

RILEY WEAVER 1868-1929

Compiled and edited by

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Riley Weaver—what a guy! He was remarkable because he was *trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent*—just like a Boy Scout should be. Actually, he became the number one Scouting Executive for all of southern Alberta, Canada during the years 1915-1929. Mentioned in the 75th anniversary of Scouting edition of the Lethbridge Herald on February 27, 1982, Riley’s memory was featured.

Excerpts from a letter written by A. N. Green in response to this editor’s request from the Lethbridge [Alberta, Canada] Genealogical Society for information about Riley Weaver:

“I was interviewed by the Herald with regard to Scouting in the early days in Lethbridge. I told them the Boy Scouts were organized about 1916 or 17 in Lethbridge by Zebulon Skousen, President of the YMIA [Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association, an organization under the direction of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. Riley Weaver, Scout Commissioner, came over from Raymond, also for that purpose. That was the only contact I had with Riley Weaver, but I do remember that he was a very kindly man, and would be in his middle age, say early 50s.”

“I often think back to the time when Riley was working with the scouts” wrote Donald Nilsson, a neighbor of the Weavers, “he had a lot of talent when it came to supervising young boys.”

Dora Meldrum Thomson wrote: “I was a small girl when Uncle Riley died but I can remember going to his funeral. When we came out of the church after the services there were two rows of men and boys, [scouts and leaders] honoring him.”

“Both Riley and his son Duncan Weaver were scout masters when I was young,” wrote Don Nilsson. “On one occasion Duncan took the scout troop to spend a week at Waterton Park. I don’t remember too much about it except that it rained most of the time we were there. The tent leaked and as a result our bedding was continually wet. This was in the days of the model T Ford.”

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Riley Weaver was born in Millville, Cache County, Utah November 24th, 1869. He died in Raymond, Alberta Canada September 4th, 1929 at age 60, and is buried there in the Temple Hill Cemetery.

Riley was the youngest child of his mother, Sarah Clark Weaver, but not the youngest son of his father, Franklin Weaver. When Franklin Weaver's beloved brother Miles died in 1855, Franklin married his two widows in the Biblical tradition: Sarah Clark Weaver and Sarah Elizabeth Holmes Weaver. This was Miles' wish and his wives were well aware of that. Plural marriage, one of the practices that had caused the suffering and deprivations perpetrated on the "Mormons" by the citizens of Missouri and Illinois had also caused the Church's removal from the United States into the Utah Territory. There for more than half a century the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could grow up as a cohesive unit, largely unmolested, until Plural Marriage was discontinued. Unlike other religious groups that sought isolation but were gradually absorbed into the larger culture, the "Mormons" were a distinct group and have continued to be, despite modern cultural encroachments.

Riley was just 15 years old when his father died, and with his mother's limited resources, it was required that he assist in providing for himself and his family. He had two sisters and one brother, all older than himself. The youngest of his mother's children born to Miles Weaver was 14 years older than Riley. Since there were no children born to the union of Miles Weaver and Sarah Elizabeth Holmes, of her eight children with Franklin, only three were younger than Riley.

We learn more from the writings of Riley's niece, Sarah Harris Mickelson:

When Franklin's health began to fail, he and his first wife, Rachel, moved to Bennington, Bear Lake County, Idaho. Sarah Clark with her family moved to Liberty, Bear Lake County, Idaho, where her oldest son Miles Joseph and wife Annie (Lindsay) and family lived. Riley's sisters Josephine (Harris) and Helen (Shaffer) had married and both families were settled in Cache County, Utah.

Later with her two younger sons, Henry and Riley, Sarah moved to Bennington, Bear Lake County, Idaho. Henry found work at a ranch near Star Valley, Wyoming where he contracted pneumonia and passed away on March 16, 1891. Henry had not yet married and was only 29 years old at his death.¹ Now Sarah and her youngest son, Riley, were alone. *"Riley was seven years younger than Henry, and Sarah's health was poor, so my mother, Josephine, persuaded her to come and live in our home, and Riley went to live with his sister Helen and family. Helen and Joseph Shaffer (not related to the editor) had 5 children when Riley, at age 22 or 23 came to stay with them. How those kids loved their Uncle Riley!"*



*Parents of Riley Weaver:
Franklin Weaver and Sarah Clark*



We are not sure how they met, but when Riley encountered Margaret (Maggie) Duncan, sparks flew. Maggie and Riley were married in the new Logan Utah Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1895 and started their life together in Bennington, Bear Lake County, Idaho. Maggie was very short and Riley was very tall. Noted in a poem by F.C. Cunningham, "Maggie Duncan gazed highly and looked with favor on our Riley." To this union seven children were born beginning with Henry Duncan Weaver in 1896 and ending with Sidney James "Jim" Weaver in 1917, a span of 22 years. Between these two were Robert, who died shortly after birth in 1897, Lucille 1898, Allen L. 1904, Leta May 1906 and Riley Franklin "Frank" 1913.



