat on the cable, and winched ourselves up to the

top of the big tree. We then had a very lofty and secret look-out from which to observe all of Bowness valley.

How we loved the soft moss that grew in the woods! It felt like running over a soft blanket to our bare feet! I shall never forget the wonderful fragrance of the spruce woods in springtime, as the chinooks blew down the valley.

I should explain that our beloved woods grew along a very steep hillside. Climbing the trees growing from the top of the hill, one was over and above those growing at lower levels.

Tarzan of the Apes was a big hero in the comics then; swinging from his tree top home in the jungle with a mighty cry of defiance. Naturally, we copied his exploits. We tied a rope to one of these hilltop trees, with a cross stick at the bottom end. Grabbing this stick firmly, stretching the rope taut, we'd run at top speed, giving the old Tarzan yell as the rope swung us out over the tree tops and back again in a full circle.

One day Mrs. Wood caught this act while out for a walk. The poor soul almost fainted! Little did we realize the danger we were in had we fallen or the rope had broken; we would have fallen many feet to the ground.

CODE OF THE HILLS

We had our own calls, signalling to one another for help. The signals were passed on through the woods, until they reached the dormitory at the home. One time some of us were cornered up at the railroad bridge by some city boys who were shooting stones at us with sling shots. Out went the call until it reached the Home, a mile away.

We made crossbows with wire and V-jointed wood with a shingle nail on the end, tied on with wire and glue, and used them for self-defence. Our rescuers came on the run armed with these deadly weapons, and the war was on. I can still see those arrows, narrowly missing the kids as they ran for safety. Little did we realize we could have killed them or seriously hurt them! But we showed them not to mess with the Woods Home kids, or else! Mother Wood never knew about these exploits, of course.

NATURE COLLECTIONS

I wonder what ever happened to the collections of over ninety different species of birds' eggs we made? Such risks to life and limb we took to get those eggs. One day another boy and my-self climbed a huge tree where Happy Valley Park is now to get hawks' eggs and nearly fell. That same day we found a snowy owl's nest.

We had rabbits, white mice and snakes for pets. The rabbits were brown and white angoras. We would keep the mice in our shirts during school and sometimes slept with them, until we got caught, and were sternly rebuked for it.

One day we caught a big bull snake. We knew Mabel, the cook, was deathly afraid of them. Boys will be boys! We trotted into the kitchen, asking her 'what's for supper?' As usual she said, 'Wait and find out!' So we said, 'Will this do?' — holding up the snake. We laughed as she dropped a kettle, then ran screaming to Mrs. Wood. We really caught heck for that.

WEEKDAY ACTIVITIES

Monday and Thursday evenings were spent learning to use and care for tools. We made useful articles from wood, such as the benches that were used by all the boys who came to the Home after us for their woodworking classes. These sessions were invaluable in later life, as I later built part of my home.

On Wednesday nights all the boys from age 10 up had to darn at least 10 pairs of socks! We were shown how to do it and if it wasn't done to Mrs. Wood's satisfaction, she would calmly cut the patch out, and you had a bigger hole to darn. We had old light bulbs to put in the socks to make it easier. While we were working, one of the boys would read from a favorite book. At the time, I hated darning socks but it, too, was to come in handy later in life.

One night, Mrs. Wood asked me to accompany her down to the girl's bathroom to help clean it up. The girls were supposed to be otherwise occupied but me walked in on four of them cavorting in the nude, much to the embarrassment of all concerned!

PARTIES

Mrs. Wood was strictly against parties where boys and girls mingled, especially dancing. It must have been a great responsibility looking after the morals of around 60 teenagers. We were strapped for merely sitting and talking to a girl. Still, youth always finds a way. One night Mrs. Wood was away and some of the girls were determined to attend a dance in Bowness. I went up on the roof and removed the screens to their dorm so they could get out. Then about two a.m. when they returned I had to let them in the same way.

Finally Mrs. Wood relented and allowed the older boys and girls to have supervised parties in the school-room.



MISS FARRELL AND 'GOBLINS' ON HOME STEPS.

HA HOWE 'EN

We were never allowed to go out into the neighborhood 'trick or treating' on Halloween as most children do. We were too busy preparing for and putting on a concert which was presented in the Al-Azhar Temple in Calgary. In return, they gave us a supper and a magic show. When we left, each child was given a big bag of apples and candy.

CHRISTMAS

Two weeks before Christmas we had to write down what we wanted. Although a few kids got to go with their own parents at this time, some stayed right there. Santa Claus would come with our gifts and we would give a concert for the smaller kids.

BARTERING

How do you get the treats you crave when you have no money nor opportunity to go to stores? You barter with others in the same boat. Peanut butter was the favorite currency, with jam a close second. For example, I traded off a jackknife for 30 slices of bread and peanut butter, paid off at one slice per day for 30 days. It helped if you had a girlfriend working in the kitchen, because you would be sure to get an extra thick dollop of peanut butter on your bread. I had a standing agreement with one boy for three years that I would eat his bread pudding, if he would eat my chocolate pudding.

THE DINING ROOM

When I first went to the home, I simply could not eat porridge. I was kept at the table one afternoon until they realized it was not just stubbornness on my part. With all the healthy activity and fresh air, it wasn't long before I could eat three large bowls of oatmeal every morning. Prunes were also a standby every morning.

Bakeries in Calgary would donate day-old buns to the Home. Sometimes they were just too hard to eat. One day we started a riot throwing these hard buns at each other. When Mrs. Wood came to investigate, she agreed they were not fit to eat and we were not punished except to clean up the mess of buns in the dining room.

Meals were always precluded with a hymn, followed by grace, and a hymn afterward as well. The hymn went, 'Let us with a gladsome mind, praise the Lord for He is kind.' I never did get the words right, I sang 'Let us wish that Gladys might give us room and board tonight...'

ADOPTIONS

How I hated that word! It meant that someone would be leaving our big Family, that he or she would be missing us as we would be missing them. We knew what was up when Mrs. Campbell, our teacher, would say, * No one is to leave the back yard today until I tell you to. We felt like a herd of cattle under observation, watched from behind the curtains, until someone was called inside for an interview.

Once twin brothers were separated by adoption in this manner. The brother that was left behind was very unhappy, wondering if he would ever see his brother again. His brother must have missed him also, as three months later the adoptive parents re-turned, with new clothes, etc., for his brother and adopted him also.

WINTER SPORTS

In the winter, most of the wild things went to sleep, but there were still lots of rabbit tracks and squirrels about. There were chickadees, whiskeyjacks and cedar waxwings keeping the woods alive with their chatter. Now was the time for our winter sports. We made our own scooters from barrel staves with a block of wood for a seat attached. With these speedy little contraptions, we would start at the “prairies” down through the small poplars, then down the steep twisting trail through the woods at very high speeds, ducking first one tree then another. Sometimes we couldn’t make a curve at such speeds, and ended up being knocked cold or worse.

The tennis courts were flooded for skating in winter and we had weiner roasts and bonfires at the big lagoon down in the park. We played hockey on the canals. Even blizzards did not keep us inside. We played King of the Mounted with his dog team chasing crooks through the snowy trails.



LITTLE BOYS’ DORMITORY

We had to line up for clean clothes before our baths and hand in the soiled ones afterward. All our clothes had our number on them.

After the lights went out in the dorms at nine o’clock, the fun began, unless Mr. Watkins caught us up to mischief. One of the boys had a crystal set radio, and we would gather round to listen to hockey games and the CFCN Old Timers. Sometimes my mother would send huge boxes of home-made candy which we all shared at these night sessions.

One game we played was to fold blankets and slide on the polished floors under the beds to see how far we could slide without stopping.

BATH NIGHTS

Friday night was bath night for everyone. The older boys had to supervise the younger ones. The little boys had some bad cases of chap on their wrists and ankles, where the skin blackened and cracked open. We big boys were ordered to scrub this skin off with floor brushes and grey paste-

‘The poor little guys would scream in pain as we scrubbed the skin raw. We bandaged their hands with camphor ice after-ward.

Needless to say the kids were more careful about letting chap build up after that. We also had to check to see that they brushed their teeth, etc.

Thinking back now, I realize those were the worst years of the Great Depression. Yet Mrs. Wood managed to feed and clothe 129 homeless children, through donations and good management. It must have been a great burden and responsibility to her, yet she had a great and abiding faith, which, together with love and compassion, carried us all through. May God bless her memory!

END OF AN ERA

As the nation slowly emerged from the ravages of the Great Depression, the residents of the Wood’s Christian Home and all those associated with it were overcome with grief and a great sense of loss as Mrs. Annie Wood, ‘Mother’ and matron of the Home, passed away at the age of 68 in the Home in Calgary, November, 1939.

