

Memories of Montgomery Place

By Margaret Gent

1996

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One day in the late summer of 1945, my husband Arthur (Art) Gent, our two pre-war sons, Arthur and Brian, and I went for a car drive. Our car was a rare possession because I had stood firm in keeping it, a 1929 Ford Coupe. My father thought I should get rid of that "junk" out in his back yard. When my husband came home from overseas, after five years absence, we had the car but very little money and so could only afford \$2.00 worth of gas each month.

So, we all four went for a drive one bright and sunny day. We were driving out 11th Street West past "The Packers" into Cory country. Over the railroad tracks we saw all these concrete foundations, stopped and tried to satisfy our curiosity. There were 25 of them. That sure stirred our interest and in the ensuing days we found it was a proposed VLA development for service people who had served overseas. The proposed cost would be approximately \$6,000 plus forfeiture of the re-establishment credit which was based on the number of years of service (many of which were up to \$7-8,000). In those days, it was a lot of money but it gave a lot of veterans a chance to buy a home, with payments spread over 25 years at 3% interest. The property was in Cory Municipality and the taxes would be \$46 per year. This tax rate was a concession to veterans, some of whom were amputees, others under emotional strain from the war or war injuries and from years of separation from families and loved ones. On top of this we were offered a \$250 grant to purchase "whatever." Our purchase was a gas stove and a wooden table and four chairs. I still have the table and two of the chairs. My typewriter is on the table and I'm sitting on one of the chairs.

The houses were supposed to be ready for occupancy on 1 May 1946. You can guess what happened. At the junction of 11th Street and Dundonald Avenue where the railroad tracks cross, there was a cave-in (one man was killed) which delayed considerably the occupancy of the houses for lack of sewer and water services.

We had bought a house on Clarence Avenue after Art returned from overseas. This we sold in preparation for our new home and an addition to our

family. Our daughter Judith (Judy Balon) was born on May 4, 1946. We were now five and were informed that our new home in Montgomery Place would not be ready until September. The person who had bought our Clarence Avenue home informed us through her lawyer that unless she gained occupancy she would be residing at the Bessborough Hotel at our expense until we moved. Immediately we moved our furniture to #2 Montgomery Place (now 3211 - 11th Street West) and I and my two sons and new daughter left for Christopher Lake where I spent almost two months. At last I rebelled (the first time in my life) and we came home and moved into Montgomery Place. There was no sewer, no water, no phones, no roads, no street lights. Three other families - the Mainlands, Moonies and Coopers - had moved in under the same circumstances. We, the Gent family, Art, Margaret, sons Arthur and Brian, daughter Judy, were the fourth. Soon after that there was a *slow but sure* entrance of new neighbours until all 25 homes were occupied. I have compiled a list of the first occupants, which is included with this narrative.

It was rather a bleak and barren neighbourhood at first and I don't think there were very many who were physically and emotionally equipped to tackle either ½ acre or ¾ acre lots.

When we signed our contracts for these homes, there was a stipulation that no one could sell for ten years. This was done to try to create stability and was the rule across Canada. However there were a very few who found the challenge too much for various reasons and VLA allowed legitimate cases to be closed out. All in all it was amazing how many rolled up their sleeves and decided it was another case of "blood, sweat and tears" that laid the foundation for one of the most beautiful residential areas in the city.

At the beginning there were very few children, especially of school age. There was Ron, Delmar, Ethel and Dave Davies, Arthur and Brian Gent, Betty and Malcolm Edwards, and Barry Fabian. Since we were in Cory Municipality arrangements were made between Cory, VLA, and the Saskatoon Public School

to say, they took their lunches. All of these students finished their Grade Eight at King George and thence went on to Bedford Road Collegiate.

When we first moved into Montgomery it was quite a dilemma - no sewer and water - so we had to dig a hole away back in our back yard and dispose of our waste (sewage) that way. One incident that later caused a few laughs occurred when one resident, an insurance office man, came home from work and decided to get this (ugh) chore over with. Not wanting to change out of his dress clothes he proceeded down the back yard in the twilight, overstepped the mark, and fell in. Oh me, oh my, need I say more!

As soon as possible we had phones installed. There were two party lines with those beautiful old crank telephones. At last I could phone my Dad and Mother and convince them that I was now out of the never-never land. Unfortunately some of the people monopolized the phones and occasionally one had to get a little snarly if there was an emergency. They were so ugly that I had ours installed in the back porch. One dear couple, highly esteemed in the neighbourhood, gave us many a chuckle. He had a set pattern of phoning his wife at 12 noon every day. One day a neighbour came and asked to use our phone and happened to hear part of the conversation. It went..."Do you love me? Then say it. I've missed you since 9 am..." They were a middle-aged English couple and truth be told, maybe we were a little envious because our own husbands didn't do the same.

