

## **Norah Helen Murphy Jamieson** **From Finishing School to Primitive Farm Life**

By Clara Jamieson Weld (abt. 1960)

She was a small delicate child born in 1842 near Derby, England, the ninth child in a family of twelve. Her father born in Dublin was of true Irish descent. Her mother of thoroughly English ancestry. The first three children of these parents died in infancy, the ninth was christened Norah Helen in an Episcopal ceremony. This family of four boys and five girls grew to maturity in what in that day was considered an average professional home in Derby. The father was a dentist, his practice taking him often to London and sometimes Paris.

In such a household there was always plenty of activity, noisy at times but well disciplined. Tutors came to the home to teach the children, the boys going later to boarding school, after which they entered technical training to follow their father's profession. The girls were taught music, French and painting in addition to their household tasks. So the busy youthful days passed. Because she was not so strong physically as her brothers and sisters, Norah was allowed more freedom study and play and often had delicacies prepared to stimulate her appetite. She enjoyed her music and painting lessons and spent much time practicing on the piano and sketching from nature. Her paintings were done in water colors. In her teens she improved in health joining in games and social entertainment, often playing piano accompaniment for the two brothers who were violinists.

The Murphy home at Trinity Terrace was close by Derby's Royal Infirmary so it was quite natural for the young men of this institution in evenings to enjoy and participate in the gayety of this youthful group. Among those who came was a doctor of Scottish descent, Alexander Jamieson, recently graduated from Edinburgh University and now headmaster at the Infirmary. He was no musician but enjoyed listening, was fond of poetry and a welcome addition to the company. As he came to know the young ladies better he began to pay more attention to Norah, courted her, and when she was twenty-three, married her. It was a simple wedding service held at Normanton Church in Derby July 4, 1865. Rev. Mr. Hope, Vicar, officiating. At this time the bride was of slender build, tall with dark hair and soft brown eyes, somewhat shy and reserved in manner. The doctor twenty-six was broad shouldered, robust, his face bewiskered according to the prevailing style. He had gray eyes and sandy hair. His college friends called him Sandy.

As soon as plans could be made, the young couple moved to Drummore, a small village in Southern Scotland, the ancestral home of the Jamiesons. Here the doctor began practice as a general physician. It was indeed new country, quite different from Derbyshire, a gently rolling treeless heather-covered neck of land between the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Solway. Generation after generation of Scottish farmers had carried on a dairying industry here. Each homestead consisted of a family dwelling, barns for cattle, horses and hay, all joined together for convenience in wintry weather, and all kept freshly whitewashed. It was a friendly community, neighbors, relatives and friends making the newcomers soon feel quite at home. They began housekeeping in a small cottage surrounded by a fuchsia hedge and with a wide view over the countryside. Fish, scones and tea became a part of their daily food.

During the next two years two sons were born, and the time had come to consider a wider field of opportunity for the children, and one with a more profitable one in medicine.

The United States of America at the close of the Civil War offered many attractions to an enterprising young man, and in this case there was the added inducement that the doctor's parents had left Stoney Middleton, England some twenty-five years before, and crossing the ocean by boat had sailed down the Atlantic coast to New Orleans and up the Mississippi river to take up farm land in the state of Illinois. Indeed, Alexander and two older children had accompanied the parents and it was some years later that Alexander returned to England for his medical education.

When the decision was made to leave Drummore, it was by no means easy to bid farewell to friends there and to relatives in Derby where the young wife had grown up. America was a little known and far off country inhabited by Indians and there was little hope of returning soon to see her mother, sisters and brothers, but with husband, two sons, one still in arms, she bravely set out on the adventure. Her father had died five years before her marriage, her oldest sister had married and her youngest brother was only nine years old. Ocean travel in the 1860's was very different from that of today, much slower, and with poor accommodations. So the sight of land as the ship entered New York harbor in 1869 was cause for rejoicing.

The little family took train to Chicago, then to Moline, Illinois their destinations. This small industrial town on the Mississippi river was about five miles from the Jamieson farm. The surrounding country was good agricultural land and there was a growing need of farm implements of all kinds. The John Deere plow which originated here is known throughout the world.