"Early experiences taught the Bennington people to be concerned about the long lonely winter months and they did more than many communities to combat them. Musical talents were developed. Dancing and drama helped fill the void, and the Bennington traveling band became very popular. The band was originally composed of Jesse Dunn, Horace Weaver, Brady Dunn, Riley Weaver, Isaac and William Speirs, George Birch, Pete and Hans Hansen and Harry Short. It traveled throughout the valley and by train to many areas in Wyoming and Idaho."ⁱⁱ

Later, Riley played in a quartet: (standing, right) At least one of these was a Clark cousin.

The above wedding photo is featured on the homepage of the website of this editor: www.OurFamilyBiographies.com The biographies are available to download at no cost.

It was in an atmosphere of homesteading and pioneering that Riley and Maggie Weaver packed up their belongings, piled them into a covered wagon, and along with their two little ones—Duncan and Lucille—left Bennington and headed for Canada. Quite a number of others went with them.

In the photo below, the Weaver and Shaffer families are evident. Helen Weaver Shaffer is standing next to Maggie in the photo. Duncan and Lucille are the second and third kids seated in front. FamilySearch.org has identified more people in this photo: see Riley Weaver KW8C-FX3



The 1902 journey from Idaho to Alberta took about five weeks by covered wagon. Though the railroads had been around for quite some time, and travel by covered wagon was becoming less common, the Weaver party used covered wagons for this journey. They went in the summertime and had a wonderful time along the way, making music and dancing in the evenings. The simplicity and speed of present-day travel tends to make a trip like that seem terribly hard, and years later when Maggie was asked by granddaughter, Ellen Claire Weaver Shaeffer, if the trip had been a difficult ordeal, she replied, “Oh, no. It was FUN!”

But all was not fun when they arrived in Canada. Lucille Weaver Larson wrote: “*We got to Magrath, Alberta, July 27, 1902 but had to stay in Cardston, Alberta, a few days because the Belly River was too high to ford. The Milk River was high too, and while fording it little Duncan got wet and by the time they got to Magrath he had a huge swelling on his jaw, and his jaw was locked tight. He was taken to Lethbridge to the Gault Hospital, where it was lanced.*”

The family's first winter was spent in a tent, and the first blizzard came in September! Riley established his family as best he could with scant means available. Mostly he farmed and hired himself out to other farmers. He and Jim Collett engaged in a haying business for some time.

Riley Weaver became a naturalized Canadian citizen in November, 1905 in judicial court, Lethbridge, Northwest Territories. Shortly after that the Weavers made a move to Sterling, Alberta to "prove up" on what was probably a quarter section of land. To fulfill the terms of the homesteading agreement entered into with the Canadian government, continuous residence was required for at least three years. To make ends meet, Riley and Maggie and the younger children found work some distance away one season, and left Duncan, age 13, to stay on the homestead. Duncan's wife Margaret attributed his lifelong dislike of potatoes to the fact that he had run out of things to eat all except for potatoes during that time when he was alone at the homestead. But he never mentioned it. After the homestead was sold the family moved to a farm near the town of Raymond, Alberta.

Donald Nilsson, began a correspondence with this editor in 1980, reminiscing about the early days in Alberta, especially about a time when his family lived near the Weavers in Raymond:

For a number of years when Allen and Leta [Weaver] were going to school, all of the children in our area, including them, traveled to school in a horse-drawn van, one with iron wheels. It was enclosed and even the driver could ride inside during cold weather. The lines to the horses passed through a small hole in the front wall of the van.

Riley Weaver's farm was less than a mile from our land. We pass it several times every time we go to Canada. Their old farmhouse still stands (1981). Until a few years ago it was still in quite good shape, but hadn't been lived in for quite a while. The old buildings occupied by the Weaver family stand a quarter of a mile from the road much as they were sixty years ago. It almost seems as if they were waiting the return of those who once occupied them.

