

CLARENCE GATES & ORA LENA (CAMPBELL) GATES

Submitted by Lucille Balfour - 20 Feb 2003

Our Aunt Lena- really Ora Lena- was born October 7, 1878 near Kansas City, Missouri. She was the oldest of John W. and Sarah Lucy Ford Campbell's five children. We only saw her a few times in our lives but she was always a presence there. She and Mom wrote often and she wrote poetry for us girls. She was Dad's sister but it was Mom that did the writing to keep us in touch with her and her husband, Clarence Gates. Dad didn't write the letters but he told us many stories about her.

I remember her as being a tiny woman, barely five feet tall, and slim. She and Clarence lived on a farm in Oklahoma near the Texas border. Their mailing address was Randlett, OK but they did most of their shopping in Burkburnett, TX, across the border and just six miles south of the farm.

Clarence was also a Missourian , born in St. Louis, 28 Apr 1876. He, with his mother Elizabeth Duvall Gates, had gone to Oklahoma and filed on a homestead , probably in 1907 since she was granted a patent for the land in 1912. Aunt Lena went to Oklahoma from Kansas City in September of 1908 and she and Clarence were married November 11, 1908, in Lawton Apparently they had known each other for many years . I found Clarence, his mother and grandmother all living in Lena's grandmother, Susan Campbell

Wright's household in the 1889-1891 Kansas City, city directory. Lena's family lived next door.

They never had any children and his mother lived with them much of their married life. His father had died when he was a small boy.

Dad said Aunt Lena had been married before and divorced after a short time. I found a record of her marriage to Thomas Carlisle, 2 Mar 1899. They are in the 1900 Kansas City, MO census and he was listed as being a millwright. I haven't looked for the divorce.

Dad told us that she liked to race in her yellow wheeled buggy and would challenge all comers. He said that about the time she was married the first time she had a buggy accident and was badly injured. He believed that to be the reason she couldn't have children.

She must have had a job in an office at some time because I have a picture of her with an office staff of several young women and two men. She had written on the back about one of the men kidding her about being so small.

I don't know what was going on in 1918- other than WWI- but they showed up in Portland where Lena's parents and two brothers were living. Clarence had a job as a streetcar conductor. I don't know

how long they stayed in Portland but they eventually went back to the farm and stayed all during the Depression. In 1935 Aunt Lena came to Montana to see us. I have snapshots taken at that time.

Both of my sisters had more contact with Aunt Lena and Uncle Clarence than I did. When Virginia was ten years old she was slow to recuperate after a bout with scarlet fever. Mom wasn't very healthy either after being cooped up as nurse for the three of us who strung out having the disease into a six week stint. In March of 1937 the folks decided Mom and Virginia should go to Aunt Lena's in hopes that they would get their health back. I think they were glad to have a little girl around and were very good to her. Uncle Clarence even borrowed a Shetland pony for her to ride. When Dad, Avril and I got down there at the end of May they were already harvesting the wheat and Uncle Clarence had a deal with Virginia, paying her a pittance to shock the bundles. I doubt she managed to earn very much because those bundles were heavy. I know because I was three years older and I didn't find it an easy job. At that time the wheat grew at least four feet tall. Some of the neighbor kids took Virginia to school at least once. She was only in the fifth grade and she was able to do better in arithmetic than the eighth graders, she said. I guess that shouldn't be surprising, though, because the teacher had only gone through the eighth grade herself.

In 1942, Avril decided to go visit Aunt Lena and Uncle Clarence. She had been working at the local hamburger stand- The Question Mark- so she saved her money and took the train to Oklahoma. The one thing I remember her telling me about that visit was that Aunt Lena wouldn't let her get in touch with a couple of Anaconda boys she knew that were at the air base at Wichita Falls- which was just across the Texas border. Aunt Lena didn't think it was appropriate for a girl to be seeking out the soldiers! I wonder if she recognized that Avril was a bit boy-crazy? It was also while Avril was there that I got married - and in such a hurry (the groom came home on leave, expectantly) that she couldn't get home for my wedding. She felt left out, I think.

They sold the farm shortly after WWII and drove to Montana to see us. I can imagine Clarence's panic when he had to drive over the mountains. He had been a "flatlander" most of his life and considered the Wichita Mountains mountains. We thought they were mole-hills.

