

FAMILIAR



bpNichol

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drove into the country for hours
roads we'd never been before

shelburne

grand valley

ellie & me
driving down till we came to
nichol township
wellington county

& i thot
"i am home"

not knowing where i was
or where home might be

my great aunt maggie
married four times

the first was a man died of tb
his name was max tease

the second (a butcher) shot himself
accidentally

& when she met Merry hell well
he was number three

& swept her off her feet

it was almost a year before he ran away
took all the money she'd managed to save
& left her

at least he didn't die

i can almost hear maggie heaving a sigh of relief

then stepping out the door
into the arms of number four

june 12 1911

walter workman
wife & two children

1911 broke 3 acres cropped none
1912 broke 9 acres cropped 3
1913 broke 11 acres cropped 12
1914 broke 17 acres cropped 23

worked on a farm south of viscount to support himself

under livestock listed
1 cow

my father was raised in goodwater
faded photo of him standing by a car
an old fur coat
he looks 15
his sister marie is at the wheel
his father beside her

the street is dusty

the land is flat

somewhere below his feet
two oceans meet
one of salt water
one of sweet

we know there are wells

in ten more years it will be 1929
shortly after that the drought
the good water dries up
noone eats well

he & my mother are married
their first child dies
they never manage to get her picture taken

none of this is there in the photo

it is so obvious his smiling face is unaware of history
the future force it was/is/will be

all my life having searched in the west
to discover the name in a book

robert nichol

1806

how he had owned two lots 6 & 7
6 concessions over from

yonge street
in the township of east gwillimbury
york county
& to know nothing more
is (as they say)
to find new mysteries in the east

(these lines stretch back farther than i remember
farther than i've been able to go

break awkwardly in the middle
like a poem

or a son
born at the wrong time

the workman & the nichol line
passing thru ontario
a half a century
before they finally met

in a hotel
on a corner
in plunkett)

robert nichol
came to america 1860
with his brothers john & hugh

started a flax mill
near the city of salem

& then

when the civil war was thru
went north
into ontario

did he know that a robert nichol had been thru there before

that in any history
there is nothing new

only a few things
rearranged

paths which cross

worlds (which grow smaller)

different points of view

like every other crazy robert nichol
going into something over his head

named a township after him
just because he'd been brock's friend

commissary in the war of blunders
one of the natives brock never trusted

driving his horse & carriage
thru the dark to lundy's lane

plunged over the bluffs at queenston
pulling everything down behind him

backing those idiots dickson and clarke
used him to rob the government blind

trying to be a man who spoke for
his people and his time

raised the question of immigration of
the government land preserve

fought the clergy reserves
sucked in again by speculators

sailed over the cliff walls
screaming lost in the falls' thunder

never stopped to wonder who his friends really were

picked him up off the shore &
laid him to earth

for what it's worth

did i tell you bout my uncle fred

fell

head over dead

into the paddle wheel of a mississippi steamer

or so it's said

never found a trace of his body

nobody knows for sure to this day

except to say he died

on that ship

on that night

who cares for history?

it is his story

or her story or

the story of someone

noone knows

& now that you know

what do you know?

questions

always it seems there are questions

once there was a man emigrated from england passed thru

ontario into minnesota married and raised some children

then was gored by a bull

that is history

that's how his story goes

name names
place places

put your history
in your head

bury the dead
with honour .

honour the living
with love

& when your time comes
it comes

when you are gone you are gone
& leave behind
a son or
a daughter or
noone



these poems from THE PLUNKETT PAPERS
were printed & bound up for friends
Christmas 1980 in an edition of 100
copies by Eleanor & bpNichol. this
is copy number UU & is for

Phyllis webb

Best, Ellie + bp

