



A Service of Dedication ***at the Memorial of John and Elizabeth Dipple*** ***and John Nicholas Dipple***

Rev. Stefan M. Jonasson
Sanford Cemetery
Thursday, September 10, 1998

In his book *Blood and Belonging*, Canadian historian Michael Ignatieff writes of his experiences returning to the small village where his family had dwelt before fleeing to Canada in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Despite the enormous changes that had occurred during the intervening seventy years, he experienced “an eerie sense of familiarity” as he encountered landmarks known to him only from photographs he had seen in childhood. Traces of his family remained in the form of faint memories and decaying buildings. In the church that had been built at the initiative of his great-grandfather, his ancestors were named and he prayed alongside the descendants of their neighbours. Afterward, he was taken by the priest to the white marble marker of his great-grandparents’ grave where together they sang the ‘hymn of memory’, after which the priest blessed the graves and left Ignatieff alone with a candle. “Nations and graves. Graves and nations,” he writes. “Land is sacred because it is where your ancestors lie. Ancestors must be remembered because human life is a small and trivial thing without the anchoring of the past.”

It is our recognition of this truth – that a place is sacred because it is where our ancestors lie – that has brought us here today to dedicate this memorial to the lives and legacy of those members of the Dipple family who lie buried in this holy ground. In gathering here today, we name them once more – John and Elizabeth, along with their son, John Nicholas – and we sing in our hearts a hymn of memory, recalling for ourselves the stories about them that continue to live on and, in some measure, take on lives of their own. While it is these three that we especially remember today, we also call to mind John and Elizabeth’s other children – William and Charles, Henry and Andrew, Mary Ann and Anna, Adeline and Alice, Georgiana and Lovina – for family is woven of many strands into one seamless garment.

While the Dipple name is no longer to be found among the residents of the Sanford area, and while the memory of its presence here slowly fades, it can be fairly said that this community has been forever affected by the fact that our family once dwelt in this place. The fact that it remains the eternal resting place of our ancestors – an anchor to our collective past – means that Sanford will continue to be, in some small measure, a part of what we call home.

John and Elizabeth Dipple had already entered upon their sixth decade of life when they came with their children to this area. Their story is a familiar one to those who know the social history of the last century, when large farm families migrated to new homes in search of land to accommodate their growing numbers. John and Elizabeth's journey to Manitoba came at the end of this era, before the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the present century led families to leave their rural homes for the cities. But while their story can be understood in this larger social context, it is special to us because it is *our* story – a family myth of origin and purpose.

Here they built a new life for themselves and their children through hard work and honest effort, building prosperous farms and happy homes. They immersed themselves in the life of the larger community, giving of their time and resources to the many worthy activities and institutions that make life worthwhile.

A citizen by choice on both sides of the international boundary, John Dipple served as a road overseer, school trustee and township supervisor while in North Dakota. In Manitoba, he was the first chairman of the Prairie Centre School District. When we recall that different attitudes prevailed during the first decade of the century, it is surprising and rather refreshing to note that the Prairie Centre School dispensed with all religious exercises during the time that he was chairman, adopting a thoroughly secular approach to learning. And while John devoted his time and energy to farming and community service, Elizabeth raised her children – a large brood – to honourable adulthood. Motherhood on the frontier was not for the faint-hearted, yet Elizabeth fashioned a frontier household from the ground up – not once but twice.

The family's fondness for music was evident in the fact that the possessions they brought to their new home included an organ, a couple of violins, and harmonicas. And, in due course, the district's first Edison Victrola was added to their parlor.

The family endured hardship and loss, including the tragic death of the son who now lies with them and of three other children during their tender years. At the same time, they knew joy and prosperity in this land of certain abundance. What remain for us are the fragmentary stories of their lives. May we ever tell these tales to one another, that their lives may be made real for us in our collective memory of their words and deeds.

In dedicating this memorial, we remember the character and values of our ancestors – the qualities of industriousness and honesty, sacrifice and service – and we commit ourselves to embodying these values in our own lives. We remember our ancestors' passion for the highest accomplishments of human culture – educated minds, and souls attuned to music and literature – and we dedicate ourselves to cultivating these fruits of the spirit. Most importantly, perhaps, we remember that they nurtured a sense of family that transcends time and circumstance – that spans the generations and brings us together in times of need and in times of joy – and we dedicate ourselves to nurturing that sense of family for our children and grandchildren and the generations yet to come.

Act of Dedication

We declare this stone to be well and truly placed. May it endure the wind and the rain, the sunshine and the snow, the hot summer days and the cold winter nights. May it long stand in silent witness to the lives of those who rest beneath it and to the contributions they made when they too walked upon this earth.

We dedicate this memorial in tribute to the lives of John and Elizabeth Dipple and their son John Nicholas. And we dedicate ourselves to living in such a way that we honour the best that was in them and enrich the legacy we have inherited.

May this place be a shrine for the human spirit in its grandeur, where we can lift up our souls in an anthem as a gift to heaven; for we are children of the infinite; in us is the breath of God. Remembering the excellence of our ancestors, we would work with courage and compassion, hope and vision to build the nobler world that yet shall be.

Prayer

Eternal God, our dwelling place in all generations, we would renew in this hour all fair and noble memories, all high and holy traditions of the days that are no more. We bless you for all unknown and humble people who were faithful in their day and place, and whose forgotten labors have made the earth more beautiful for those who follow them. Give us the grace to live worthily and to hold our inheritance as a sacred trust, that we may leave it with increase to those who shall come after us.

With reverent hearts we remember all who have lived valiantly and died bravely. May we take example from those who have gone before, and so live that those who are yet to come may share the blessings that we have received, and find them strengthened and illumined by our steadfast loyalty and good works. Amen.

Benediction

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Amen. (Philippians 4:8)