

Neighbors

Recitations and Monologues

By Suzanne Veh

Before the advent of the family TV set and the two-car family, people had to rely almost totally on self-made entertainment. Christmas concerts, school concerts, lodge meetings, church socials, institute meetings; all of these functions called for a type of entertainment in the rural areas that is rarely seen or heard anymore; namely recitations and monologues.

A recitation, probably the more popular of the two, was a recital, done by memory, of a poem. A monologue was a story, usually funny, also delivered by memory performed by one person often using costumes and stage-props.

The village of Russell has had its fair share of these talented people. Many will remember the late Alex Craig as well as the late Nellie Morris; both were known to many for their ability to recite. Their repertoire would cover such poems as **Face on the Barroom Floor**, **The Burial of Sir John Moore**, **The Stove Pipe Hole**, and many more. Authors might vary

from unknowns to the likes of Robert Service or Robbie Burns. As much as recitations and monologues were widely used for public entertainment; it was also a popular past-time to read or recite at family gatherings, something which is still carried on today.

Recently, people like Alice Hamilton, Margaret McCallum, Nellie Wolff, Margaret Burton and more have all been involved in some recitations at various social gatherings, institute meetings, and church strawberry socials, etc.

There might be a lot of people who can memorize a favourite poem, but there are few who have the talent to bring it to life at a recitation. As Alice Hamilton said: "It takes the human voice to bring it out!"

Mrs. Hamilton lives north of the village with her son Wilmer and his family in their bungalow which sits next to the original farmhouse built in 1886 where she and her husband lived. Now in her 90th year, she can remember giving recitations at Lodge meetings and church functions. As a teenager, she found she had a quick memory and could recite poems easily. This memory has yet to fail her for recently she recited **The School at Injun Bay** without a moments hesitation.

Nellie Wolff, of Craig Street, is another who gives public recitations on occasion. She too started to memorize poetry as a teenager and found she enjoyed it. No doubt she inherited some talent from her father, who while he did not recite publicly, Mrs. Wolff can remember him reciting for the family and making the stories come vividly alive with his expression. Mrs. Wolff recited frequent-

ly for Sunday school in her youth and then as she became busier with a family of her own she found less and less time for it. It was not until years later, while playing a game at a party, and she lost and was asked to forfeit something that she recited a poem. Word soon spread and she was asked to recite at parties and social gatherings. There are many in Russell who are familiar with Nellie Wolff's humorous recitation of **The Inventor's Wife**.

Helen Morrow of north Russell, former supply-teacher, remembers planning many Christmas concerts where a monologue was always part of the program. Among some of those she remembered were **Aunt Mamie Goes to the Ball Game**, **Uncle Goes to Vote**, **Grandma tells of a Visit to Town**, **Me and My Downtrodden Sex**, **For A Little Girl**, and many more. In the days of the one-room, one or two children would be chosen to deliver a monologue as part of the program at various school functions.



MRS. ALICE HAMILTON



MRS. NELLIE WOLFF

The School at Injun Bay

As recited by Alice Hamilton
When Mary-Ann Dollinger
got that school
Down there at Injun Bay — (I
was glad)
For I like to see a girl
A-makin' her honest way.
I'd heard some talk in the
village
About her, a 'flyin' high
Too high for busy farmer
folks
With chores to do — to fly.

But I paid no sort of attention
To all their talk and tell
And she came at her regular
boarding round
To visit with us a spell.

Our Jake and her had been
cronies
Ever since they could walk
And it kinder took me back a
bit
To hear her correctin' him in
his talk.

Jake ain't no hand at grammer
But she can't beat him for
work
And I says to myself — "Look
out, my girl
You're a 'follin' with a Turk."

Jake bore it very patient —
mind once he ax me

For some of my Injun buns
She said he should always say
"Them are"
Instead of "Them is" the
ones.

And one day I was a 'pickin'
currents
Down by the old quince tree
And I heard Jake's voice a
'sayin'
"Be you willin' to marry me?"

And Mary-Ann correctin'
"Are ye willin' " you should
say
Our Jake he put his foot down
In a plum decided way

"No women folks is goin' to
be
A rearrangin' me,
Hereafter I say scraps 'them
is'
I calculate to be!

If folks don't like my talkin'
They needn't harkin' to what I
say
But I won't be made a fool of
By the dudes at Injun Bay.

So I ask you free and finally
Be you goin' to marry
me?"
And Mary-Ann said, tremblin'
yet anxiously,
"I be, I be."

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