

Letter written about life of John Alexander McClung
Arenac County Scrapbook
Contributed by Bill Harrington

This copy contributed for use in the MIGenWeb Project. USGENWEB NOTICE: In keeping with our policy of providing free information on the Internet, data may be freely used by non-commercial entities, as long as this message remains on all copied material. These electronic pages may NOT be reproduced in any format for profit or presentation by other organizations.

Life of John Alexander McClung Or "A Preacher From The Rough"

Dear Cousin, (Note: We are not sure which cousin requested this autobiography. It was written in 1950.)

You said in one of your letters you would like me to write a synopsis of my life, but being so busy with life, I put it off, but now I am not able to be going on account of sickness so thought I would try and do what I can briefly. I was born on a farm about three miles south of Cayuga, Ontario, on the 30th of December 1883, The son of Robert James and Elizabeth McClung. At the age of one year my folks moved to Middleton Township in Norfolk County, Ontario. They lived on a rented farm for about four years then moved to Charlottesville Township where the land was very sandy and poor, but produced a meager living. I can recall how the sand would bank up along the fences so high we children would play on the banks in summer like we would on the snow banks in winter. All there would be of a stake and rider fence sticking out, would be the top rail and the stakes. I do not know if you would know, what kind of a fence that would be, but it is a crooked rail fence about five rails high and had two stakes at each corner put in the ground and crossed over the fence like this X at each corner, then another rail or two put on the crotch, this would both brace and tie the fence from blowing down.

After about four years we moved four miles north of Delhi which was a better part of the country. I was about nine years old. This was in Grover Cleveland's day when times were very hard in Canada as well as in the USA, butter was twelve cents a pound, eggs eight cents a dozen, potatoes ten cents a bushel if you could sell them at all. A great many times you would have to take it out in trade at the store as they would not pay cash.

After two years on this place, Mother's brother bought the farm we had first lived on when we came to Middleton Township and gave it to my Mother and Father if they would keep my grandmother and father and her younger sister. The sister had been struck on the head by a falling board when my uncle was building his barn, and her mind was affected the rest of her life, so she was quite a card at times.

I was twelve years old by then and was full of the old nick as a red headed Irishman could be at times. I was ready for a scrap any time, so my school mates called me "John L. Sullivan", after the prize fighter of those days. I also liked to tease my grandfather and get him angry then run away so he would chase after me. When I was about fourteen, Charlotte Gettas, who was my father's niece and her husband David Reed and family came to visit my Aunt Eliza Flood and held meetings in a near by Methodist Church. My parents were Presbyterians and we attended that church and Sunday school, yet I was

permitted to attend these meetings. One Sunday forenoon, though it was raining I walked about two miles with our neighbor's boy, in this service the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and I went to the alter and prayed till I felt the burden of my sinful life had rolled away, and I felt as light as a bird in the air, it seemed as if I was treading on air for about three weeks. I remember my first testimony, all I said when I rose to my feet was, "Praise the Lord". As time went on and the majority of the people were not spiritual minded, I died spiritually for the lack of some one to help me. I finally got away from the Lord altogether, yet his hand still followed me. I wandered for five years and again I felt the call of the Holy Spirit, my heart was melted up and I sought the Lord, but during these five years I went away to work and got among young men who drank and I got led into it.

After spending three summers on a farm working, I went into the blacksmith shop and learned that trade, and then I hired out to come to Michigan to work for a man who had been raised in the same locality I was. I forgot to say, that during the past few years, I felt my need of God's help at different times and could see that sin was getting the best of me. I resolved to turn over a new leaf and even joined the church hoping that would solve my problem, but found myself with a lack of strength to do the will of God as I should. So after going to Michigan to work, I found a group of Free Methodist people who were on fire for God. Being in the shop I met them real often. I found they had some thing more than I knew anything about, so I began to seek God again and found His grace sufficient to help me, and he took away the desire for the things of the world and I, like Paul, became a new creature, old things passed away and behold, all things became new!

During this time I became acquainted with the girl who later became my wife. I went back home to see my folks, then went to Niagara Falls to visit my mother's oldest brother, then to Chautauqua County, New York and in the grape belt. That fall I got work in Portland in a blacksmith shop for a man by the name of Livingston, who wanted to go to Colorado for his health and left me in charge of his business while he was gone. After his return I got work in another shop for a man by the name of Mattison, and worked there till I received a letter from the man in Michigan for whom I had worked. He was sick and wanted me to come back, which I did. I began to keep company with the girl previously mentioned and on May 10, 1905 Florence Ethel Mae Dorman became my wife. Our honey-moon was a trip to my wife's aunt, about five or six miles with a borrowed horse and buggy of the man I worked for.

After a short time we rented some rooms in the village of Snover up over a store. Our first furniture was a bed, table, one half dozen chairs, a cupboard made out of a dry goods box, a stove, and we were happy as could be. Needless to say, it was not the furniture that made us happy, but because we loved one another, and were both willing to sacrifice, and both belonged to the Lord.