When I was young Riley worked with the Scouts. He was surely a special man. His generation lived through some difficult times.

Alice and I were married in 1930 and that year wheat was 25 cents per bushel or 60 pounds and the going wages were \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day if you could get a job. Your folks and your grandparents lived through this. You likely missed most of that experience. In a way conditions are similar today. Money is quite plentiful, but doesn't buy much. The highest wage I ever made in my life was working on a threshing machine. Me and my team of horses and wagon received \$10.00 for a twelve-hour day. Very few would consider working for ten dollars an hour now. In spite of it being hard times then, we seemed to have more time to be friends and good neighbors. People depended more upon one another, and helping someone that was in need seemed to bring pleasure. Riley was farming both before the Great Depression as well as all through it. I don't imagine they saw much prosperity.

In some special pictures I have had of our town basketball teams I have had one of a team called the Idlers. They had been the High School team for several years. I'm quite sure they were Alberta champions for several years. Duncan [Weaver] was the coach. Several of the men in the picture with them had a great deal to do with all high school sports. When the MIA held their track meets Duncan conducted the athletic events. He was especially efficient in training athletes. He and his father, Riley, were also especially head of the Boy Scouts and were loved by all they were associated with.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jim, (Sidney James Weaver), youngest child of Riley and Maggie Weaver wrote in a letter dated 1982: ^{iv}

Mother and Dad emigrated from Utah to Canada in 1902 by covered wagon. Mother kept a daily diary of the trip and the diary was destroyed by mice in the back room at home. What a gem that would have been! Duncan went into the Navy and I was born while he was away and he was a stranger to me when he came back. After I started school, he was the principal...and I received a lot of flak over that. Anyway, I always held him in awe. He was my talented brother and I was always glad to be known as Duncan's kid brother. And I have always wished I had curly hair like his.

I can't remember my father [Riley Weaver] very well, but I [do] remember my father as a gentle man, something of a dreamer maybe. He was a large raw-boned man—not beefy but big framed. [Jim was 12 when Riley died.] I don't ever remember being disciplined by Dad in any way, or by Mother either for that matter. I guess I grew up spoiled rotten... My brother Frank would tease me till I got angry and started shouting and then we would both get a talking-to.

As far back as I can remember I had a cow to milk and chickens to feed and numerous chores around the farm. We always had a big garden to hoe and potatoes to dig in the fall. And it seems there was a huge pile of big yellow pumpkins in our living room for a few days till they were disposed of in some way. We always had strawberries and raspberries to eat. And vegetables and beef and pork and eggs and chicken. And my mother's delicious gravy over her good bread.

When reading about the dust bowl days of the American plains, one ordinarily doesn't think of it in terms of how widespread it was. But Canada experienced the same phenomenon. The West Texas and New Mexico dust storms of the 1960s and 1970s, and even some in the 1980s with which this editor is well familiar, makes Jim Weaver's descriptions quite vivid:

Dirt, dirt, dirt. I just don't mean dust, I mean dirt. I wasn't tall enough to get my head up out of the dirt that was blowing. Everybody's topsoil was moving in the wind along with big round tumbleweeds or Russian thistles. These thistles would roll in the wind till they lodged against a fence or something and there the dirt would fill in around them and pile up like snow till the fence was covered. But the dirt was in our houses too, in the cupboards, in the dishes, all over the bed at night, thick on the window sills and blown in around the doors. There was no keeping it out. You shook everything before you put it on. Some dust storms almost blotted out the sun. There was a prevailing westerly wind that blew almost continuously, summer and winter. And it would blow snow in the winter.

Martha A. Godfrey Mecham wrote the following poem at her home in Superior, Wyoming, August 1926:

*The wind is blowing up the dust-I'm sure it beats the devil.
It blows up hill and down again, as fast as on the level.
It fills our houses full of dust. It surely raises Cain.
It blows down the canyon, then it blows it back again.
I think I'll leave the blooming place,
For a land of flowers and trees
Where everything is lovely
And young girls show their knees.*

Jim continued: *Dad played a guitar and sang and loved to entertain and be with people. I am told he and mother sang duets together. As he played his guitar the little finger on his right hand (strumming hand) rested on the guitar and had almost worn his guitar through. He also played classical guitar. People came from miles around to hear him play.*



When Duncan, a precocious child according to Mother, was very young Dad and Mother dressed him up in a cute little minstrel suit and he would sing and dance while Dad played the guitar,” said his sister Lucille. She also noted that Riley was the Choirmaster for many years in Raymond.