In May of 1940, a ceremony was held in the Home to pay tribute to Annie Wood. The reception rooms were overflowing with the large crowd which included the more than 80 children then in the Home. The children all wore white carnations in Mother Wood’s memory, and the girls who be-longed to the Girl Guides wore their uniforms.

“This large audience is a tribute to the love, admiration and respect which surrounded the late Mrs. Wood,” said W. J. Snaddon, chairman of the meeting.

The Rev. Dean H. R. Ragg, D.D., gave the prayer, saying, “We are gathered here today to humbly remember before God his faithful servant, Annie Wood, and to give thanks to Him for her life of devotion and service.

10, 11 The Calgary Herald, May 13, 1940. Reprinted by permission of The Herald

Delivering the dedication address, Rev. G. W. Kerby said, “Since the death of her husband 12 years ago, Mrs. Wood has carried on this work with the aid of citizens animated by the highest ideals of Christian service.”

The satin ribbons which drew the white veil from the tablet dedicated to Annie Wood were pulled by a graduate of the Home, one of Mother Wood’s children, Henry Gerlitz. The tablet read: “In loving memory of Annie Wood, Mother and first matron of the Wood’s Christian Home, born 1871, died 1939. Love, Faith, Works.” The tablet was placed on the Home fireplace mantel beside that of the late George Wood.

12, 13 The Calgary Herald, May 13, 1940. Reprinted by permission of The Herald

BIG JOB, SMALL SALARY

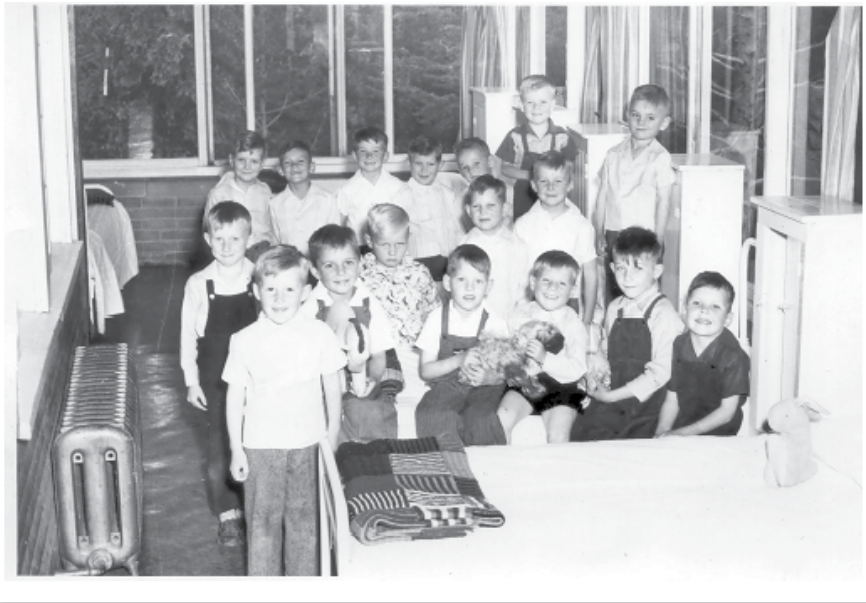
L. A. Soollon served a one-year term as principal of the Home school— 1939-40.

My first introduction to the Wood’s Christian Home was at a Halloween party put on by the two departing teachers, one of whom I was to replace as Principal of the two-room school. The two male teachers had joined the army and were leaving that weekend. After the party I was given a quick tour of the Home. The classrooms were in the basement of the main building, under the children’s dining room and the visitors’ par-lor. My living quarters were in the top storey of the two-storey boys’ dormitory. It consisted of a small bedroom with a private bath across the hall.

I had got the job by answering an ad in The Calgary ‘Herald which had been placed by the Education Committee of the Board of Trustees for the Wood’s Home. I met with the Chairman of the Committee and the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Andrew Snaddon. After we discussed what my duties would be, and salary, \$900 |a year as teacher and Principal, plus board and room for taking charge of the boys’ dormitory, I agreed to take the job.

I moved in on Sunday and started work Monday morning. Up at 7 a.m., I had to make sure that all the boys in the dorm were up, washed, dressed and off to breakfast on time. After breakfast, the boys had to return and make their own beds and I had to check and be sure they were made correctly; if not, the bed had to be made over again. The boys were divided into work groups and I had to make sure that each group did its job correctly and on time. The groups were: dormitory cleaning, three groups, one for the two floors and the basement; side-walk cleaning; school rooms cleaning; pot group -- cleaning the pots and pans; vegetable group -- getting the vegetables ready for the cook; and the odd job group. The girls had their teams also: cleaning the dormitory, which was in the main building; kitchen group -- washing dishes and helping in the kitchen; dining room group -- setting and clearing the tables and serving the food in the staff dining room; upstairs group -- cleaning staff quarters and halls upstairs; and laundry group -- assisting the laundress. Each group rotated jobs weekly. The boys considered the pot and vegetable jobs the worst. Often, though, they got extra tidbits from the kitchen.

After inspecting the work of the boys' groups, I went to the schoolrooms and got things ready for classes. I taught grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. An elderly lady teacher had grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. The pre-school children were looked after by two staff la-dies. School started at 9 a.m. with recess at 10:30 and 2:15. Noon hour was from 12 to 1. Each classroom had about 35 to 40 pupils which made them quite crowded, particularly the senior room as the passageway into the junior room had been taken off it.



SMALL BOYS IN THEIR DORMITORY

which was 8 o'clock for the younger ones and 9 for the older ones. After getting ready for bed, the younger ones would gather around me on one of the beds and I would read or tell them a story. Then out would come the cod liver oil bottle and each would get a spoonful (UGH!!) and into bed they would get, hopefully for the night. The older boys, instead of getting a story, generally sat around and we would discuss any incident or problem they had or wished to talk about. I would make the rounds with the cod liver oil, pouring a spoonful into their mouths. Some of the boys did not take it so easily and I would have to chase them around the dorm until I cornered them and poured it in. They did it mostly for fun.

After all the boys were in bed and settled down, I did my homework, getting lessons ready, reading or correcting papers. If there was no schoolwork to do, I worked on my bookkeeping and typing, for each Thursday night I attended a business college in Calgary taking bookkeeping and typing for teaching credits. The only other time I had off was every other week-end which I generally spent with friends in the city.

I soon found that my recesses were taken up doing odd jobs such as fixing an iron, the mangle, a washing machine, a light or something else that would not work right. Being the only man on the staff, I was handyman, disciplinarian and settler of quarrels or disputes, even among the staff. During dinner and supper, I assisted in keeping discipline in the dining room.

After school the children were free to play until supper. After supper, any that had studying to do did so, in the dorm or classroom. Those that did not have homework could play in the yard or basement of the dorm until bedtime,

Friday evenings were bath evenings; the younger ones first, followed by the older ones. The boys undressed in the dorm and then came down to the shower room in the basement. Each boy washed or scrubbed his feet first in a pail of water with soap and water using a hand scrub brush, then into the shower he went. After they were washed and dried, they came to me or an assistant, one of the women on the staff, for inspection. If they passed inspection, they got into clean pajamas and went up to bed. If they did not pass inspection (generally due to dirty ankles), back to the scrub pail and brush. The bath sessions were generally hectic, boys free from clothes were always more active, running around, talking or yelling. I always had a whistle, which I used to get their attention or quiet them down. I can still hear it.

Saturdays and holidays, after breakfast and dinner, was free time for the children. Some were picked up by a parent or relative and taken out for the day or weekend. Others, with permission, could go shopping or to a show. The rest played in the hills back of the Home or in Bowness Park.

Sundays were Visitors' Day. Besides parents, friends and relatives, once in a while various groups from the city would come to hold church services or some entertaining in the afternoon. Sometimes instead of coming on Sunday, a group would come on an evening during the week and entertain the children.



CHILDREN ENJOYING PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

The girls' dorm consisted of two floors in the upstairs of the main building, out of bounds to all males, except when something had to be repaired or inspected. The female staff also had their rooms upstairs with the girls. The Matron had a suite of rooms on the main floor consisting of a bed-room, bath and large sitting room. The very young children slept in a closed-in verandah that went part way around the east and north side of the main building. They were looked after by two of the women who were assisted by the girls. The rest of the staff consisted of a cook, a sewing woman and a laundress.

The older girls helped when needed, thus learning household , duties. The boys had it easiest of all.

Some time after I had been at the Home, I began to wonder , what kind of students I really had, so I gave them an 'intelligence test. The results were very enlightening. I found that, I had some very intelligent pupils who had been sitting back, resting on their laurels, so I immediately demanded more from them. The majority of the class were average or a little better. These were interesting facts as all had come from broken homes for one reason or another.

