



Clara Maclean (1872-1952)

Prominent minister's wife and mother of Norman MacLean, author of "A River Runs Through It." Clara was the rock that held the family together, an advocate for mission work, and the silent leader of the church.

- **182-Birth.** Clara was born August 17, 1872 in Chatham, Argenteuil, Quebec Canada. She was one of 12 children born to John and Cecilia Davidson of English/Irish descent.
- **1878.** Clara's family traveled by wagon and oxen to Manitoba to homestead. Her mother and sister were the first white woman and child born in the Manitoba township.
- **Education.** All Clara's brothers were given money for college but the girls were expected to marry. The Davidson girls bucked this expectation and were granted further education to become teachers. Clara's first teaching position was at Mowbray near the United States border.
- **1893-Marriage.** On August 1, 1893 Clara married John Norman Maclean a Presbyterian minister and ten years her senior. They moved to the United States following John's ministerial calling.
- **Children.** Clara and John had two sons: Norman (1902) and Paul (1906). Norman was a professor at the University of Chicago and an avid storyteller who wrote many short stories and books including *A River Runs Through It*. Paul was a journalist and worked for many noted newspapers. After hours, however, Paul was a lady's man, prankster, and night life carouser who was murdered in Chicago in 1938.
- **Epitome of 19th century women roles.** Clara stood quietly and steadfastly behind her husband. She always referred to him in public as Dr. Maclean. She raised her boys and kept house in an era of brooms, scrub brushes, and hand washing. Clara was 'stable boy' for a large succession of Chesapeake Bay retrievers which the Maclean men used for hunting. The Maclean men tended to 'forget' about the dogs' care until hunting season each year. Fly fishing consumed the men's free time with casting lessons conducted from the dock at the Seeley Lake cabin using Clara's metronome from her piano for the 'proper casting timing'.
- **Sundays.** Clara and John reserved Sundays entirely for religion and family. In the morning the boys went to Sunday school then to morning services to hear their father preach. In the afternoons the boys had to study and recite 'The Westminster Catechism' before they were allowed to go for a walk. In the evenings family Bible studies were held then off to evening services to hear their father preach again.
- **1908.** The MacLeans moved to Missoula, Montana. John became the minister of the First Presbyterian Church in 1909. They arrived in time to have 33 days straight of rain and witnessed the great Missoula flood. They witnessed the wash out of the original Higgins Avenue Bridge.
- Clara was determined to keep her boys from fighting as Missoula was a 'wild, fighting' town at that time and they had a tendency to be 'wild'. Rev. Maclean only became concerned if the boys lost a fight. Affection was never displayed in the Maclean household. The Rev. Maclean stated once how he hated to ride on the train as he would be required to kiss his wife in public prior to boarding. Clara had a special fondness for Paul due to his mischievous nature and happy go lucky attitude which was so different than the staunch order expected in the household.
- Clara tutored the children at home until 1913. School time was from 9am to noon. Each hour was divided into two parts: studying for 45 minutes in the room across from father's study then 15 minutes to recite to him their studies.
- Rev. Maclean conducted all sermons, baptisms, marriages, and burials in the church. All other church work was considered 'woman's work'. Clara tended her husband's flock by caring for the sick and needy, listening to their problems, visiting new members, running charities for the reservation tribes and running the Ladies' Aid, Christian Endeavor and Women's Guilds to instate mission work. She was also expected to sing each hymn seamlessly and louder than anyone else in the congregation.
- Every summer was spent at the log cabin built by Rev. Maclean at Seeley Lake MT. The logs used for this cabin were cut on one side of the lake and floated across to the family property. It remains a family gathering place to this day.

- **1952-Death.** July 13, 1952 in Missoula MT.

Contact the 1st Presbyterian Church in Missoula for more information on the MacLean family.