In grade school Duncan won favor for his teacher when the dreaded Inspector came,” wrote Lucille. “She’d call on Duncan to sing. He’d throw back his head, raise his voice and sing *For I’m a Mormon Boy*. Lucille said that their early school teachers all seemed to be old maids from the East, probably looking for adventure in the West.

Duncan studied the violin, going to Lethbridge by train for lessons. Note the organ and Riley’s guitar on the wall. Riley and his boys formed a musical group that would play for town and country dances. Riley would play the guitar, Duncan the fiddle, and one or two of the younger boys on the drums.



From the *History of Magrath, Alberta, Canada*, this band, pictured, consisted of Rowan Fletcher, Ammon Mercer, Charles Harker, Lafe Pixton, Riley Weaver (rear and left of drummer), Truman Bone, Levi Harker, Clare Bennett, Andrew Rasmussen, Roy Jensen (drummer),

Ralph Winterton, Noel Rich, and George Birch, conductor. Absent were Dan Fowler, and Dick Toomer.

More from Jim Weaver:

My first talking movie was “Abby’s Irish Rose.” There was a theater in Raymond, where I was born and grew up, and Saturday was a day for kids. Admission was usually 10 cents each and for

that dime we were transported into another world for about three hours. I've lived with Tarzan and the apes, Tom Mix and his horse and cartoons and all sorts of adventures. Dimes were hard to come by pretty often and since the theater owner also owned a grocery store, we could sometimes gain admission to a Saturday matinee with a large carrot or potato, etc.

Water was a problem. We caught rain water from the roof, and it didn't rain that often that we had a lot of water. Most of the water we hauled in barrels which we filled at Aunt Lucille's home in Raymond. Every time someone went to town a small keg of water was brought back. For livestock we built ponds and filled them with irrigation water.

When dad died in 1929, we sold the farm and animals and equipment and moved into Raymond. Frank and I were the only children left and we had to work to keep things open. I was a printer's "devil" or apprentice at the local print shop and earned a few cents a week. Frank being a bit older would earn more than I could. He learned guitar and went into music and spent his life in music, traveling with dance bands as a guitarist, bass fiddle man and vocalist a lot of the time. I stayed with the printing game and am still in it at the Seattle Times.

Mother worked as a seamstress and earned barely enough to keep us alive. We had a cow and chickens and a garden and Mother looked after her mother, Grandma Collett. [Jane Owens Wardrop Duncan Collett]

Shortly after I was married Mother married Brian Meldrum. He was a fine man. Your daddy [Duncan Weaver] spoke at his funeral.

In a 1981 Don Nilsson shared the following letter from relatives of theirs:

Dear Alice & Donny:

Needless to say, it was a delightful surprise to receive a nice, long, interesting letter from you in the mail yesterday.

I well remember Duncan Weaver. He was my school teacher in grades nine and ten. Also, when he taught in public school, he and Mr. Mitchell used to give us concerts on the violin and piano. Later on, they became brothers-in-law, but that was when he was still single.

I also remember Bro. & Sis. Riley Weaver. They were very fine people. Do you remember the first year of the sugar factory here? It was a very rainy fall and there was great difficulty harvesting the beets. It was the year of 1925. They let high school out to top beets for a couple of weeks. Melba West and I went out to the Weaver's farm to work. I don't know how much topping we did, but it was an experience. We stayed there the full time, night and day, and I certainly learned to think a great deal of the Weavers. I was always happy to see Sister Weaver many years later.

The rain continued that fall. Melba and I used to tie gunny sacks around our shoes or overshoes to wade in the mud. Sister Weaver cooked us good meals. It was the first time I ever tasted chocolate pie. I remember Bro. Weaver telling me he was related to the Clarks in Stirling - cousins or second cousins.