During my stay at the Home, we never had less than 90 children, but only two were true orphans. The children's ages ranged from three to sixteen. Any that had finished grade 8 could attend school at Bowness High School, a short distance away.

The Home was without a matron for two months after Mrs. Wood's death until Mrs. Agnes Longair, her husband James and two sons, Arthur and Ernest, arrived. Up to this time, I was the only male resident on the place so I was glad to see Mr. Longair. He helped to lighten my load a great deal as he became handyman and assisted with the boys.

The Longairs and I got along very well. I was relieved of many of my extra duties and thus I had more time for school work and my own studies. Mr. Longair and Arthur always helped with the Friday night baths and the work groups. I can remember a couple of times when I was called upon to assist with repairing the large commercial laundry extractor; we had to take it apart, fix or replace a broken part, and put it all together again, at least a two-day job.

Part way through the year the teacher of the lower room quit because of poor health. She was replaced by a younger woman who lived in the city.

Most of my days were very busy and very seldom did I get to bed before midnight. Due to this and the long bitterly cold winter, I contracted a chest infection. Fortunately, I was able to overcome it with medication and rest. I did not lose any time teaching but took it easier in the evenings and weekends.

Spring was a welcome relief from both the heavy clothing and being shut in. Once again the children enjoyed rambling in the hills and playing in the park. The staff enjoyed the relaxation of the park. After all children were safely in bed and supposedly asleep, we younger staff members would go down to the park and enjoy boating, swinging, and walking for an hour or more.

The months went quickly and the end of June seemed to come too soon. All the children passed their grades. Some left to re-join a parent or relative; others, who were old enough to work, were placed in private homes as domestic help or part-time workers.

I left the Home in July for a holiday and to join the air force. When I joined WB staff I weighed 128 pounds and when I left I was down to 112 pounds. It had been a strenuous year and I was ready for a change, but I have no regrets for the time spent in the Home..

CHAPTER VII THE WAR YEARS

Although the passing of Mother Wood was traumatic for some children, and she was missed by all, they soon adjusted to her successor, Mrs. A. Longair. Although she served only about two years as matron, Mrs. Longair was well thought of by the children and highly respected by the Board of Trustees. Mr. D. B. Robert-son continued in his position as business manager and secretary-treasurer. In their 1941 Annual Report, the Board paid a tribute to Mrs. Longair and Mr. Robertson as well as the rest of the staff, saying, “We are fortunate in having an excellent staff of workers who are devoting themselves unselfishly to the welfare of the children and we wish them to know that we appreciate their services”.

The Home teachers in 1940 were Mrs. P. M. Elliott who taught grades 1 to 4, and Andrew Scollon who taught grades 5 to 8. In 1941, Miss Weir, who had been in charge of the junior grades, got married and was replaced by Miss Doris Young. Henry Gerlitz, a former resident and graduate of the Home school, was now in charge of the senior classes and, subsequently, became principal of the school.



*HENRY GERLITZ, D. B. ROBERTSON,
MATRON SUSAN BLACKADAR, STAFF
AND CHILDREN*

In 1941 there were 91 children in the Home, which was almost capacity, although the number had decreased slightly from the previous year.

1941 was the first year of the Calgary Community Chest operation, and the Wood’s Christian Home received \$7,000 from that source in lieu of the Home’s annual campaign which was no longer required. Operating expenditures for the Home totalled \$19,529,49 ¹⁴ in 1941.

THE WAR TOUCHES THE HOME

According to the 1941 Annual Report, there were 22 children in the Home whose fathers were serving overseas. Thirteen of these children had no mothers, and the mothers of the other nine were too ill to care for them.

There were about 28 former Home boys serving in the armed forces during this period, with at least 12 of them having gone overseas. The first casualty amongst these former Home boys was Robert R. McCrindle, Ordinary Telegrapher, who was lost at sea. He had joined the navy in Calgary and completed his training on the Pacific Coast. Robert had been in the Home during the period 1931-1935.

¹⁴ Wood’s Christian Home Annual Report, 1941.

As the war years progressed, there were some subtle and some major changes in the Home. One major change was the appointment of Mrs. Susan L. Blackadar, who succeeded Mrs. Longair, as matron of the Home.

There were also some changes in the school arrangements. In previous years, students graduating from the Home were able to continue their education at Bowness High School.

Unfortunately, in 1945-46, Bowness High was unable to accommodate Wood’s Home students, so room was made in the boys’ dormitory for an additional classroom for high school students. Henry Gerlitz was still principal and taught grades 7 to 9; Miss Young had grades 1 to 3 under her care; Miss Stauffer taught grades 4 to 6 and was in charge of the new high school class as well. In 1941, the Kiwanis Club had made a handsome contribution of gymnasium equipment to the Home, and all the children made good use of it under the watchful eye of Henry Gerlitz.

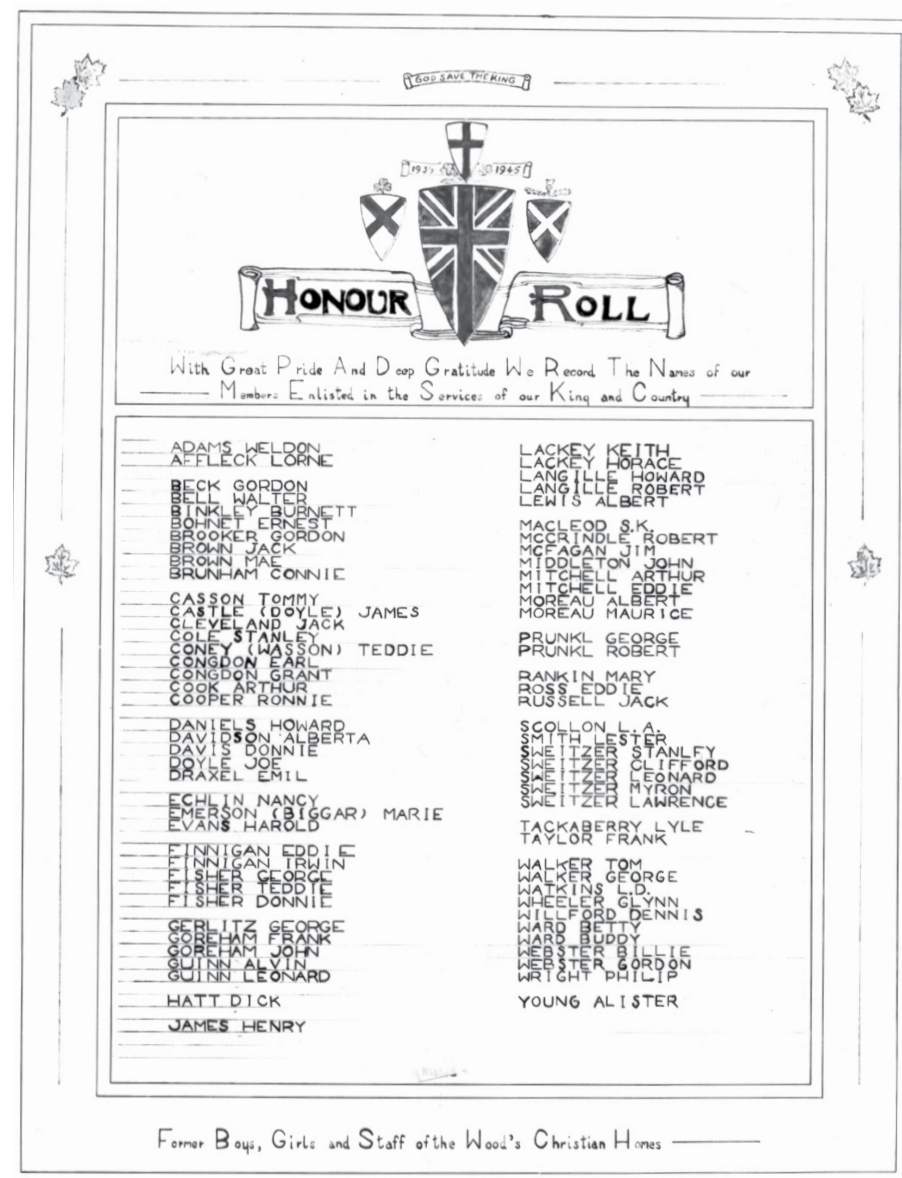


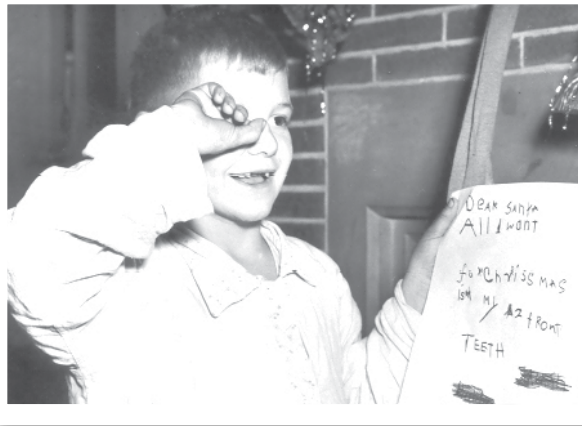
The Home buildings were all in excellent condition and the financial affairs were also in good shape. Expenditures in 1945 totalled \$27,303.63 with a surplus of \$480.12.15

When the Second World War ended, it was determined that 71 boys and 7 girls (former Home residents), 3 teachers and 1 staff member had served in His Majesty's Forces during the hostilities, a total of 82. This was a very creditable showing, but unfortunately there were some casualties, at least six former residents being listed as killed or missing in action.