What did we do for fun? We formed a *Ladies Aid* or whatever you want to call it, affiliated with the United Church. We had some enjoyable meetings but unfortunately it got to the stage where no one wanted to be President because sure as anything, within a short time of assuming office, our President was pregnant. That was the time of the beginning of the now so-called "baby boom" and we were all doing our bit to increase the population of Montgomery Place. Shortly, four new homes came under construction, then a few more, and we began to feel like a real community.

We had a *Ratepayers Association* and shortly there evolved a regular Christmas Party, solely managed by the men and women. Fred Mendel graciously loaned us the use of the cafeteria at Intercon. We contacted the dairies and received, gratis, dixie cups and milk. We contacted grocery stores and canvassed for candies and oranges. Some of us, armed with a list of names, sex and ages of the children, met with managers of the bigger stores for donations of gifts for the kids. All were very gracious and cooperated so that when Santa arrived at the Packers, there was a gift-wrapped present for everyone. In those days it was much easier to satisfy the wishes of children and parents, partly because it was pretty nice to have Dads and Moms and children together again.

Our gratitude will last forever to the late Fred Mendel for the many ways he helped our lives be a little brighter. Thanks to him having the City of Saskatoon provide bus service for his employees, we were able to walk to the Packers and get to and from town. He also had a well-fertilized area back of the Packers where we used to take our shopping bags and pick mushrooms by the bagful. Then, since quite a few of the men worked at Intercon, they got some good deals on steaks and other meats and we had many social evenings. Not everyone joined in. Others were doing quite well with their own activities. One time Intercon sent out a brochure inviting anyone wishing to "come and get it," as much manure (pardon me - today its fertilizer) as they wanted. My next door neighbour (bless his heart - he's long gone) had 25 loads put on his and the lot where Stevens now live. Boy, the aroma that hot summer! We all felt like running him out of town, but had to admit that he grew some pretty nifty produce.

When I look back at the hours of work we put in, sheer manual labour digging, levelling, planting.... My husband and I had chickens for a few years. The kids loved the baby chicks, but the novelty wore off, and as my husband was out-of-town for weeks at a time, I had an extra chore to cope with. In the fall and canned chickens, or froze them whole to provide good winter meals.

By this time our third son, Douglas, had arrived. I remember one time when

door close, I yelled, "If you're coming in, take your shoes off. I've just finished waxing." I looked up and "oh my gosh," it was Reverend Bob Elliott from St. Thomas-Wesley with his shoes in his hand, a grin on his face, and this comment "Its only me Margaret." Oh for a hole to crawl into.

There was hardly a thing that we didn't love to grow in our garden. We planted raspberry bushes and had some tremendous crops (sold quite a few) and apple trees. Then one year my husband decided on a new venture. He was outside one Spring day and was setting up taps on the maple trees. He had an old Quebec heater in the back yard and for several years we had our own maple syrup. Some of our neighbours thought he had gone around the bend, and would ask me "Is Art alright?" After a few samples, the comments ceased. I understand that now it is not an unusual thing as a hobby.

You may sometimes wonder why there are so many fir trees in Montgomery Place. When it first opened up, except for a few clumps of bushes, it was still farm land. Through VLA we were able to apply to a Saskatchewan government nursery for fir and maple trees - 100 for \$2. The fir trees were about five inches tall (more work), but baby look at them now!

The time was coming when we needed to start thinking about being absorbed into the city. At first they didn't want us, but we had a good strong *Ratepayers Association* and finally an agreement was struck where the mill rate was frozen for ten years (boy, did the rest of the city holler!), but it went ahead. The first year our taxes doubled, then again the next year (with reassessment), but we became part of Saskatoon from then on.

The next step was a school, then a church, then a Catholic school, until we have a community that is the envy of the city for beauty, congeniality, activity and togetherness.

Who could ever forget Mary Fabian with all her foster babies? She had one room with eight cribs. Everything in the room was white and there was a sweet

smell of contented babies who had no homes. Mary was their Mother until they were adopted. She would have loved to keep them all forever.