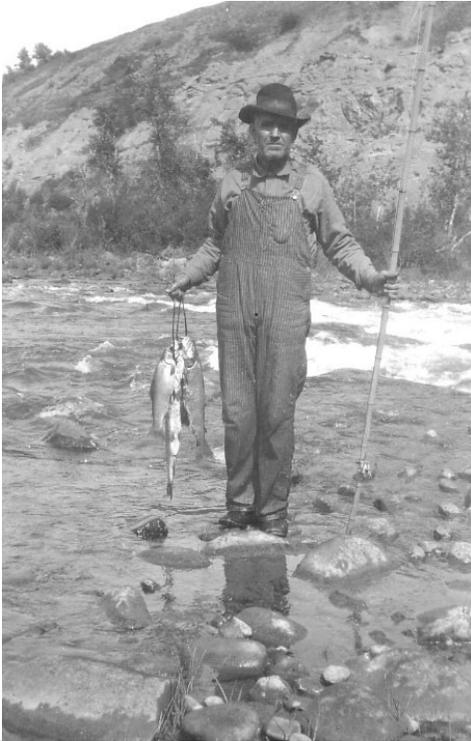
I also remember Sis. Collett and the house where she lived. Your genealogy is slightly wrong though, Don, as she was the mother of Sister Weaver by her first marriage when her name was Duncan. Bert Nilsson's wife Marriette was a Collett and was Sister Weaver's half-sister.

When Lucille Larson was living at the lodge, I had to go there occasionally for Relief Society. One day there was a Mr. and Mrs. Duncan there to visit her. They lived then in B.C., but originally, I think he published a paper at Banff called the Crag and Canyon. He was her mother's brother, I think.

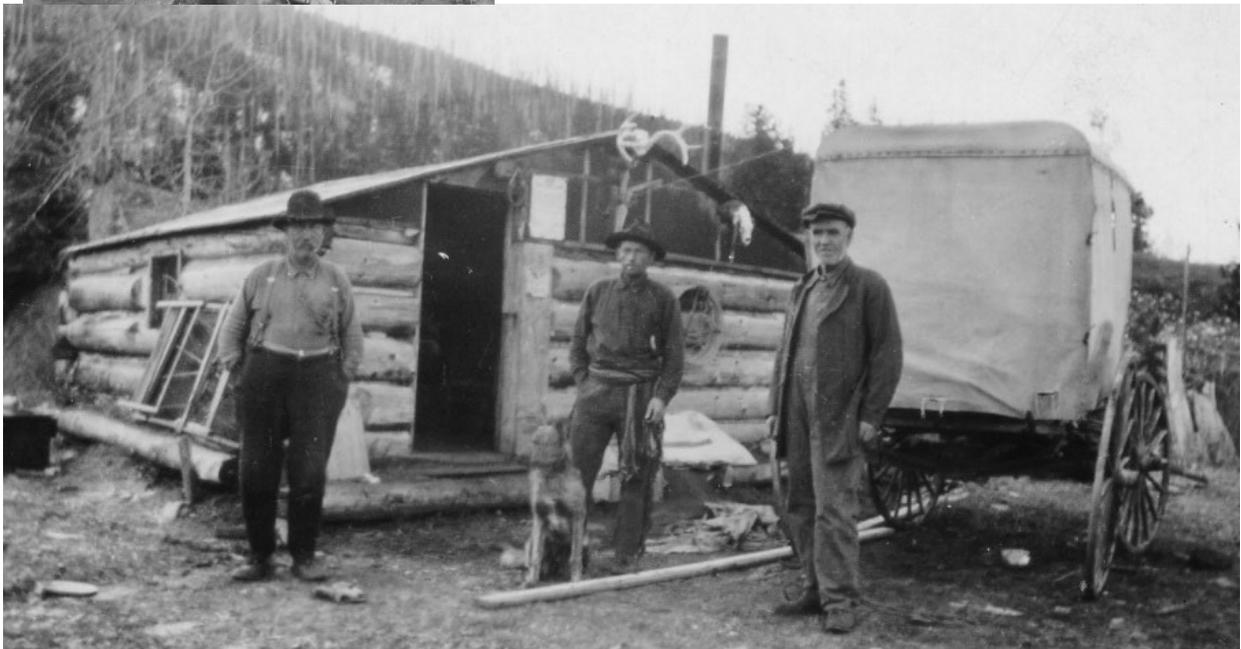
With love, Kay and Velma

Photo below: Lucille and Maggie in front; l-r rear: Allen, Duncan, Jim, Frank
Picture likely taken at the time of the funeral of Brian Meldrum



