

A Biography of Sarah Campbell Student at Poltalloch School

Sarah Campbell was born on 16 January 1837, the fourth of seven children of John Campbell and his wife Isobel McLean. Sarah and her siblings were raised at the Baroile farmstead in Glassary Parish. They were one of eight families living in the Upper Rhudle area at the time of the 1841 census. Her father worked as an agricultural labourer. The farmstead, built on a hill overlooking Rhudle Burn south of Kilmartin, is now abandoned. The stones used in the homes were taken to build the bridge at the end of Rhudle road; no evidence of the original site remains except for a small walled area.

Ten years later, in the 1851 census, Sarah was 14 years old and living with her family at the Auchachrome farmstead in the hills above Slockavullin in Kilmartin Parish. Her father was one of four tenant farmers living on the farmstead of 87 people. Sarah, being of school age, attended the Poltalloch

566 ARGYLESHIRE.
A girl school of industry has lately been established by Mr Malcolm of Poltalloch, within a mile of Kilmartin, for the benefit of the children of the tenants and people on his estate. The children of some of the people from the neighbouring properties are also allowed the benefit of attending. In addition to the ordinary elementary branches of education, the children are instructed in all the useful varieties of needle-work; knitting, laundry work, &c.

From Statistical Accounts of Scotland, 1834-45

School of industry for girls, where she obtained her basic education and learned skills, such as needlework, that were designed to support the operations of the nearby Poltalloch House. In 1854, at the age of 17, she stitched a sampler at school that today hangs in the dining room of her great-

granddaughter's home in Novi, Michigan. An almost identical sampler made by fellow student Christian McVean – Christian was sometimes used as a female name – is still in the possession of the school. Sarah's sampler has the initials of her parents on either side of the Poltalloch School name, and the initials of her siblings below.

Sarah's father passed away two months after she completed the sampler. He was 58. Sarah's oldest brother, Neil, erected a monument to his father in the Kilmartin church cemetery. Though we don't know what killed her father at a relatively early age, a local history buff mentioned that diseases ran rampant through the area farm communities. A neighbor of the Campbells at Auchachrome died a year earlier of cholera.



Sarah Campbell Sampler, 1854



Campbell House near Alvinston, Ontario

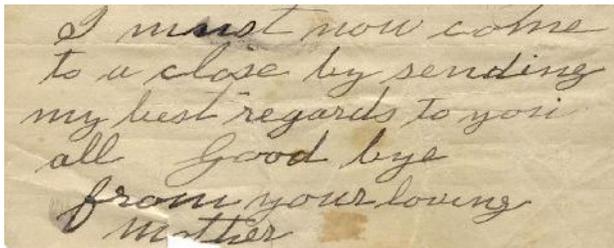
Within at least three years of her father's death Sarah emigrated with her brother Neil, her mother, and a younger brother to Canada. Neil bought farm land in 1857 in southwestern Ontario, near the present-day town of Alvinston. The 1861 census showed the family living in a log house: 31-year-old Neil, 24-year-old Sarah, 20-year-old Donald, and their 60-year-old mother. A house still stands on the site and is used as a farm home museum on the A.W. Campbell Conservation Area grounds.

Sarah met a farmer, John, who lived about two miles away,

and in 1862, when she was 25, they were married. John Livingston's parents were from the Craignish and Glassary parishes of Argyll and also lived for a time in Kilmartin Parish before emigrating to Canada in 1820. There was a strong Scottish presence in southwestern Ontario. The names in the area's Canadian censuses read much like the names in the Highland censuses of the time.

Sarah Campbell and John Livingston raised a family of ten children on their farm. Their second youngest child was our grandmother, Sarah Campbell Livingston.

John Livingston died in 1895, leaving his wife Sarah a widow. Two years later she moved to Detroit, Michigan, a thriving industrial city a hundred miles to the west. The 1900 census shows her living there at age 63, with two of her daughters and three of her orphaned grandchildren, no doubt to provide better job opportunities for the daughters than farming could offer.



From Sarah Campbell letter of 1903

In 1903 she visited her family back in Canada and wrote to her daughters about the trip. She related how she visited one of her sisters and brother-in-law, who loaned her the use of their horse, Nelle, on a dark, rainy, blowing night so she could visit the Campbell home. Although the letter has no punctuation and occasionally uses phonetic spelling, it demonstrates that she obtained basic reading and

writing skills at her school back in Kilmartin that stayed with her for life. She adds a postscript to say "excuse me for mistakes," though over a hundred years later the letter is still clearly legible and understandable.

Sarah died in 1914 of "old age" at 77. She is buried beside her husband John in the Kilmartin Cemetery near Alvinston, Ontario. Her children settled in southwest Ontario; Detroit, Michigan; and Cleveland, Ohio. Her grandchildren spread as far south as Florida. And three of her great-grandchildren, who visited the Potalloch School in June, 2013, are living in Michigan and Arizona, with their families spread across various other states.

Sarah didn't forget her school in Kilmartin. She kept the sampler she made there throughout her life and she passed it down through her daughter's family. The effect that the teachers and school had on her were much like the sampler: they lasted a lifetime and still ripple through her extended family.



Sarah Campbell