No one heard of recreation centres in those early days. About the third or fourth fall we lived there, a bunch of men put their heads together, rolled up their sleeves, gathered some old oil barrels, recruited the kids who were big enough to help, and proceeded to build a skating rink. It was built on the 11th Street lot where Gordon and Dorothy Hendricks now live. The men linked up garden hose from the Davies home - 3213 11th Street, the Gents - 3211 11th Street, Baileys - 3209 11th Street and Coopers at 11th Street and Lancaster Boulevard. The men came from every home to help. The rink bank was done, then the water hoses (with additions) ran from each of the four houses. They filled the barrels, tipped, repeated. We had two war amputees, Ed Smith and Bob Cooper, who worked as hard as anyone else and when the ice was ready, the hockey began, every weekend. Ed and Bob donned their skates and were goalies, with chairs handy in case of necessity. It also provided a good opportunity for moms and kids to either skate, or learn to, during the week. We made our own fun and it was amazing how we kept up the pace along with all our responsibilities.

There was a time when the city was endeavouring to establish a new sanitary landfill. Our aldermen and mayor of that time (in their wisdom?) chose the area just south of 11th Street, back to now where we have Gordie Howe Park. One morning I got a frantic phone call from a resident in that area, "Couldn't we do something to stop it?" In those days I was involved in *Home and School* and many volunteer groups. We marshalled a bunch of canvassers for the area south of 11th Street and Montgomery Place, and much to the chagrin of those councillors, we bombarded them with so many names, they daren't go ahead. As a result the landfill is now south of the railroad tracks (thank heavens).

Another time I personally invited Mayor Sid Buckwold to drive around the stockyards and Montgomery Place on a hot, humid, breezy day to relish the aroma floating in the air. He always had a good sense of humour and took up my challenge. then phoned me to let me know he now understood our reason for

complaining.

Montgomery Place has continued as in the beginning, as an all-encompassing area. All work together, and share their social activities. Few of the original residents are still residing at Montgomery, but some of their children have returned to make their home there. My husband and I lived for 37 years at 3211 11th Street West. I still maintain my contact with the community through Trinity United Church. I leave the next part of the history to the next generation.

Montgomery Place Residents - 1947

List prepared by Margaret Gent 1996

Montgomery Place when it was established was in Cory Municipality and thus had no established addresses. As a result, the Post Office addresses we used were numbers 1 through 25. Number 1 was what is now 3213 11th Street West. Number 2, the Gent residence, is now 3211 11th Street West.

Following is the list of names of the first 25 residents:

Post Office Number	Family Name
1	Clara and Taffy Davies - He was also a veteran of the First World War. Children: Marge, Delmar, Ronald, Ethelwynne, David.
2	Arthur and Margaret Gent Children: Arthur, Brian, Judith Ann, Douglas
3	Robert and Lena Cooper Children: Wayne, Janet
4	Tom Hall and family
5	Gilbert and Freda Moonie Children: Donald and Allen
6	Thomas and Esther Mainland Children: Daniel, Raymond, Wanda, Arnold

- 7 Mr. & Mrs. Robert **Bird** - They only lived a short time here
and were replaced by Mr. & Mrs. Archie **Smith**
- 8 Percy and Pat **Waterer**
Children: Carl, Pat
- 9 Trig and Marge **Tregaskis**
- 10 Pat **Moloney** and his mother
- 11 Mr. & Mrs. Jim **Hunter** - They stayed only briefly and were
replaced by Charles and Jena **Irwin**
Children: Robert, Steve
- 12 Gilbert and Claire **Eamer**
Children: Claire, _____
- 13 Captain and Maisie **Carter** - Veteran of First World War - we
didn't dare call him Mr. - it had to be Captain
Children: Joyce, Kent
- 14 Carl and Rita **Sedgewick**
Children: Sheila, Carole, Ted, Vivian
- 15 Russell and Dorothy **Montgomery** - Came as newlyweds -
Children: Lucille, Lorraine
- 16 Phil and Frethe **Cardiff**
Children: Claire, Dennis
- 17 Robert and Elizabeth **Brown**
Children: Joanne

- 18 Gordon and Maud **Edwards** and her father
Children: Betty, Malcolm, Barbara
- 19 Hugh and Mary **Fabian**
Children: Barry, Rick, Doug
- 20 Harry and Dorothy **Wiggins**
Children: Robert, Ronald, Tom, Kathleen
- 21 Mr. & Mrs. Syd **Barker**
Children: Leslie and his wife Pat and their daughter
- 22 Royce and Audrey **Fulcher**
Children: twins Vicki and brother
- 23 Mr. & Mrs. Ron **Matcham**
- 24 Edwin and Eileen **Smith**
Children: Eleanor, Beverly, Marion
- 25 Lloyd and Anne **Kyle** - Only stayed a short time - House was
sold to John and Verna **Davies** who later exchanged residences
with **Cardiffs** - number 16