



Taking on coal in South Cle Elum Terminal, 1910.

# Family Memories

by Ray Sarlin



A remote homestead in the North Cascades Mountain Range.

Panorama of the North Cascades looking west.



JOHN ALLEN NICHOLSON  
Territorial Pioneer



FRIEDA ELIZABETH NICHOLSON

IN MEMORIAM

# Memories of Uncle Al

By Ray Sarlin

This is the story of my uncle Al, as told in a memoir by Aunt Frieda that I discovered in a bunch of old papers several years ago. At some point before she died in 1987 Frieda Elizabeth Nicholson had been encouraged by my mother Grace Elizabeth Sarlin, Frieda's niece, to jot down family history as far as she could remember, and mom had typed up 20 pages of memories and recollections.

Genealogy purists will note from the above paragraph that Frieda and Al were my grand aunt and grand uncle, but my sister Polly Ann and I always knew them simply as Aunt Frieda and Uncle Al. They seem to be the most exotic relatives on my mom's side of the family, a multi-generation railway family. My visit to their farm was a much anticipated and multi-faceted treat.

I grew up on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Arizona. Once every year or so during the summer vacation, my Mom, Dad, sister and I would visit relatives, driving three-days through the western United States to Seattle, Washington, the centroid of the families on both Mom's and Dad's sides.

Visiting Uncle Al and Aunt Frieda entailed another trip of 4 hours over the heavily forested Cascade Mountains through Snoqualmie Pass to Cle Elum, a railroad town where my Mom grew up. Before the transcontinental railroad was extended to Seattle in the mid-1880s, Cle Elum was the terminus for east-west trains. From here, passengers endured a torturous buckboard ride over the Cascades.



We then drove into the Cascades along rugged dirt tracks. Civilization fell away as the turnouts to farms and ranches in the foothills became sparser the further into the mountains we drove.

Just when it seemed like we couldn't drive much further, a mailbox read "Nicholson". We pulled off and followed a small forest track several miles until we reached their place. At first glance it was a picture-perfect log cabin built out over the slope surrounded by flowers. The homestead was completed by a large barn, a few other outbuildings along the slope, and split wood fenced paddocks on both sides for cattle and horses uphill and crops for personal use on the downslope.

Uncle Al and Aunt Frieda loved the visits. Naturally generous, they were thrilled to share with us. During a visit in 1954, Uncle Al "gave" my 13-year-old sister a Guernsey calf which loved attention just as much as a small child or puppy. That was too sedate for an active nine-year old boy, so I was given the barn and everything in it. A fascinating place to explore, it had a huge pile of unbaled hay to play in... something not lost on the dozens of cats living there that frolicked with me.

Just uphill from the track halfway between the house and barn was a strange-looking structure like a potato cellar with several large padlocks on a heavy wooden door that seemed to go straight into the mountain. This led to a productive underground gold mine that Uncle Al had worked as needed for more than 40 years. Every time I walked past the gold mine to "my" barn, I fantasized about its untold riches. No wonder that I became a mining engineer, albeit one with an allergy to cats.

Aunt Frieda's memoirs shared many memories, especially about her side of the family.

Frieda's father, Mom's maternal grandfather, Nels Anderson (1849-1918) migrated in 1871 aged 21 from County Brunskog, Varmland, Sweden to Brainerd Township, Crow Wing, Minnesota, just as the Northern Pacific Railway was pushing westward through Minnesota. Nels [right] joined survey crews protected by 600 troops under General Winfield Scott Hancock as the Northern Pacific was built along the trail initially blazed to the Pacific by Lewis and Clark from 1804-1806. The Northern Pacific Railway established its headquarters and shops in Brainerd.



The Eriksen family from Tune, Østfold, Norway migrated to Canada on a merchant ship in 1871. Olaf Eriksen (1828-1904) a shoemaker, his wife Oliane Marie Eriksen (1830-1913), and four children Emma (1852-1940) [below], Edward, Georgina and Carl Albert migrated to Minnesota in 1872 and homesteaded in Minnesota's Crowing County near Brainerd. Olaf fashioned and played his own violin and supplemented his shoemaking income by playing for dances and entertainments.



Some Lutheran church members complained that Deacon Olaf shouldn't play for dances, so Olaf sought the advice of the minister who suggested he continue with dances but perhaps also accompany congregational song during worship services.

At the wedding, Emma wore a brown wedding dress. Nels wore a black broadcloth Prince Albert suit, the fashion of the times. Their first daughter Christina was born the next year, followed by Agnes, still-born Edward, my grandmother Selma (1884-1971), Gustaf, Nettie, Frieda (1891-1987), Carl Albert (who died aged 12) and Ida.

Gleason Filmore Leyde (1848-1921) was born in Pennsylvania when it was the American frontier. He came from a pioneering family that migrated west as the U.S. border did. Arriving in Minnesota as a boy, he lived through the Sioux Uprising of 1862-3, which his father and three older brothers fought against. The brothers then fought in the American Civil War.



