

Family, Friends Bid Farewell to Mother, Grandmother, Great-Grandmother, Painter, Potter, Writer

Margaret Mae Holmes, 87 lived a long, happy and productive life.

She was born on March 6, 1922 in Edmonton to Annie and Wilfrid Ferris of Hayter, Alberta.

Margaret was the youngest of a large family that lived on the farm north of Hayter. She attended the one-room Goodlands School often travelling by horse, developing a life-long love of animals. Sometimes two children rode together on one horse. They walked in the spring and fall and in stormy or very cold winter weather, their father would drive them by sleigh.

The farm was six miles from the post office at Hayter—a busy village with two grocery stores, restaurant, hotel, garage, machine shop, blacksmith shop, bank and a lumberyard. There was a community hall and two schools, an Elementary and a High. There were seven elevators and the CPR trains carried passengers daily.

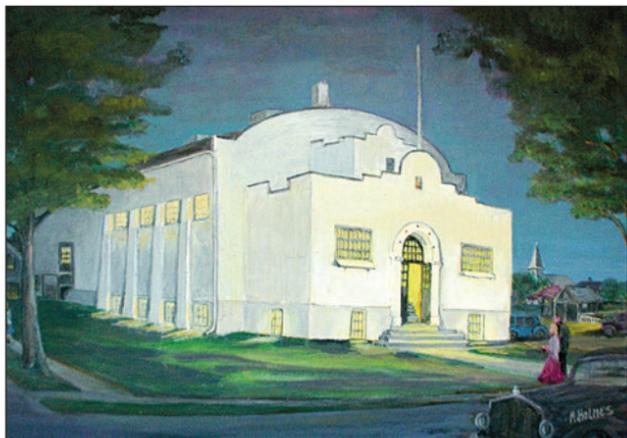
There was no refrigeration at home, so the cellar held any cooked food that needed to be kept cool. Jellied fruit or vegetables would be put directly on the cement floor. The years that were commonly called the "Dirty Thirties" might be assumed to have been unhappy ones but children didn't know that they were unusual. Clothes were handed down from one child to the next, sometimes altered, sometimes turned inside out and remade. Margaret recalls "Mother was a good seamstress and kept us looking 'respectable' (her word for neat and clean). I had a pet pig for a while. Pigs are not dirty animals. They are cleaner in their habits than cows or horses. Baby pigs are pink and cute, and clean."

"Our religious upbringing was not exactly consistent. The Ferris and MacDonald forbearers had been Presbyterian but as there was no church of that denomination in Hayter or Macklin we didn't get firmly rooted in any one church. (There was a Presbyterian church at Chauvin, but we simply never went to Chauvin, it was too far and the roads were too poor.) In the summer months we went to Stainsleigh schoolhouse where Mr. Thompson — commonly known as Preacher Thompson, held services for a very mixed congregation. He was the schoolteacher at Stainsleigh and a man who was respected — almost revered — in the area. He didn't call the meetings church, they were referred to as Sunday School. In the winter months we didn't go to church. At that time roads were not kept open in the winter. Cars were put on blocks, (to take the pressure off the tires) and batteries were removed. It was too long a trip to go to Hayter by sleigh. Sunday was still observed. Father read a chapter from the Bible while we were still seated around the table for breakfast. He started with Genesis and read the whole book, including Revelations, which frightened me and probably the other children, too."

Entertainment for the youth was simple and mostly self-made. As a child with asthma, Margaret was seldom involved in sports. Books were her great pleasure and she read everything she could get her hands on including her dad's farming magazines, often reading by the window in the fading light and by the dim light of coal oil lamps. "I



MARGARET MAE HOLMES



The Provost Community Hall.

don't remember a time I couldn't read. The older children would tell me what a word "said," and by this hit and miss method, I was able to read before I went to school."

She did have a pair of skis that likely her dad made, working by hand (no power tools).

There were card parties at the school and in people's homes. The boys at home sometimes played poker with match sticks for chips which was considered almost gambling and was frowned upon by mother. No one could play cards on Sunday.

Sunday was a day of rest but for some reason horse-shoe playing was deemed okay. Actual horseshoes of various sizes were used, the young children throwing the smallest and lightest ones.

The family enjoyed music. "We knew all the popular tunes and sang even if our voices weren't musical. As well as the piano, there was a variety of instruments in our home." There was also a gramophone with hollow cylindrical records that had a lot of use.

Recently when visiting near Provost, Margaret recalled as a child going cross-country with her father from the farm via oxen and wagon, through the Huck farm a half mile north and atop Ferris's hill and on to Provost.

Margaret attended high school in Provost and became homesick. The first term she boarded at the Agars, who lived directly across the street from the old brick school. Provost had electricity but no water or sewer system, until the late 1940s or early '50s. The school however, had its own sewage system so there were better facilities there.