The doctor established his practice in the town, also among the adjoining rural families. His office was in the home, but transportation by horse and buggy was available when calls came from a distance. Meanwhile the mother was getting acquainted with neighbors, making new friends, and caring for the household. Moline, situated on a main east and west railroad and with boat by river to the South, was a growing town, steadily attracting foreigners especially from Scandinavian countries.

During eight years residence the doctor's family was increased by four daughters. Because of the need of more space for the growing children plans were now made for a move to the country. Grandfather Jamieson had died and a transfer from town to the family farm seemed the best solution. The original one-room log house became the family living room. Kitchen, dining room and bedrooms were later added as needed. The center of life was in the "big room" with its coal stove kept burning day and night in cold weather, its old-fashioned cane-seated chairs brought from England, its small organ and house plants in the windows.

Naturally there were disadvantages as well as advantages in this move. The nearest district school was two miles away. Housekeeping without plumbing, furnace heat or refrigeration was difficult and adjustment to farm work not easily acquired. But there was an abundance of good air and sunshine, fresh milk, fruits and vegetables.

During the next six years, another son and two more daughters were born. It was a time of adventure for the children, of getting acquainted with animals, birds, trees, flowers, and insects, all of which afforded endless material for observation. It was a wholesome happy life though not an idle one. Each child had daily tasks and responsibilities, the boys beginning to take on farm work and the older girls household tasks. Even the younger ones kept the wood box filled, carried water from the cistern, fed the chickens and gathered the eggs. Exercise and simple food built strong muscles and nerves which were to serve well in the years to come.

The doctor kept fully occupied with his practice extended now to farmers and their families as well as to former town patients. The mother, in spite of the hard work of laundering, churning butter, getting meals for a hungry family (all bread in those days was baked at home) was a good neighbor and friend to all in the community and was often consulted for advice in times of illness and sorrow. She never considered that she was doing anything out of the ordinary or remarkable, this girl who had come straight from an English finishing school to rugged farm life. She never seemed lonely or discontented with her lot. There was music and singing in the home and time for sketching and water color painting. Some of her pictures were exhibited in Davenport, Iowa and given awards. Of necessity in her early married life she became a seamstress although it is doubtful that she had ever seen a sewing machine before leaving Scotland. She made garments for both boys and girls until they were able to make their own, or earn money for store clothes.

So the days and years passed. Life it seemed might continue thus, summer followed winter, seedtime and harvest, snows and spring flowers. And then suddenly all was changed. The doctor became ill, had to give up his practice, grew steadily weaker month by month, and died at the age of fifty, leaving the wife with nine children, the oldest twenty-three years of age. Frail of body after many anxious weeks she met this emergency with courage, determination and without complaint.

Now began the effort to keep the children together and to educate them. Besides the meager income from farm products there was a small royalty from a soft coal mine then in operation on a part of the farm land. Two of the oldest took advantage of business courses, others entered public High School in Moline, and two married.

The time had now come for a move back to Moline where those prepared found employment in business firms and where graded schools afforded better education for the younger members. During the following years five graduated from High School. The mother encouraged and rejoiced in these accomplishments and continued to make sacrifices to further them. When another son married and settled in the then family house, it became necessary to move again, this time to Ann Arbor, Michigan where a daughter was attending college.

There must have been time during all these years since leaving England when the mother longed to see her mother, brothers and sisters. If so, she kept her thoughts to herself. She was busy with her children and their needs and was content. Three of the children later received university degrees.

At last after forty years' absence, the opportunity came for the mother to visit England and Scotland. She and a daughter sailed from New York to Southampton to spend two months with relatives. Although there had been so many changes in Derby, including the death of her mother and two brothers, England to her was still beautiful and there were happy memories. In Drummore she lingered at the little whitewashed cottage with its fuchsia hedge looking much as she had left it years before. But after the visiting was over she was well aware that America was her real home where children and grandchildren awaited her return.

Her last years were spent with a daughter in Moline. Three children preceded her in death. Three have since died.

She was in her eighty-sixth year when she died. Her eagerness for life, her interest in and love of people of all ages and races, and her continuous and deep appreciation of music and art kept her young in spirit. She was brought up in the Church of England, joined the only Church in the Illinois farm community, which was Lutheran, and became a member of the Baptist Church in Moline.

Throughout her entire life she retained a calmness and dignity that proved her a lady under all circumstances. Her patience and love was boundless, her life an inspiration to all who knew her.

She was my mother.