There were approximately 90 children in the Home at this time, although the number fluctuated as new arrivals replaced children who were discharged into the care of relatives or to their re-established homes. Several of the children were reunited with their fathers who had been overseas and who, upon discharge, were once again able to undertake familial responsibilities.

Wood's Christian Home Annual Report, 1945.





LITTLE LLOYD HENDRICKSON ASKS SANTA FOR TWO FRONT TEETH

Valentine Skating Party: P- A. System, newly cleaned and flooded ice, goodies, races, skater's music and lovely, lively lasses. I recall buttering up a certain young lady for days and then mustering up enough courage to ask her to skate with me on that special evening — only to find that she had just broken her skate lace — screech!! I wonder if she remembers?

Do you recall...the usual fall lineup...cod liver oil is good for everything -- they told me — and I hated it!

So, being rather wiley, I learned how to trap the cod liver oil between my tongue and the roof of my mouth, then make a swallowing motion, after which I proceeded to the toilet to spit it out.

Now, it happened on one occasion that a big, strapping fellow of about 6' 4" was spooning it out and happened to notice that I was 'conning' him. When I started walking away, that extra-size hand grasped the back of my neck and said 'swallow it'; then forthwith disbursed his own kind of justice by ramming the whole bottle down my throat and letting it gurgle down. Fortunately, his good wife intervened in this situation and excused me from further dosage. Now, all said and done, I don't recall that cod liver oil ever did anything for the toilet...and I still hate it!

On the serious side...every child needs a hero!

I remember the two persons whom I most admired and who made the greatest impressions on my outlook in life: my teachers, Henry Gerlitz and L. L. Gaetz in company with his good wife, Mary. These people were to become my friends in later life.

Henry Gerlitz, being an impassioned lecturer, instilled values and discussed life situations which helped give me some idea of what the outside world was all about.

Mr. Gaetz was a very warm, -helpful and understanding person who had a way of communicating a most fair and unbiased opinion. He spent many hours listening to and reasoning with childish complaints, all the while man-aging not to disrupt the staff or atmosphere of the Home. Many times I appreciated being allowed to bend his ear and vent my hostilities, and to learn to see another person's viewpoint. Mr. Gaetz became a valued and steadfast friend to many of us during childhood and continues to be a friend in our adulthood.

I recall that in the evenings between 6:00-7:00 the skating rink was for general skating and hockey sticks were forbidden. However, the boys always managed to get in some scrub hockey by skating around non-players and then playing later into the night. Each year it fell to the older boys' lot to provide the wood from deadfall on the home property for fueling of the old make-shift wood stove in the skating rink shack. I also recall the many hours spent shoveling and scraping the ice so it could be used!

Big events were the Valentine Skating Party for the senior boys and girls and one or two hockey games with Springbank or Bowness — usually arranged by the school principals — H. Gerlitz and L. L. Gaetz during my years in the Home.

THE JOHNSON KIPS

Gertrude (Johnson) Roberts is the eldest member of the Johnson children who were only one of several multi-sibling family groups resident in the Home over the years.

When I reflect upon the time I lived at the Wood's Christian Home, three words come immediately to mind — simplicity, caring and fun.



THE JOHNSON FAMILY - B: GERTRUDE AND JOHN F: LORNE AND JEAN

Simplicity was manifested in the teaching of basic principles of living and growing. From a very tender age one learned that it was essential to strive for clean, healthy bodies and minds. The work ethic, as we would call it today, was not neglected either. We had chores to do on a daily basis and I think there was a competitive attitude that prevailed as far as the performance of these chores was concerned.

'Do it quickly, do it well and hope you did it better than the last person did who had the chore. That old saying of 'if a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well was the status quo and I think created a strong sense of responsibility and self-discipline which is retained into and throughout adulthood.

Our relationships with the staff and our peer group were much the same as that of ordinary members of a family. The difference was that our 'Family was a very large one. One individual who stands out in my mind as being the epitomy of motherhood was Mrs. Mary Ferguson. I found her to be a loving person, possessing a good sense of humor, interested in her charges and quite able to be firm when the necessity arose. I liked to hear her singing as she went about her work and she sang to herself often.

A large part of growing up is spent in having fun, and in our 'Family' there was plenty of time for this. Our fun was self-made with the minimum of sophisticated equipment and yet I can-not remember feeling deprived.

I loved the "spring tea." Each May we had a tea to which all interested persons were invited. I always looked on this event as our introduction to the social graces. Preparations started weeks in advance and the 'Oak Room' where tea was served positively sparkled. The girls served tea and took the visitors on a tour of our Home and I recall the day as such a happy event.



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE FAMOUS OAK ROOM

One never lacked for companionship in those surroundings; friendships, relationships were forged — some never to be threatened, others less prominent but none forgotten. My memories of the Home included a feeling of deep gratitude to the staff, the teachers, our companions and all those who contributed to the ultimate welfare of children.

LITTLE SISTER

Jean (Johnson) Grant

I have so many fond memories of my 10-year stay at Wood’s Christian Home that it is hard to choose which to write about. The one that comes to mind and has given me many a good chuckle is as I call it: ‘The Great Lowney Raid’. In the late 40’s the Lowney factory in Calgary caught fire and all the candy that was classed as smoke-damaged was donated to the Home. Can you imagine ‘our delight in having a “store room” of such treats as Marshmallow, Bridge Mix, and Cherry Blossoms? Mind you, they were all under lock and key and were measured out to us at just certain times!

I wasn’t aware that anything was out of the ordinary until the candy began to appear in abundance and my brothers John and Lome suddenly became quite free in sharing their “treasures’ with me.

All went well until one Saturday at noon when dinner was finished (the boys had second helpings) that Miss McArthur and Bert Temple began to set up card tables, covering them with an odd array of containers: socks, greasy cowboy hats, shoes, army boots, boxes, shoe boxes, etc. Lo and behold, they were filled with candy. Obviously someone was not happy with the way the candy was being doled out and had taken drastic measures!



JEAN JOHNSON - COSTUME MADE BY MISS FARRELL

My very favorite person in my growing up years in Wood’s Home was my grade 7, 8 and 9 teacher, Mr. L. L. Gaetz. This man had a heart filled with kindness and a ton of patience. He could be firm, but also very fair.

I remember each summer he would take us hiking to the five-mile caves; sometimes we would be so tired we could hardly put one foot in front of the other, but he was always there to help us over the next hill. He would play baseball with us and run after the ball the same as the rest of the team. Most of all, he listened to us -- I mean really listened to us.

Sometimes when our school work was done he would spend the afternoon telling tales of his life before he came to us and we loved it. He encouraged us in many ways, helping us get over some of our fears and even when we left the Home, we could al-ways call him and he was always the same.

It mattered not that you weren’t the smartest kid in the class, or the fastest runner, or if you couldn’t spell as good as some, he liked you for yourself.

Thanks, Mr. Gaetz, I’m proud I know you..

A list of boys’ names were read out and they were asked to claim their individual containers. I remember Bert Temple giving a long lecture on stealing and then asking the boys if they liked candy — yes, they said — then eat it all up he said — and they did, or at least the attempt was made, some had to leave the room, others looked quite green. Boy, were they sick!

The following week my mother came to visit and like kids we all waited to see what little surprise she had brought us. I can still see my brothers’ faces when she opened her purse to display a large bag of -- you guessed it — Bridge Mix!

The teachers were great. Miss Farrell really must have cared a lot to spend so much of her time making those lovely costumes for us.

My very favorite person in my growing up years in Wood’s Home was

CADETS

John Bankst Regimental Sgt.-Major (Retired), Royal Canadian Artillery, recounts the Wood’s Home boys’ involvement with the Calgary Cadet Corp.

