

Highlands Profile:

The Gimbys

Last fall, Anita Jenkins offered to do a story on her ancestor Wellington Gimby. Gimby built two houses on 65th Street - 11248 in 1914 and 11242 in 1929. Coincidentally, the newsletter received another story about the Gimbys submitted by Doris Pallister Morgan, an early resident of the Highlands who now lives in Ottawa. We have also included information about other families which have resided at 11248 65th St., in what Mrs. Morgan calls "the square white house on the corner."

Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate a family photograph.

Charles Wellington Gimby

As a child, I heard family members talk about my grandmother's uncle, Wellington Gimby, who "did well." He always drove a car. even during the Depression. He built several handsome homes. He owned an automobile repair business, and bought and sold cattle.

In other words, he was typical of the people who bought land from McGrath and Holgate and settled in the Highlands before 1916.

Wellington Gimby's descendants and relatives were part of the family lore as well.

Daughter Marion was a fine teacher and the first female president of the Alberta Teachers' Association between 1951 and 1953. In the accompanying story, Doris Morgan reports that "Miss Gimby" was a Rhodes scholar. Actually, women were not eligible for this award until the 1970s, but Marian did earn a B.A. from Oxford University.

And there was grandson Bobby Gimby of the Happy Gang radio show. Bobby wrote the hit song "CA-NA-DA" for Canada's Centennial in 1967.

Perhaps Bobby inherited his ability from his grandmother's family. Wellington Gimby's wife Marion was a sister to Canadian novelist and poet Robert Stead.

Stead wrote about the early days in Canada. One of his stories, "Life on the PB Ranch," was included in "Highroads to Reading, Book Five," a 1930s school reader for Western Canada.

However, being young, I wasn't much interested in a character - no matter how colorful - who died before I was born.

Living on a farm near Vegreville, we didn't feel particularly British. But if we had an ancestor named Wellington Gimby, I guess we were! Then, in 1990, my husband and I moved to 68th Street and 111th Avenue. When my aunt Islay Arntzen visited our new home, she told us how fondly she remembers the Highlands.

I don't think I had heard anyone mention good old Uncle Wellington for 30 years, but my appetite for family history was now whetted. I proceeded to search the records...

Charles Wellington Gimby, known as Chas W., first shows up in Henderson's directory of 1912. Apparently, he came to Edmonton alone, leaving his family behind in Ontario.

In 1912, Henderson's indicates that he is employed at



The "square white house" at 11248 65th St. built in 1914 by the Gimby family

Hogle-Campbell Co., and in 1913 he is with Campbell, Gimby and Murphy, Real Estate Brokers, at 242 Jasper Avenue.

The land title records show that on February 21, 1913, his wife Marion J. Gimby became owner of lots 16, 17 and 18 of block 21 - street addresses 11248 and 11242 65th St. The price of the three lots, purchased from McGrath and Holgate, was \$8,500.

The three-storey house that still stands at 11248 - 65th St. (lot 16 and part of lot 17) was probably built within the next year.

Henderson's shows that Mrs. Gimby (Marion) and several of their children were living with Chas W. at that address in 1914.

In that year, Henderson's directory shows the two Gimby daughters, Ethel and Eva, living at the home. In 1916, Eva is working at James Ramsey department store, and by 1919 both Eva and Ethel are listed as nurses. Son Fred is listed in 1922 as an employee of Communal Life. Two of the younger children, Marion and Howard, are listed as teachers in 1923. In 1916, Chas W.'s occupation has become "rancher" in the directory.

My family tells me it would be more accurate to say he was a cattle dealer. He bought stock and hired people, including family members, to fatten up the animals on his farm in the Viking area.

The cattle were then sold at the Edmonton stockyards.

In 1920, the Gimby and McAlister garage opened at 9654 106A Ave., just in time to take advantage of the booming automobile business that developed during the Roaring Twenties.

The business became Gimby and Coburn Ford Sales and General Repairs in 1921, with partner Alex F. Coburn.

The building at 9654 106A Avenue stands today. It's now in the middle of the Chinese business district on 97th Street, and still serves as an auto repair shop.

In 1920, after 15 years in the big white house, the Gimbys built a smaller house next door, at 11242 65th St., on the remainder of the land that had originally purchased in 1913. In the mid-1930s, the Gimbys moved to a large home built earlier on their farm near Viking.

Anita Jenkins

Remembering the Gimbys

The square white house at the end of the trail leading north from the Gibbard Block on 65th Street was the home of Charles and Marion Gimby. They had moved to the Highlands from Lanark County, near Ottawa.

Most of their family of eight children were grown and started their careers when I remember them.

Marion and Howard, the two youngest, still lived at home as well as two grandchildren, Marguerite and Verna (Verna King of Surrey, B.C. supplied some of the details for this piece).

My father brought a lonely war bride to live on 65th Street in 1919.

More homes were being built on the street, and a proper road pushed its way to 113th Avenue. Beyond lay our beloved "bush."

Most of the newcomers settling on 65th Street had left kith and kin back in the "Old Country," so the Gimbys became "Grandma and Grandpa" to the kids.

Many happy times were had at the Gimbys - picnics and parties on the lawn, euchre (card game) in the evenings, and quilting bees.

During the summer, we were joined by "true" Gimby grandchildren, including Bobby, later known as the Pied Piper of Canada for his Centennial theme.

While our mothers plied their needles creating beautiful quilts, we children were let loose in that grand old house.

We raced up the front steps and down the back kitchen stairs, played hide-and-seek in the attic and bedrooms, and chased each other around the wide veranda encircling the house (now removed).

Many a wild game of kick-the-can, red light and run-sheep-run was played under the street light on the corner of the big house.

Those of us who attended Eastwood or Eastglen will remember Marion Gimby. she taught us history. Before her teaching years, Marion had enjoyed a stay in England studying at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

When she retired, Marion returned to Bath, in England.

Grandma and Grandpa Gimby have remained in the hearts of the children who grew up on 65th Street and 112th Avenue.

Doris Morgan (nee Pallister)

Other Residents of the Gimby House

In 1929, Andrew Millar, Chief Inspector of Mines for the Alberta government, became the second owner of the Gimby house.

The Millars lived there for 15 years, until 1944.

The next owners, the R.W. McIntyre family, owned General Whitewear and Uniforms. The McIntyres were there for about 10 years.

For a brief spell, (1953-54), Donald Wilson of Canadian Chemicals lived at the address.

In 1955, Leslie and Julie Wiles moved in.

Mr. and Mrs. Wiles, who had arrived in Edmonton from England three years earlier, brought the "garage" connection back to the house.

Les Wiles was the proprietor of Devonshire Motors in 1956, and in 1958 bought the Delton Service Station at 11714 Fort Trail, later called Belvedere Auto Service and then Les Wiles Automotive Repairs.

Omitting the brief stay of the Wilsons, the house has been home to only four families in over 75 years.

Anita Jenkins