Because she had skipped a grade in public school, her parents believed her to be clever. "Actually it was more an accident of having a good memory that allowed me to cope with the classes." Before the year was over she had made friends and started enjoying the school and the town.

The following year, Francis Manske and her batched in a room upstairs at the home of the Burrs who "were kind people."

If it was necessary to get home in winter months they took the local (train) to Hayter where they would be met with the sleigh and horses.

During that summer her dad retired from the farm, and brother Lorne took it over. The folks moved to Provost where her dad took over

the bulk oil dealership for Imperial Oil. When Margaret finished high school she applied at the bank, and the local stores. Banks hired only men and even the stores felt more inclined to take male help when so many men were looking for work.

After she married George S. Holmes on July 31, 1941 on the family farm north of Hayter—another series of adventures began.

During the war she followed her husband to Calgary during basic training and later via train to the West Coast. With Margaret expecting their first-born, George was lent to the U.S. Army for the invasion of Kiska, still in Japanese hands in the Aleutian Islands in the North Pacific. During George's absence their daughter appeared. Little Georgia was six months old before she saw her father, returning from the war back at Provost. Margaret recalled:



Two of hundreds of pottery pieces shaped on Margaret's wheel or by hand and then fired in her kiln.

"My mother arrived in Vancouver the week before Georgia's birth in mid-July. It was wonderful for me to have her with me. She was probably more worried than I was about the arrival of the baby. I thought it was going to be an interesting event. I was only disappointed that George wasn't going to be there. (I don't mean in the delivery room as this wasn't even imagined at the time.) In the labour room I explained to the nurse that I didn't want anesthesia. I wanted to be awake. She laughed. Natural childbirth was not in favour at the time, and after some hours of labour, a general anesthetic was administered. It was only after I awakened that I was told I had a baby girl. She weighed 5 pounds 5 ounces, was wrinkled and red, and had dark hair. The nurses were short-staffed, as many had left and joined the Armed Forces. We still were kept in bed for a week and only then allowed to sit up in a chair. The following day we would take a little walk. Most patients stayed 10 days. I was there for 12 as I ran a fever. A very new drug was given me, sulpham, the first of the antibiotic drugs. It involved round the clock administration—being wakened every few hours, but did quickly bring the fever to normal. When Georgia was three weeks old, mother and I left by train for Provost.

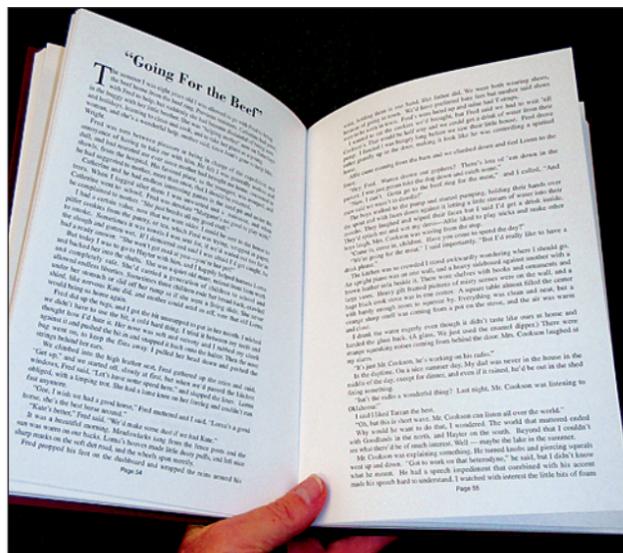
It seemed the wisest thing to do until I heard from George. I had sent a telegram, via the army post office to him, but it was a couple of weeks before he received it. I told him I'd given the baby both our names, Georgia Margaret. It wasn't what we'd planned but I had decided he should be remembered in this way, in the event of his not coming back. I didn't yet know where he was. We had talked of naming

a girl Carolyn Anne, for both grandmothers, Carolyn being altered from Karalina, which I didn't much care for, and Carolyn a popular name at the time."

They made Provost their home for many years where Margaret kept busy with gardening, working part-time at *The Provost News*, taking trips to Salt Lake and Dilberry Lake when the couple finally got their own car in 1955—four years after all their children were born.

Margaret developed her artistic skills, taking both pottery and painting classes in town. She had her own kiln and documented many landmarks from across Alberta and Saskatchewan in her vivid paintings—some of which scenes have since vanished. The paintings were shared over the years with friends and acquaintances beginning in 1967 when the first of a series of Christmas cards appeared. The initial one was a winter scene of the Holmes's backyard in winter, painted when she was in her mid-40s. Her 42nd annual card prepared for this winter is of St. Margaret's Church, south east of Medicine Hat. Several people have collected her cards throughout the years.

Margaret and George travelled countless miles teaching



A book of stories and poetry.



The Canadian Pacific Railway station.

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