It was during the tenure of Wood’s Home Superintendent D. B. Robertson that the Home boys were initiated into the cadet movement. Boys from all parts of the city gathered at the Calgary Armouries; that branch of the corp was headed by Captain P. Fry.

The 19th Medium Regiment, R.C.A., became interested in the group and initiated artillery training for this group which included many of the Home boys. The group was given the use of the famous 25-pounder field gun used in World War II; this created great interest and enthusiasm, as the boys were able to drill with and actually fire the gun in the armouries with the insertion of a Morris tube which was a 22-calibre barrel in the centre of a blank shell casing. Many nights were spent firing the gun at little model towns and houses on a sand table inclined against the armouries’ west wall, and many of the boys became adept at hitting targets from observation posts on the balcony. (They did not fire at the target over open sights; the method used was known as indirect laying. This involved using an aiming point somewhere away from the target and having the observation post officer call down fire by having the muzzle moved either right or left/up or down.) Many of the boys went out to the Sarcee camp with the regiment where they were given the opportunity to fire the real thing under strict supervision. This was always the highlight of the year.

In the early years of the Artillery Regiment, the Commanding Officer was the then Lt. A. K. Brown. He advanced to become the CO of the King’s Own Calgary Regiment (Tank Corp). At that time, instruction was available for firing both small bore and regular army 303’s which were applicable for indoor or outdoor use, depending on the season of the year. Some of the boys were also taught to handle and use light machine guns with, of course, strict safety measures in force. Various types of hand guns were available from ex-servicemen for cadets’ use and the-se, along with some civilian weapons, were used for target practice. Some boys even got to use a German army luger courtesy of a veteran of World War II.



CADETS (1940’s): ARNOLD WADSWORTH, KEN BEVAN, RON BANMAN, DAVE MARSHALL, BOB GARRETT - Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta

July and August saw many Wood’s Home boys on the train to Camp Vernon for a six-week stay at a military installation. The daily agenda usually included drill, rifle practice, map training and military discipline. Swimming in Lake Kalamalka and romping on the beach were favourite activities; the trucks ran back and forth to the beach every day, depositing and picking up cadets involved in physical training.

During one of these sojourns to Camp Vernon, the smallest cadet in the regiment managed to befriend a young lady whose father operated the boat rental concession, so he was always able to enjoy boating when he had free time. For those former cadets whose memories have been dulled by time, that small cadet’s name was Robert (Bobby) Taylor. Although the smallest uniform avail-able from the Quartermaster was obtained for Bobby, it still had to be altered and made even smaller. This alteration was done by an old friend of all the boys, Sgt. Fritz Robak.

The Banff troop of the regiment, under CO Major Robertson, kindly gave us use of the Banff armories for overnight jaunts. These trips were organized by the staff and were classified as ‘ski, training’ or ‘mountain hikes’, etc. Our old friends Sgt. Robak and ex-serviceman ‘Uncle Norman’ were always on hand to see that all the boys were well fed and had as much fun as possible. The 19th Medium Regiment provided the equipment, vehicles and drivers. Sgt. Robak,



THE 'SMALLEST' CADET BOBBY TAYLOR, SHOWN HERE IN 'GENTLEMAN'S DRESS' COSTUME MADE BY DORIS EDMONDSON

with the help of various regimental CD's, would procure food rations and field kitchens. On many occasions Sgt. Fritz would have a field kitchen set up and pounds of bacon and dozens of eggs sizzling by 6:00 a.m. The boys, of course, were expected to do their share which usually meant kitchen fatigue duties under the watchful eye of Sgt. Fritz. The men of the Banff troop must have had good connections in the area, as they were able to provide such extra activities as trips in the chair lift and boat rides on Lake Minnewanka. Trips to Sylvan Lake were also arranged for the boys; buses and drivers were provided by the army.

For years, Sgt. Robak was on hand each Monday evening to make sandwiches or dole out some other snack for the boys. He had a knack for knowing where to scrounge up bread buns or cakes. He would often trade a case of beer for cocoa at one of the permanent military messes (kitchens) so that each boy would have a good hot drink. However, sometimes the boys would overindulge in cocoa during one of their late night snacks, and the result would be a few damp beds in the morning. After a few 'accidents', we received a call thanking us for being so good to the boys, but would we 'please knock off the liquid refreshments'.

'Uncle Norman' could usually be found at the Home during Christ-mas concerts, and many a boy will, I'm sure, remember having had a dollar discreetly slipped into his pocket by this kindly man. At this writing Uncle Norman is in the Belcher Hospital where he has been for many years, and I know he would be heartily cheered by visits from some of his 'old boys' from Wood's Home cadets. Once, when asked by a padre from the Home why he ("Uncle Norman") preferred to work with the Home boys instead of a regular R.C. establishment, 'Uncle Norman' replied: "Padre, you kick with one foot and I kick with the other, but we both kick in the same direction".

The last cadet officer to head up the artillery unit was Capt. A. O. Holm who had the unit for a number of years. During that period a number of boys from Forest Lawn were also brought into the movement, and the rivalry, at times, became quite tense.

Over the years/ many young men (former cadets) have dropped into my place of business to say hello. I may have forgotten some of their names, but I'm always pleased to see them. I've also renewed acquaintances with some of the "old boys" at the annual reunions held by the Home Alumni Association.

Many typical army cadet anecdotes could be related about the boys; following are just a few of the examples of the escapades that went on over the years. If you were a cadet from the Home, do you remember:

Who always seemed to get a card game going in one of the covered army trucks during trips to Banff, etc.?

Who knocked out another boy's tooth with a slingshot during a mock war?

Who were the members of the gang which decided it could 'borrow' a truck, and decided to use a pole at the Sarcee Camp to stop the truck after the joyride?

Who was the bright lad who found that empty liquor bottles could be conned from a soft-hearted sergeant at the Sergeants' Mess to store the extra cocoa rations?

Who were the members of the gang which, on arrival at Camp Vernon, stuffed their faces with ripe cherries and green apples and, subsequently, spent the rest of the day in the office of the medical officer who treated them for diarrhea?

Oh, yes, those were happy days! As one who was responsible for the boys and their welfare, I can say my days were made bright by their willingness to work on any detail assigned them, whether it was pot scrubbing or cleaning the floor of the old Banff Armouries. They often slept on that cement floor in the armories in sleeping bags (usually after an hour or so of boisterous hi-jinks) and no one ever complained about the 'hard beds'. Many times I would 'lay down the law' when someone got into a scrape or something, and though I tried to project a tough image, I would be laughing inside. It was very difficult at times to maintain the traditional image of a sergeant-major!

I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude to the CO's of the 19th Medium Regiment whose names appeared on vital papers (a la Radar's style of M*A*S*H fame) which enabled us to draw from the military the food and equipment we required. These CO's did what they could for what they knew was a good cause, and they often turned and looked the other way when some of the unmilitary hi-jinks were going on. Although a strict military tradition may have been overlooked at times, many of those young cadets eventually joined the service or became productive members of the business world or the trades. There were three Commanding Officers to whom we are especially grateful: Lt. Col. J. H. Mooney, Lt. Col. Robert Lucy, and Lt. Col. C. R. Hoar. All were members of the 19th Medium Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, and many of the boys who attended cadet parades will, I'm sure, remember the names if not the faces.

Two of the junior officers who worked with the cadet movement during those years were Lt. A. K. Brown (later Captain) and Cadet Services Lt. A. O. Holm. Two Warrant Officers who gave much support to the cadets were L. La Place (WO 1) who could always be relied upon to have all the paperwork done (in quintuplicate) in time to get the necessary signatures for the various trips that had been arranged. W. Mackie (also WO 1) was accountable for all the regimental supplies and equipment we borrowed; he never seemed to have any difficulty in obtaining tents, trucks, ammunition, skis or anything else necessary for good outing.

Another young fellow who gave much of his time to the cadets was L/Bdr. R. Griffiths. Although he wasn't much older than most of the boys, he ferried them back and forth from and to the Home every Monday with an army truck.

How can I express gratitude to two of the most giving, warm-hearted and dedicated men it has ever been my pleasure to know? Sergeant Fritz Robak was the boys' cook on their outings — it was said that Fritzie could create a banquet out of a dead skunk. It was not unusual for him to put in an eighteen-hour day, having a huge breakfast of bacon and eggs ready by 6 a.m., making a big lunch by noon and then preparing a great supper of roast beef with all the trimmings. How he always managed meals on time and where he scrounged up all the fixings remain his trade secrets. But it's known that even in wartime England Fritzie could always come up with something to satisfy a hungry child. Some of the boys may remember Sgt. Fritz prized possession, a carving knife inscribed with the name of a town in England, which was given to him in recognition for his "hobby" of keeping the kids there from going hungry. Fritzie was truly an old and dear friend to the Wood's Home boys. Then there was an ex-serviceman whom the boys called "Uncle Norman" Mulligan. He, too, was always on hand on Mondays and for outings to help serve the food and to see that all the boys were enjoying themselves. I know his kindness, wisdom and helpfulness are fondly remembered by all the boys who knew him.