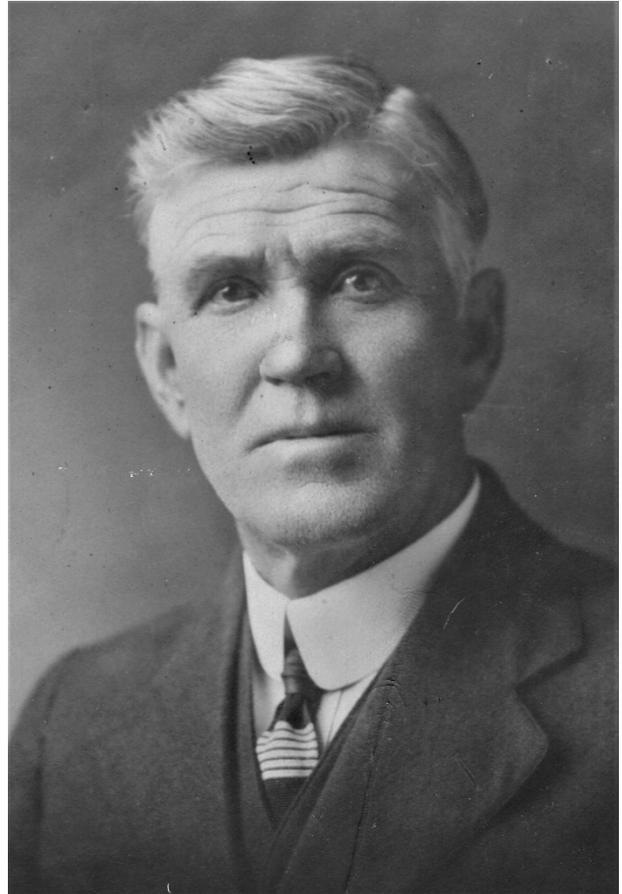


Time out for fishing – and the old fishing camp:





The child in Riley's arms is likely the first son of Lucille and Ross Larson, Harry Ross Larson, born in 1922. Riley was still in good health at that time.



More from Don Nilsson:

I often look back to the time when Riley was working with the scouts. I don't know what kind of a rifle he had, but apparently it used a heavy bullet - but not the high velocity of present-day shells. I remember him telling us after the gun was fired you could set the gun down almost before the bullet struck. He had a lot of talent when it came to supervising young boys. It has been a lot of years since all this took place, yet each time we pass the old Weaver farm and look at the home you can't help but think of the history that was part of what still remains. The buildings were about half a mile up in the field but several years ago one of my boys and myself called there. They are empty now, but the old farm home was still in quite good condition. I don't know why such things bring a feeling of sadness but we often look back and wish we had known how to help such special people in their struggle to survive. Those were hard times in many ways but I think neighbors meant much more to each other. Maybe they needed each other more then.

When I was young and the Church sponsored the M.I.A. track meets Allen participated in some of the events and your father spent a lot of time developing the talents of the young people. I remember that he was very talented at painting. I have wondered if any of them [paintings] had been kept by

the families here or rather at Raymond. A few of them were hung in the school rooms. I'm quite sure we looked at some of them at Lucille's place.

December 1986

When I was young it seemed natural to expect some of the family would stay with the farm, there are very few places that any of the original family still operate. I think I told you that on the mile of road where the Weaver farm was, there were four sets of farm buildings where families grew up. We drive that road occasionally and since meeting you and Jane [Weaver Toronto] I wish that we had known the family better. Those were hard years, not much money and some dry years when almost nothing was raised. As young kids growing up, I don't think we realized it was hard times. We had never known anything else. I'm sure buying land at just a few dollars per acre was as difficult as it is in present times paying several hundred dollars per acre. During our farming life irrigation water was controlled by ditches, so wasn't too expensive. Now it is done with sprinkler systems which required large and expensive pumping equipment. The man that owns the Weaver farm now said the irrigation cost more than the land.

I can't help but wonder if some of the families are watching over the place. It's about the only farm with the original buildings intact. At times it seems like it would be good to go back and re-live those years. The 20's and 30's were hard years. Some disastrous dry years and years of grasshoppers, cutworms and crop-eating caterpillars... The small farms are a thing of the past which to me at least it seems rather sad.



Temple View Cemetery, Raymond, Alberta, Canada

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Sources:

ⁱ It occurs to me that my father, Henry Duncan Weaver, was likely named after this Henry, his father's late brother.

ⁱⁱ J. Patrick Wilde, *Treasured Tidbits of Time, an Informal History of ... The Bear Lake Valley*; p. 8

ⁱⁱⁱ Letters of Donald Nilsson: as written to the Toronto family and the Shaeffer family 1980-1988; Family History Library call number film #1597826, item 10.

^{iv} Transcription of letter in possession of the editor; original sent to his daughter Lauryl Weaver McMullin.