They moved to Iowa Park, Texas after they retired from farming where Clarence died of a myocardial infarction on 5 Aug 1954. He was 78 years old.

Aunt Lena stayed on in Iowa Park for several years, living by herself. She seemed to have had several good friends who kept an eye on her. She usually had a little dog- a Boston bull Terrier, as I remember, to keep her company.

Aunt Lena was a staunch Southern Bap-

tist and as such alcohol was a no-no in her book. It tickled us all when in one of her letters she told Mom about a new tonic the doctor had prescribed to help increase her appetite- it was called Mogen David!

As much as Dad complained about his older siblings being too bossy and trying to "run him" he still seemed to feel close to Aunt Lena. She told Virginia that he was a "spoiled brat" so maybe being a couple of thousand miles apart made them get along better. It isn't unusual for the youngest to be "spoiled" I suppose, when the next oldest is eight years his senior.

Aunt Lena finally had to go to a Nursing Home in Electra, Texas and died there on my birthday, 12 Dec 1959. She also died of a myocardial infarction. She was 81 years old. She and Uncle Clarence are buried in Temple, Oklahoma.

Lucille Campbell Balfour 2/3/03

These are the only poems that she wrote that I have been able to find.

She came to Montana about 1935 and wrote this while she was with us.

We three girls are her nieces and Jackie was a three year old son of our very good friends the MacFarlands.

I know a little girl named Virginia
Her blue eyes and happy smile
Surely will win you
Her dimples come and go
Oh, she is a dear little girl to know
Avril is another little girl I love
Her brown eyes sparkle and snap
With her little bobbed head
In an old faded cap
and her cheeks so rosy and red
Lucille is another one I love
Her blue eyes sparkle and shine
For all she has a happy smile
And is always good and kind.
Jackie is the cutest boy
I've seen in many a moon
His eyes are pool's of heaven's blue
His hair is like spun gold
The only trouble is, he will grow up too soon

She wrote this one for a friend , Mrs. Officer , who lived in Fresno and was homesick for Oklahoma. Lena told her she was silly! It sounds like Lena had lived in Fresno at one time.

(no title)

I want to go back to Fresno
To the land where the fig tree grows
Where the poppy blooms in the springtime
Where there is no cold wind or snow

Where the mocking birds in the branches
of the tall eucalyptus tree
Where the perfume of roses mingles
With the air from the deep, salty sea.
Where the grand old palms will hide me
From the rays of a red hot sun
(for it does get hot in Fresno)

But who would live where there wasn't a sun?
So you just,
Let the turkeys and the chickens
All rustle or go to the dickens
Stay where you are
You're happier by far
Than running from sand storms and blizzards.

This one sounds like the never ending chores of a farmer's wife.

Just One of Those Days

There is so much to do today
Do hope I won't go crazy
I must be getting very slow
Or maybe I'm just lazy

I'll have to wash the dishes
And I want to go to "Burk"
I need to wash my hair
and I want to go to "Kirks"

There's the separator to clean
And there's hurning to do
There's the ashes to take out
My! but things look blue.

There's the house to clean
But there's that coat to finish
I want to make a pie
But I'd better cook some spinach.

There's the kitchen floor to mop
And chicken house to clean
There's some mending to be done
And CD said "cook some beans"

There's Bobby bird to feed
And I need to clean the lamps
And CD wants a button sewed
On a pair of his old pants.

I'd like to fly away today
Where there's not a thing to do
Where I could just sit and sit and sit
And talk and talk and talk to you

Oklahoma

That's the land for me
Where the skies are bluer
Where friends are truer
Where the cotton and the corn
Are waiting every morn
For the rain that never comes
In time

Where the sun shines the brightest
And our hearts beat the lightest
Till the peaches and the pears
are sending up their prayers
For the rain that never comes
In time.

Where the birds sing the sweetest
Where the dust gets the deepest
And the onions and the beans
Are pleading so it seems
For the rain that never comes
In time

Where the wind blows the strongest
Where the days seem the longest
Where the weeds grow the highest
And the ground gets the dryest
While waiting for the rain that never comes
In time

Where the owls hoot the loudest
Where man can be the proudest
'Til he sees his oats and wheat
All wilting at his feet
While waiting for the rain that never comes
In time.

Where the coyote gaunt and gray
Calls his mate at close of day
Where the thunder rolls and crashes
And the lightening flames and flashes
All signals, for the rain that never comes
In time.