Many of the Wood's Home boys involved in the cadet movement went on to serve in the armed forces, or went into business or the trades either in Calgary or other centres. Following is a list of some of those former cadets who have kept in contact with me or whom I've heard about.



GORDON PHILLIPS (BACK - R) AND CLASSMATE'S"

Collins, who had been Cadet Senior Officer, joined the 19th Medium Regiment Militia. He now operates his own drafting business in Calgary. Robert Taylor has worked as an electrical troubleshooter for the CPR, travelling between B.C. and Manitoba, and also worked as road electrician between Swift Current and Victoria. Jimmy Nelson is known to be working in Calgary.



ARNOLD WADSWORTH - SEATED RIGHT - AND CLASSMATES

I consider my association with the Wood's Home cadets one of my most satisfying periods during my army service. I met young lads who may not have had the worldly goods and opportunities today's generation has, but they had a spirit of cooperation, fair play and helping their buddies which, I fear, is lacking in today's youth. I attribute the boys' positive attitudes to the upbringing and discipline they received in the Home from a caring staff. (Miss McArthur's wielding of a table tennis paddle may have turned more than one boy into a real fine man!)



L-R: JIM NELSON, GEORGE LOTHIAN, ERNIE TAYLOR, KEN BEVAN, KEN TAYLOR LATE 1940s

Hugh Stickle served in the RCAF, and is now a school principal in Ontario. He is also Commanding Officer of the Militia Regiment - North Superior. Ray Nelson and Jerry Nelson both served with the Navy and are now retired and living in Vancouver. Gordon Phillips also served with the Navy and is now retired and living in Victoria. Al Wood is a Senior NCO at the Navy Diving School in Esquimalt, B.C. J. Johnson was Senior NCO in the RCAF at Comox, B.C., but now lives in St. Hubert, Quebec.

Arnold Wadsworth is now Militia Master Warrant Officer in Toronto where he works and lives. Vern

The shutdown of the Artillery Cadets occurred approximately the same time as the original, old dormitory style of the Wood's Home ceased operation and changed physically and operationally. The Honourable Paul Hellyer, then Minister of Defence, cut many of the existing regiments and changed many of the military installations. Most of the older serving members retired with their regiments. The cadet corp was taken over by Cadet Services, but there was a decline in interest without the professional aid of the military regiments. Now, there is but one small army cadet outfit in Calgary.

Recounting my association with the boys from Wood's Home has brought back many fond memories. All those who gave their time and efforts to preserve the comradeship and traditions of the Wood's Home, and those still giving, are to be commended.



CADETS - 1948-49

CONFIDENCE BUILDER

Vern Collins, who later served for several years in the Army Reserve, relates the importance of the cadet movement in his life.

During my second year at the Home (1948) I joined the Army Cadets along with a couple of other boys in the Home (Ken Bevan, Arnold Wadsworth).

Joining the Army Cadets was a very important turning point in my life. It gave me confidence in my later years.

After spending four years in Army Cadets, I reached the rank of Cadet Captain and Arnold Wadsworth became a Cadet Colonel. Our Cadet Battalion had 120 cadets. We won the best cadet corp for Western Canada



L. L. GAETZ' GRADE 7 CLASS, LATE 1940's -- VERN COLLINS (KNEELING FRONT AND CENTRE)

in 1950. Our main instructor and leader was Warrant Officer II, Ian Banks. This man dedicated himself to our cadet corp and was especially attached to the 22 boys from the Wood's Home. Over the years the boys who knew Mr. Banks regarded him as theirs. I later joined the reserve army where I served for eleven years, but as I approached grade nine I did not know what lay ahead. I was asked by Mr. Banks if I would like to stay at his home and continue my high school. This was the most enjoyable period of my life. I will always be in debt to Ian Banks, his wife, Madge, and their two boys for sharing their home with me.



FUN AND FROLIC

In the early Forties, the older boys received Manual Training which included carpentry and 'handyman's' work under the direction of Mr. Haigh who had been in charge of this instruction for a number of years. Miss Ainslie, assisted by Miss Coyle, was in charge of running the Canadian Girls-in-Training group, and the girls looked forward to CGIT meetings with keen anticipation.

*BUILDING SKILLS AND CHARACTER
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary Alberta*



'SANTA' ARTHUR WEST SINGING CAROLS WITH HIS 'KIDS'

boys; Mr. Tutt, who regularly assisted with Sunday school, sponsored a 10-day outing for seven girls at his Okotoks camp.

During this period, in addition to attending the Rotary Club circus, Stampede Parade and Exhibition and the usual picnics, the children attended the Passion Play at the Grand Theatre as guests of the Lions Club which donated to the Home the proceeds from the play.



GRACE LOTHIAN AND BILL CARRUTHERS,



1947 BASEBALL TEAM

In the late Forties, the senior boys and girls were in charge of publishing the school paper, the "Wo-Ho", and they took great interest and pride in doing so. Mr. Ivor Parker, who often arranged and supervised games, hikes and parties for the senior group, formed a photo club for them, and the results of their photography efforts were posted for display in the Home.

Some entertaining occasions during this period included: a picnic at Bowness Park given by the Royal Arch Masons; a Christmas party sponsored by the Calgary Kiwanis Club which distributed gifts to all the children who each received a crisp new dollar bill from Mr. A. H. Mayland; the Kiwanis Club also held a 'Y' camp at Bowfort for several

There were many school-related activities, such as scholastic and sports competitions between Wood's Home students and Bowness students. For example, in 1947-48, WCTU contest for grade nine students showed that Home students could more than hold their own; in the essay category, Bill Carruthers and Grace Lothian from the Home came in first and second respectively, and Grace took first in the reference books category, while Bill took first in posters. Bill Carruthers was also valedictorian mid-1940's and Yearbook editor.

The Home had a mixed baseball team (boys and girls) which played against teams from Bowness and Spring-bank. The boys seemed to do fairly well with their hockey games/ judging from Yearbook reports, although there were the usual assortment of minor injuries such as Arnold Wadsworth getting a tooth knocked out in a game against Bowness.

THOSE DARN CHORES I

Elaine (Phillips) High vividly describes the children's duties and responsibilities in maintaining daily life in the Home.

Every child had a job. Every job ran for a month. The first of each month, the matron would come in with a long, long list and would, in ominous tones, slowly read out the fate of each child. Regardless of the job given, every last one of us would groan in agony (even if we got the

job we wanted and our boy friend would be working close by).

The girls' jobs included dusting upstairs, oakroom, staff living and dining rooms; broom closets upstairs and downstairs; silver-ware; bootroom; back stairs; oak stairs and staff bathroom; little girls' playroom; big girls' playroom; little boys' playroom front and back; little boys' bathroom; girls' bathroom, hall, shower and sinks; little boys' dining

room; sickroom, sewing room, hall and dispensary; large dining room and the laundry. These are, to the best of my knowledge, the jobs allocated to the girls on the last Saturday of each month. Each girl was given a different job each month. These jobs are listed from those for the youngest or newest girls to those for the older girls.



BACK ROW: RUTH TAYLOR, DOROTHY BANMAN, LILA SEVAN, GERTRUDE JOHNSON, ELAINE PHILLIPS. FRONT ROW: BAB GARRET, VERN COLLINS, BOB- McKEEN.

Here's how we rated the jobs for 'big girls' (over 12): Laundry - Real good. Here one girl got to work with two boys.

The only bad part of the job was hosing the floor on Saturdays"* rush, rush, rush to get to the show on time. Another bad part was Monday mornings, when we would have to untangle 36 aprons with ties each, each twisted and tied to the others.

Staff Dining Room —not bad. Here we learned how to set a nice table, place the glasses, napkins and main dishes, shine the napkin holders and clean the brass.

Kitchen—" good, able to 'favor' boy friend by putting so much syrup or honey on his bread that it soaked through.

Care of little girls —awful, had to be in by seven o'clock to get them ready for bed. Lots of sweeping and beds to check.

Care of little boys — ditto, only they had a bathtub that was up on legs and they had to be lifted out. Gave girls big and strong muscles. Large area to solvent, wax and shine but did it ever look nice once it was done.

