

THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 33

OCTOBER 2022

NUMBER 4



Wednesday evening, October 12th, the Historical Society met in the Library's Meeting Room for its Annual Soup Supper. A delicious meal was enjoyed and followed by a video presentation of the 2013 Cemetery Walk, including presentations of the lives of Hugh Seed, Andrew Walmsley, James Brooker, Larry MacPhail, Lucille Bauer, Dr. Daniel Deming, Belle and Alfred Knapp, and Cora and James Purdy.

What's In A Name?

In 1885 Curtis W. McPhail the son of Scottish immigrants living in Caro loaded up a sleigh full of salable goods, drove it to Cass City, and opened a store in a building on the Northwest corner of Main and Seeger Streets. Shortly thereafter he built a new building across the street to the east and opened a bank—the Cass City State bank, the first bank in town.



Cass City State Bank

Curtis married Catherine Ann MacMurtree, and they lived in an apartment above the bank. Their first son, Leland Sanford McPhail was born there in 1890.

Catherine's parents were also born in Scotland and emigrated to Ontario, Canada. It's not known what happened to them as Catherine became an orphan at the age of four. She went to live with her aunt and uncle, the Dougald

McIntyres, in Sanilac County. When she got older she went to live with a sister in St. Louis Mo. where she finished her education. At some time she met and became close friends with Leland Sanford's wife, Jane Sanford. It must have been a mother and daughter kind of relationship as Jane was older than Catherine. She returned to Sanilac County where she taught school until she met and married Curtis. They named her first son after Jane Sanford's husband, Leland Sanford.

Leland Sanford became an important and wealthy man. A trained lawyer, he moved to California during the gold rush era. He began in the mercantile business and then invested in railroads. He served as a U.S. Senator and as California's governor. He became president of the railroad that built the tracks over the mountains to Utah where he was honored to ceremoniously drive the last (golden) spike that joined the east coast to the west coast by railroad. Leland and his wife, Jane donated the funds to establish Sanford University in memory of their only son, Leland Sanford, Jr., who died as a teenager from typhoid fever leaving no one to carry on the Sanford name.

From the beginning Leland McPhail was known as Larry.

He went to school at the



Leland, Catherine & Curtis McPhail

Staunton Military Academy in Virginia. He then attended Beloit College in Wisconsin for his freshman year where he played both football and baseball. He enrolled in law school at the University of Michigan but dropped out due to some physical problem with his eyes. He enrolled in George Washington University in Washington, DC, where he graduated with a law degree at the age of twenty.

Larry changed the spelling of his last name from McPhail, to MacPhail thinking that Mac stressed his Scottish heritage. He was proud of his heritage perhaps considering the history of Scotsmen like Sir William Wallace (Braveheart) who fought bravely for Scotland's independence. Wallace challenged his country's fighting men—" **I am William Wallace**

and I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny! You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are! What will you do without freedom? YOU WILL FIGHT!"

After graduating Larry practiced law for a short time and was involved in various business ventures including a large department store in Nashville, Tennessee.

When the First World War broke out Larry enlisted, and rose quickly to the rank of Captain of an artillery firing battery. He and his men fought in the Argonne Forest in Northern France where



World War 1 Artillery

he was wounded and gassed, but recovered. He was offered a promotion to the rank of Major but refused it to stay with the men in his firing battery.

After the war his former commander, Col. Luke Lea and six other officers and enlisted men from Tennessee decided to travel to Holland where they would kidnap Kaiser Wilhelm II who was living there in exile, and bring him to trial for war crimes. They talked Larry into joining them because Larry could speak both German and French and could get by in Dutch and Belgian. The group succeeded in getting into the castle and cutting the phone wires, but a servant trying to make a call discovered the plot and warned, the Dutch police who were on their way to arrest them. They had to drive at night with their lights out racing ahead of gun fire to the Belgian boarder to escape capture.

During their way out of the castle Larry pocketed a royal ash tray which he cherished as proof of their having been there.

In 1930 an option to buy the Columbus, Ohio Redbirds minor league baseball team was offered. Larry bought it and began his career in professional baseball. He brokered sale of the team to the St. Louis Cardinals as a farm club. He built a new stadium installed it with lights, and promoted specials such as season tickets and Lady's Day. Attendance at one point exceeded that of the Cardinals.

In 1933 the Cincinnati Reds was sold to the Crosley Radio Family and they hired Larry to be the general manager. Larry again worked on building the team and installed lights that introduced night baseball in the major leagues. He got President Roosevelt to turn the switch for the first major league night game. Larry understood that working people couldn't afford to take an afternoon off from work to attend a ball game, but it became a controversial issue. In 1937 Larry left the Cincinnati Reds but it is believed that he paved the way for the Reds to win the pennant in 1939 and 1940.

In 1939 Larry was called to the Brooklyn Dodgers who were in dire financial straits. One of Larry's successful traits was his ability to recruit the right people and demand their best. He hired Leo Durocher as the manager and Red Barber to announce the games. He instructed Red, **"You know this business better than anybody. You are close to it. You have to talk in a microphone immediately. You have no eraser. Your words must be now. I want the truth about my team told to the public. If you see any of my players dogging it and needs to be burned—then, by God, burn them!"**

Broadcasting the games taught the public all the details of the game of baseball and probably did a lot to make it the National Passtime. The Dodgers won the pennant in 1941.

Larry entered the army for the second time as war broke out again for world war II. He held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and served under the Under Secretary of War, Robert Patterson doing public relations work for the war effort.



Col. MacPhail

After the war Larry returned to baseball. He and two other men bought the New York Yankees and Larry became the president. He introduced televised baseball. The Yankees won the World Series in 1947 and Larry retired from the game as he promised his wife that he would.

Larry was one of the greatest innovators in baseball, and he had to battle resistance at every stage. Broadcasting would limit attendance, and batters could only see the top of the ball under lights, etc. Larry's Scottish temperament unleashed by a drink or two made him sometimes loved, but sometimes hated. In spite of all the controversy over his character he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1998 after he had passed away in 1975.

Larry probably didn't realize that Mc is just an abbreviated Mac, and that Mac means "the son of". Mac was added to names when surnames became required for tax purposes. Sometime in the past Larry had a grandfather named Paul. The meaning of the name of Paul is "small". It seems some names can be a challenge to live up to them, and others challenge to overcome them.

Larry is the highest ranking soldier in the Elkland Cemetery. He is buried there with his parents, Curtis and Catherine.