After the war, Gleason joined the Northern Pacific as it resumed its westward push through Minnesota. He married Canadian emigre Sara Jane McClay [1858-1892] in 1881. They had a daughter and four sons.

The boys all worked for the Northern Pacific Railway in Brainerd. First son Matthew Leyde (1885-1962), my grandfather, qualified as a train engineer (driver) and spent a lifelong career with the NP.

Matthew Leyde and Selma Anderson met in Brainerd and married June 9, 1910 in Minneapolis/St. Paul where the Northern Pacific had transferred its headquarters during the turbulent years when the robber barons (Andrew Carnegie, J.D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, E.H. Harriman, John Forbes, James J. Hill, etc.) had fought for railway hegemony.

As an experienced senior engineer, Matthew pushed west as the Northern Pacific matured, through North Dakota, Montana and Idaho to Malden in eastern Washington State, where Mom was born in 1912, and then to Cle Elum. Matthew and Selma's siblings moved west as well. Selma taught school, and their three children Alice (1911-1985), Grace (1912-2000), and Warren (1921-2015) all graduated from university. For example, my mother graduated summa cum laude in Mathematics and Physics from Washington State University, but then spent six months at a secretarial college to acquire employable "female skills". Times were different then. She met my father Reino Sarlin (1909-1993) when hired by his fraternity at the University of Washington to tutor him in Math.

Aunt Frieda's notes included less about Uncle Al, formally named John Allen Nicholson (1875-1961), but it had some doozeys, including a cryptic "Al's GGM's sister's fiancé hanged in Ireland."

Here's the story. Al's great grandmother Eliza Odella Curran (1779-1863), born in Rathfarnham, Dublin, Ireland, was the second surviving daughter of Rt. Hon. John Philpot Curran (1750-1817) and Sarah Creagh Curran (1756-1844). John [right] was a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin, and was well known as an Irish orator, politician, wit, lawyer and judge, who held the office of Master of the Rolls in Ireland. His wife Sarah descended from a line of denominated 'ancient Irish inhabitants'.



Sarah and John had eight surviving children, four daughters (Amelia Maria, Eliza Odella, Gertrude Sarah, and Sarah) and four sons (Richard Creagh, James, John Bartholomew, and William Henry).

Uncle Al's great grandmother, Emilia Maria Curran (1779-1863), married Reverend James Taylor of Clifton, Gloucestershire, England and died in 1863 in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England.

Her elder sister Amelia Maria Curran (1775-1847) became a noted Irish portrait painter whose portraits hang in the National Portrait Gallery in London. She travelled to Ireland with her lifelong friend Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1812 when he campaigned against the injustices done there by Britain, introducing Shelley to her father, one of the leaders of the cause. She had a close friendship and correspondence with Shelley's second wife Mary Shelley (author of *Frankenstein*) and painted a portrait of Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, mother of Lord George Gordon Byron's daughter Allegra. A confidant of Lord Byron, she lived a liberated life before marrying Dr. Thomas Phillips.

Her brother James (1787-1815) entered the British Army and joined the East India Company as an ensign in 1805 in India, gaining the rank of Lieutenant with the 27<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry in 1806 and senior lieutenant with the 29<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry in 1815. Increased taxation after the Second Rohilla War (1794) had raised discontent throughout the Bareilly district in Uttar Pradesh, India, and a serious skirmish between rebels and sepoys under Captain Cunningham and Lieutenant Curran cost 300–400 lives. Lieutenant Curran was killed in the action on 4 September 1815. Bareilly was later a centre of the Indian Rebellion of 1857.



James' twin brother John Bartholomew Hoare Curran (1787-1832) had a successful career in the Royal Navy, attaining the rank of Captain. Their elder brother, Richard Creagh Curran (1776-1847) followed their father to Trinity College in Dublin and was admitted to the Irish Bar in 1799. While at Trinity, he befriended Robert Emmet (1778-1803) [left] who became a leader in the failed Irish Rebellion of 1803. Richard introduced the Irish patriot to his sister Sarah Curran (1782-1808) and they fell madly in love.

Her father considered Robert Emmet unsuitable, so their courtship was conducted through letters and clandestine meetings. When Rt. Hon. John Philpot Curran discovered their secret engagement in 1803, he disowned Sarah [right, c. 1805] and treated her so harshly that she took refuge with friends in Cork. After the rebellion failed, Emmet was tried and executed for high treason. A fabled name in Ireland, the legend is that his body was stolen after execution and buried in a secret grave that will only be revealed when Ireland is free of the British yoke.



The grieving Sarah met Captain Henry Sturgeon, a nephew of the Marquis of Rockingham, in Cork and married him in November 1805. The two lived in Haiti, where Sturgeon was posted; she had a child who died after a difficult birth. Sarah Sturgeon died of tuberculosis on 5 May 1808. Tradition-helped along by writings of luminaries like Irish poet Thomas Moore, American author Washington Irving and Canadian novelist Amelia Clotilda Jennings - suggests that Sarah died of a broken heart.

As Forrest Gump's mother may well have said, "Family history is like a box of chocolates...."