LEARNING TO DARN

There are many kinds of darns: small, large, hard, soft and, occasionally, easy darns. But for the beginner they are all hard and at times turned into a soft 'damn'. By way of explanation — first one needs a hole (preferably square) in a sock (usually); second, an old light bulb (also perfectly square), a needle and one very long piece of wool. (No matter what length it will either be too short or will knot.) In order to darn properly, one must learn to square a round hole over an even rounder light bulb or it will bulge.

At the Home we were 30 to 36 girls, 12 of whom were the 'big girls' who had to help darn the socks. Now the girls changed their long ribbed cotton stockings every Thursday night (official bath night). On Friday afternoons up would come the clean clothes from the laundry and, lo and behold, each girl would have worn a hole in at least one heel (some small, some large but holes nevertheless), holes to be darned by the 12 girls and they were never, that I remember, ever square!

More explanation -- to darn take one holey sock, insert one light bulb to area of hole (if in luck, bulb will not pop out through hole). With needle and wool make square half inch outside of hole (I never could make a square inside). Now start to weave back and forth, two stitches in the one-half inch of cloth, one long stitch over hole, two stitches in cloth, move needle one stitch over and repeat, continue until you've come to opposite side. Now turn sock a bit so the long stitches can be woven as you start again from the other side, weaving back and forth in same manner over work already done. Do not skip or try to weave two stitches at a time, it will show every time. Not only that, but if not done properly the supervisor will cut out your darn, making a larger hole, and you'll have to start over. Darn, darn, darn! P.S. We learned to be darn good darners.

FRUITS

Fruits were consumed in copious quantities so any that we could pick free were most welcome. One year the saskatoon bushes gave forth such quantities of berries that the kids could literally milk them off the trees. The staff treated three blue-mouthed kids with massive doses of caskara before they knew of the wind-fall growing on the hill. Once the staff heard about the abundant crop, it was, of course, up to the kids to harvest and can it. With much grumbling and complaining, every kid (except the canning girls) picked each day, before going swimming, one pail of saskatoons. The size of the pails ranged from a small four-pound candy tin to a 25—pound jam can (which two kids would fill). We canned over 200 two-quart jars that summer.

Another time we received free fruit in the form of 100 boxes of apples. The contents of the boxes ranged from “one going to bad to Jall rotten. What a windfall and what fun. We worked in shifts from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. with four kids peeling and cutting and four others doing the canning. We even got out of school to do it. It took two or three days to complete the job and did those jars of applesauce look nice.

CHURCH

Church was held Sunday morning and evening and every other Wednesday night. Mr. Bartle conducted services Sunday and Mr. Tutt evenings, Reverend Mr. Brown on Wednesdays.

Every child learned and recited a different Bible verse for each Sunday morning. With the guidance of Mrs. Ferguson (matron) we could (near the end of my stay at the Home) start on Monday evening and by Sunday morning recite the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes verbatim.

Mr. Bartle would start passing around the collection bank and every child would put in his or her penny. This bank always fascinated me because it was such a funny shape. I got a good look at it one time and, to my surprise, discovered that it was in the shape of the continent of Africa to where our pennies were eventually sent.

KIN AND KINSHIP

Ruth (Taylor) Collins and her four brothers were from a single parent family and spent their ‘growing-up’ years in the Home.



BACK L-R: ERNIE, RUTH, KENNETH
FRONT L-R: GORDIE AND ROBERT

It was July 1946, and Daddy was taking us out to the Wood’s Christian Home. Mother had died in June.

‘Us’ included myself and four brothers: Kenneth, Ernest, Robert, and Gordon. I remember going through the big iron gates and up the road to the big house which looked like a mansion. When introduced to the supervisors, I had a warm and friendly feeling of being wanted.

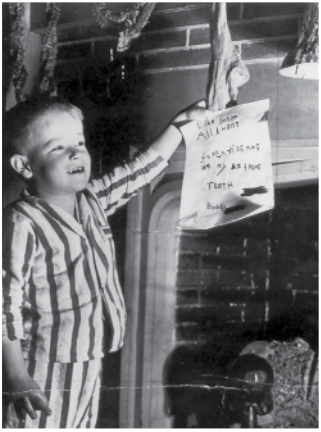
There were six staff members and about a hundred children with the children’s ages ranging from four to fifteen. It was like a big family; the older children looked after the smaller children. Each child from about the age of seven had a job to do once a month, such as washing dishes, peeling vegetables and cleaning pots. A sense of accomplishment and a feeling of pride resulted from the friendly competition of how well and fast each child could do his or her job.

During the summer about half the children would go out with relatives for their summer holidays. The other half, including my-self and my brothers, would spend the summer swimming, saskatoon picking, going on hikes through the woods with box lunches and to a summer camp for two weeks. The different camps we went to were Bible Camp, C.G.I.T., Girl Guides, Camp Kiwanis and Cadet Camp.

Swimming was a big thing to us; we went twice a day sometimes. Mr. McDonald was the manager of Bowness Park. We were allowed to go swimming free as long as a super-visor was with us. Mr. Robertson, the manager of the home, often would drive the girls down to the park in his car.

We didn’t take lessons but most of us learned to swim within two weeks. The pool had a raft, waterwheel, low diving board, high diving board, and slide. We would play follow the leader, swimming from one end to the other.

One memorable event in the fall was a Christmas service at the Al Ahzar Temple. Every child would memorize a verse from the Bible and do their part in the service. The service was in the evening so we would get out of school early. The girls would curl their hair, have an afternoon nap, then be ready for the big event. Every child would receive a gift and a bag of candy,



ANTICIPATING THE ‘REAL’
SANTA’S VISIT

We had a Christmas concert about December 18th. The different classes would put on plays and Miss Sinclair formed a choir to sing carols. The parents and Wood’s Home Board members were invited and the children were each given a dollar from the Taylor Trust Fund by a member of the Board.

During the Christmas holidays there were only about 20 children who remained in the Home. We would hang a sock at the foot of the bed and it would be filled with candy, nuts, oranges and apples Christmas morning. Then we would have a special breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast and milk. After breakfast we would go downstairs to the schoolroom where there would be a parcel of gifts on a desk for each child. Daddy came to visit that day.

We had a skating rink about 96 steps down the bank from the main house. It had a shack we could go in to with a little stove to keep us warm. Every year we had a Valentine Party. I remember a boy sliding down the side of the steps and falling with the box of goodies for the party in his hands. He was very unhappy but didn’t get hurt.

During the years I spent at Wood’s Christian Home there was a very close bond to the kids and staff I lived with. Today I still feel a warm kinship to those with whom I spent a significant part of my life.

POST-WAR PROGRESS

In 1948, there were 98 children in the Home and operating 16 expenses for that year totalled \$34,923.25. Considerable repairs and renewals were carried out and the landscaping be-gun the year before was completed. The landscaping had been provided for by the late Dr. O. H. Patrick and the work was done under the supervision of his son, Brig. L. Patrick. A lovely green lawn sloped down eastward from the main building and shrubs were planted in the pattern originally conceived by Dr. Patrick who had been a member of the Board of Trustees for several years.

The children were happy and healthy, by and large. Dr. Follett continued to give his services to the Home gratuitously, and Dr. Carman Johnson attended to the dental work required.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

¹⁶ Wood's Christian Home Annual Report/ 1948



STAFF: L-R — MABEL MARTIN, MRS. ELIOTT, MRS. MACFARLANE, MRS. FERGUSON, W. B. ROBERTSON, MRS. BLACKADAR, MISS ROBERTS.
- Glenbow Museum Archives, Calgary, Alberta



GRACE AND GEORGE LOTHIAN



MATRON SUSAN BLACKADAR, LATE 1940's

should they not, other companions will relate the events of your struggles.

But, as so often happens, just when everything seems to be going well, something ontoward occurs. The matron, Mrs. Susan Blackadar, died after a lengthy illness. Not only was she well beloved by the children in her care, she was also much appreciated by the Board which felt she had carried out her duties with efficiency and was exemplary in her role as a leader in the Home.

A year after her death, [Mrs. Blackadar was still well remembered and missed by her children, as was demonstrated in a written memorium to her by Grace Lothian:

“In loving memory of Mrs. Susan Louise Blackadar, who devoted that latter part of her life to the care of the children of Wood's Christian Home.

“The death of Mrs. Blackadar, Who was always loving and kind, was a great loss to our Home.

“In pain or worry, ‘Mother’ always wore a smile — a big, heart-warming smile — the kind that only ‘Mother’ could give. Although she was in pain for many months, she would hide it, for which everyone would admire her.

“Mother was taken to the General Hospital one night late in June. When the news arrived (that she had died), a sincerely sad atmosphere enveloped Wood's Home and even now, a year later, we think of her and miss her kind face and comforting smile.

