The White House & Family Life.

After the fire in 1910 Jim MacDonald and Fanny, our grandparents, built the ‘White House’ on the corner of Minto and Duke Streets in Campbellton. It was one of the first houses completed after the fire to have electricity. Jim had his crew of men build it. It was a very large house and was always painted white, hence the name, White House.

The stone wall that enclosed the lawn of the White House was a very substantial effort since Minto Street was much lower that the White House foundation. Rather than having the lawn sloped, it was terraced in steps. It was also stepped on the Duke Street side. The boys who were home at the time created the terracing under the supervision of Cliff. Ron who was about 10 years old, and George who would have been 8, were given the job of hauling rock for the terracing from the edge of the river with a horse and wagon. They picked rock from behind what was Taylor's dry cleaning, just to the left of the present bridge, downstream to Andrew Street extension. The effort took one complete summer. The size limitations on the rock caused no end of bickering between the boys. There was a common driveway on the west side of the White House and shared with the Miller’s house and then Fawn Ingraham’s house.

There was an L-shaped extension on the house and the offices were in it. That’s where Jim had his office before he died and Cliff took it over. There was a door you entered from the verandah into the waiting room and two doors off of it. One was to Cliff’s office and the other to a hall leading to the kitchen. Off that hall to the left was Uncle Jack Wyer’s office and to the right a laundry room and then straight ahead to the huge kitchen. There were always 2 women working as servants – there were a lot of people in the house, the 10 children and then always, always guests.

Burns described the layout of the house. The six younger boys all slept in the bedrooms in the L shaped wing above the offices. In the main house at the front was a big master bedroom that was later rented out to George Mackenzie who was in charge of the railway stock and engines and roundhouses from Campbellton all down the Gaspé coast.

Beside that big bedroom was another with a fireplace in it that Stella occupied. The 3rd floor of the house was at that time a big open space that Cliff used as his gym and it had a bar and rings and he’d work out up there. Later it was finished with bedrooms.

The basement was full of hardwood slab wood for the furnace and it had a big room, 12’x12’, with shelves where supplies were kept. There were barrels of Gravenstein apples from NS, barrels of molasses always with a cast iron tap, canned goods and preserves and pickles of all sorts.

When Nita and Stella went away to college or other study they always brought back friends with them and their mother never objected. Ron studied medicine a couple of years at McGill and when he came home he brought a friend. One of them was from the Fiji Island.

The dining room was very large and it was nothing to have as many as 16 people for dinner. The dining room was all paneled up ¾ of the way with a plate rail. There was a door
that went to the pantry and from the pantry to the Kitchen. There were sliding doors that opened from the dining room into a large living room with a fireplace, a piano and other musical instruments, and big leather covered armchairs.

When you came in the front door the living room was on the right and on the left was the parlor that was wood paneled and the doors were kept shut and only opened when the minister came or other important guests.

Later on, Grammy Mac decided to improve the White House and other properties around the whole block by putting in concrete sidewalks and planting poplar trees. When the men were planting the Carolina Popular they sprinkled oats in the hole because they said it helped the trees ‘take’ better. The White House was on the corner of Minto St. [that cut in from Roseberry St where Eaton’s Department store used to be and the movie theatre was] and Duke Street that ran all the way through town and ended at Yorston’s farm. The INR that came out of the Tobi que Road area and crossed Sugar Loaf St. and just in that area there was the INR station and turn table. When the INR was taken over by the Grand Trunk railway they shut that station down and rerouted it through Yorston’s farm and veered over and crossed the street and hooked up with the CNR west of the main station.

When George finished his degree in the late 1920’s he went back to Campbellton and articulated with Hugh Carr and lived in the house that was divided by then into apartments.

At dinner Cliff, as head of the household after his father died, sat at the head of the table and everyone minded their P’s and Q’s when he was there.

Every year their Uncle Dave Wyers came to visit them and brought bear steak. He was stout and snored very loud so you could hear him all over the house.

One time when Stella and Nita came home from University they had a big dance at the house and they danced all over the big verandas that went three quarters of the way around the house. Stella made a big cake for the party – chocolate – it was in a pan 3’x3’ and put in the basement ready to serve but neighbors kids got into it. Burns stressed many times that there were so many friends came to the house – he can’t remember a time when there weren’t any.

Burns describes salmon being salted – it would absorb tremendous quantities of salt and had to be soaked a lot before you could eat it. They also had salt cod with fried pork fat cubed and the rendered fat with fat pork chips poured over the potatoes. They also had salt herring that Grammy Mac really loved. Then they had moose meat – they’d separate the different muscles in the hind quarter and they had separate membranes on them and Grammy Mac would prepare a spiced mixture that was quite sweet and she’d soak the pieces of moose meat in that to preserve it and sometimes left it in to spice mixture to keep it. They very often had that for their evening meal and Burns really liked it.

Another item they had in their larder was headcheese. One of the women would put the whole head of a pig in a huge pot and boil it until the meat could be picked off it and left in the liquid, which would gel. Bread came up in the CNR train from Moncton or some other place along the way. It was shipped in 3-foot square boxes made of hardwood slats. In early days they used to keep birds, and meat and anything perishable in reused ‘bread boxes’, and buried in snow banks to keep it frozen. They’d also fill the boxes with salt salmon, salt herring and salt pork and mess pork. And they’d bring in Boston butt – the shoulder pork. On the weekend they
usually had a chicken, one would be got from a box and it would be roasted along with a pork roast.

Considering that there was not even radio in those days, it is likely that Nita who had gone to theatrical school in Boston, introduced the family to poetry reading, mostly poems of Robert Service [*The Cremation of Sam Magee*] and Henry Drummond [*Jean Batiste*] that had a pleasing meter and told a story. The whole family knew them and could recite many of their poems from memory.

In his tape recordings, Burns introduces the Kedgwick Bard who was the poet Clyde [or Claud] Hines. In his poems – he wrote in a similar meter as Robert W. Service and Kipling. One poem was about a cook who served a stew that was old and sour and all the men got sick and had diarrhea. Burns read a poem, probably by the Kedgwick Bard, titled ‘*To the skeleton found at 8-mile Gulch*’. It is on and is quite long and I did not take time to transcribe it. Notes with the poem say it was written around 1917 and it mentions kindly Jim MacDonald and his Depot Camp [at the Forks of Kedgwick]. Burns suggests that the poems of the Kedgwick Bard may have some historic value, mentioning as they document various places up the Kedgwick River.

The White House burned down around 2010.