“Although ‘Mother’ is gone, her memory will always remain with us.”

Miss Ethel B. McArthur was appointed to succeed Mrs. Blackadar. Miss McArthur had been on staff at the Home for two and one-half years as supervisor of the small boys, and had prior experience of a similar nature in British Columbia. The Board had every confidence that the new matron would effectively apply her skills and knowledge in her new position.

Principal Henry Gerlitz resigned at the end of the 1947 school year in order to return to university for further study. His thoughts and feelings of his tenure with Wood's Home and his involvement with and concern for the children are reflected in his farewell address in the 1947 school yearbook.

“At last a dream has been translated into reality, a great de-sire has been achieved; we pause briefly at another milestone. The path branches so that we will be separated in our journey. The time we had together has been so delightful, so much so that your companionship will be greatly missed as I continue on my journey. No doubt many of our paths will cross;



HENRY GERLITZ WITH MISS FARRELL (LEFT) AND MRS. TURNER (CENTRE), 1945



HENRY GERLITZ

“The challenge of the future is as enormous as at any time in history. Prepare yourselves well for its exigencies. As our own Governor-General, Viscount Alexander, said recently, ‘Education is important to all of us today if we wish to maintain our way of life. Other ideologies threaten the freedoms we have gained by generations of toil, of study, and of struggle. It is therefore only reasonable that by expanding our mental capacity to the limit now, that we can find our proper place in the future.

“My plea to you has always, and still is, to avail yourselves of every possible opportunity to acquire knowledge. My hopes for all of you have always been great. Do not lag or falter in the struggle to fit yourself as completely as possible for your individual task.

“I will always look back on the last eight years as years of tender memories. I have watched many of you grow from small bewildered youngsters into strong, healthy and alert young men and women; some of you have faltered and fallen, but you have always had the courage to rise and try again. Mistakes often are the greatest bulwarks of character, for they teach the lessons of life more completely than endless words.



ELSIE HENDRICKSON WITH SISTER MYRTLE AND BROTHER LLOYD, MID-1940's

“Now we pause, but only for breath for the next effort. Only our thoughts remain to comfort us as we journey on to the next crossroad in the highway of life.

“My sincere wishes go with each one of you. May God bless you and keep you ever true to His purpose.”

Henry Gerlitz received, in return, a tribute from the students. The next edition of the yearbook contained the following letter addressed to Mr. Gerlitz which was written by Elsie Hendrickson on behalf of the children.

“We would like to dedicate this little corner of the yearbook to you, to tell you how much we appreciate all the things

you have done for us. We all miss you terribly, and are so overwhelmed when you come to see us or drop a line or two, that it cannot be worded.



MISS FARRELL'S GRADE 4, 5 AND 6 CLASSES

“We also would like to let you know that you are always welcome at the Home (your home) and on behalf of the children and staff of Wood's Christian Home, I would like to wish you all the health, happiness and success that is due you.”

Mr. Linton Leonard Gaetz was appointed to succeed Henry Gerlitz. The other teachers on the staff were Miss Margaret Farrell and Miss Doris Edmondson, who ably assisted Mr. Gaetz. The 1948 graduating class was given a fine address by the chairman of the educational committee, Board member G. W. Skene, who also presented the graduates with pins and gave out the prizes to scholarship winners.



MISS FARRELL'S CLASSES ON FRONT LAWN OF THE HOME, MID-1940's

There were many kinds of entertainment provided for the children in 1948 as well as in following years. Arrangements were made for many of the children to go to summer camps, and others took their vacations with a parent or relatives. And as guests of certain organizations, the children attended such events as the Rotary Club circus, the Kiwanis fireworks display, the Stampede parade and exhibition, and several summer picnics, all under the supervision of the Home teachers and staff.

Mr. Bartle, who for several years had been the Sunday School superintendent, became ill and for the first time was forced to miss his regular Sunday services. Mr. Tutt and Mr. Westcott took over the Sunday services, while Rev. J. Rex Brown arranged mid-week services.



CHILDREN PUT ON CHRISTMAS PLAY - 1947

struggled with an average of 30 pupils per class, some of whom had emotional problems making discipline very difficult.



YOUNGSTERS LEARNING THE 'GOLDEN RULE' FROM THE 'GOOD BOOK'.

Situated on acres and acres of lush grass and wooded hills covered with pine, spruce, cottonwoods, ash, and majestic Douglas firs, with the Bow River flowing languidly by, the Home afforded its residents all the pleasures of country living in the midst of suburban sterility.



Many people in those days donated their services to the Home and the children with no thought of being compensated for their time or material donations.

It may be difficult to believe in today's affluent business and educational strata the kinds of salaries that were received by professional people 30-plus years ago.

For example, in 1948 teachers received salaries of \$1,200 dollars each: Miss Edmondson taught grades 1, 2 and 3; Miss Farrell (later Mrs. Allan Graham) had grades 4, 5 and 6; and Mr. Gaetz taught grades 7, 8 and 9. Each teacher

Working conditions could not be classified as ideal, either. The basement of the main building was divided in two, separating the elementary classes with a thin partition. The junior high class was housed below the boys' dormitory and was poorly lit, overcrowded and ventilated by cold air pouring in through the open windows onto the necks of students and teacher. Classroom equipment was barely adequate, but the energy, skill and devotion of the teachers compensated for lack of materials, and good progress was made by most of the students, as reported by the school inspector in 1948.

¹⁷ Wood's Christian Home Annual Report, 1948.

One of the most appealing aspects of the Wood's Home was its lo-cation.

The children were involved in many organized activities such as guides, scouts, cadets, hockey and baseball, and trips to the circus, Stampede and camp-outs. But they also enjoyed the freedom of creative activities in their own back yard which covered a large area. The boys could roam the woods hunting for berries or birds' eggs, or pretending to be great hunters, imagining that behind the next tree lurked a ferocious bear or tiger waiting to pounce on them. And the setting was perfect for playing cowboys and Indians or cops

LATE 1940's BASEBALL TEAM



LITTLE GIRLS SHARE DORM WITH 'SISTERS'

and robbers. The girls also loved to roam the woods; it was a great place to talk about (or spy on) the boys.

And because there was little privacy in the Home (everyone slept in dorm-type rooms and ate in one small and one large dining room) , the woods became a place of solitude., and privacy where a young girl could dream her dreams. She could sit on a huge fallen tree and imagine that miniature families lived beneath the toadstools growing on the carpet of soft green moss, and dream of the day she would have her own family to love and care for.

The Home teenagers often sneaked over to Bowness Park whenever they could, as the park was normally out of bounds unless a supervisor went along. The park was handy for clandestine meetings with one's object of affection. It was also the place to get hamburgers, french fries, malts or other junk food which was not normally available to Family members. If one had some money, one could also go on canoe rides in the lagoon.

The Bowness Park lagoon was a great place for skating, especially if the evenings were crisp and clear with a full moon illuminating the scene and music floating on the breeze.

BIG SISTER

Madelene (Collins) Kinley was the eldest of the seven Collins children, all of whom eventually lived in the Home.

The fall of 1947 was the first introduction of the Colling children to Wood's Christian Home. I was the oldest of a family of seven children. Mother was left with all seven on her own and had to make the big decision about breaking up our family and going out to work. We were very close and it was a traumatic experience for all concerned.

Vernon, Shirley, Darlene and myself were the first four to join the Wood's Home family of 105 children. Eunice came in the fall of 1948 followed by Iris and Fred in 1949. We were given our first introduction to Mother Blackadar, Mrs. Ferguson, who was matron for the girls, and Miss McArthur in charge of the smaller boys. Mr. Robertson was manager of the Home, a true friend and grandfather to all.



L-FRONT: SISTER DARLENE COLLINS AND CLASSMATES

All girls under twelve years of age were told as soon as they arrived they would be getting a boyish haircut which brought all of us to tears because Shirley had waist-length hair and it was her pride and joy. An exception was made if I got up early in the morning and braided her hair, which I did every morning for two years.

A tour of the Home was given by the staff and we were assigned our bedrooms. Our mother left and returned about every two weeks, taking us out for the weekend and for all holidays. We settled into a routine which was well organized and done to clock-work.

The saddest event was the passing of Mother Blackadar. She was a dear 'mother' to all; several children had known her for several years. Many tears were shed when her passing was announced in the dining room. Mrs. Clark was our cook (an adorable lady) and one of my jobs was working in the kitchen. I recall many evenings having to make the rolled oat porridge in a large double boiler (about a ten-gallon pot) stirring with a 3-4 ft. wooden paddle. This was left to cook all night (what good wallpaper glue it would have been by morning). Lots of hard cleaning, polishing and scrubbing was done by the children, even in the laundry. Mrs. Martin