Shortly after this I felt the call to preach the gospel, and like a great many others, began to make excuses, until I began to grow cold because of refusing to obey God. I tried running away in distant places to get work, and in each place was successful in securing work, but felt so uncomfortable on account of disobeying the Lord, that I could not stay.

I thought all the time I was hiding the call to preach, until one evening I went to a camp meeting among strangers, except the ones I went with, and during a testimony meeting I felt I should testify and thought I was careful not to uncover my secret, after the service, the preacher whom I had never met, came immediately to me and said, "say young man, haven't you a call to preach?" Of course I dare not lie or I would have grieved the Lord, so I had to say yes. Later at another camp meeting while at the alter of prayer the Lord laid it so heavy on my heart, that I told him I would, and the Blessing of the Lord fell on my soul until the whole camp felt it.

I went home from the camp and prayed over it and told the Lord I was ready, and if he wanted me to take that way in life, to open the doors and I would fill them. Needless to say, the doors were opened up before that week was gone and have been opening ever since. Shortly after this we moved to the town of Argyle, Michigan to work in a blacksmith shop. There was no holiness church and the Lord spoke to me and said, here is a good place to start prayer meetings. I sent and bought some song books and started in. The Lord opened the homes and hearts of that community and they turned out until the houses were filled to their capacity. There would be between forty and sixty there for meetings.

About one and a half years latter, I was hurt with a horse so I could not follow up the blacksmith trade. I can see the hand of the Lord working to get me out in a greater work. I went to the carpenter work, until I mastered it. I moved my family to Port Huron, Michigan where I worked and filled the open doors as they came along. About a year later, we were called to Lum and Burnside, Michigan, our first circuit. The two towns were nine miles apart, which I used to walk a greater part of the first year, after that the Lord provided' us with a horse and buggy. When we arrived on this circuit, we found eleven members and a new church in the making, but no parsonage or house to move our goods into. We stored them in the new church, still without doors or windows and we stayed with the members until we could rent a house, which we soon did. We used part of it for our services for a time. We finally got a better house to live in and were nearer the church. Our daughter, Beatrice Maude was born there, which made five children to support besides ourselves. The Lord supplied all our needs even though the members were poor. Here my trades came good. I did blacksmithing, carpenter work and plastering and brick work. After we finished this new church the second year, we were sent to a nearby circuit called Hadley, Brandon and Oxford Michigan, which was seventeen miles one way and had three preaching points. They asked, "how much of a family have you?" I told them I had five children, they said, "Oh," there is no use of you moving here, you will starve to death.

This was a very discouraging outlook, but knowing God was able to create worlds out of nothing, we packed our goods, loaded them in wagons and moved there. I have drove the thirty four miles, preached three times and came home with out receiving one penny to rub against another. Here again my trades the Lord gave me helped us out and he supplied all our needs. "To Him be all the Glory." While here, I was called to overhaul the parsonage at Davison, Michigan and built on two rooms, also a barn at Durand Michigan.

After two years here, we moved to Ontario and took a circuit one hundred twenty miles north of Sarnia. We spent two years here and enjoyed our work very much, found some very faithful pilgrims and saw some souls saved. Here another boy was born, named John Wesley. We then moved back to Port Huron, Michigan, where I again worked at my trades and preached at a country place called Kimball, also filled many other calls to preach in and around Port Huron, where I met up with some misunderstanding and suffered quite a set back with some higher ups of our church, which proved to be a great blessing to me and helped me to become more settled in the will of God than before, and again I can see the hand of the Lord in this to help me to grow in grace.

While living here another girl came into our home, named Lottie Faye, which made seven children. Before leaving this field I was called to build a new church in Marine City, Michigan about twenty five miles south. At Kimball we saw the work grow from a congregation of six or seven to around twenty seven and thirty. One family was saved, who have stood true and has been a great help to the work in that place ever since. From here the conference sent us north to another very weak circuit with only three members, which was called Standish and White Feather, Michigan. Again no place to live but three small rooms back of an old hall where we worshipped which was much too small to house our family and hold services. We rented a large house in Bay City, Michigan, thirty two miles away. Here I was called again to go to Midland, Michigan, twenty miles west and build another church for the pastor, Rev. V. E. Rensbury. I also got work in Bay City, enough to support my family in good shape and drive to my appointments over the week end. For two years we made this drive and the work steadily built up and at the end of the two years we were able to rent a house in Standish, Michigan and move on in our field. We spent five years on this circuit and saw it grow from three members to twenty six in full and eighteen probationers making forty in all. We also built a new church here. We were much encouraged. While here I was stricken with typhoid fever and was laid up nine weeks. I left this field that fall, very weak in body, to our next circuit twenty six miles to another county seat called West Branch, Michigan. Here the northern air and healthful water proved beneficial for me and I soon became very strong again. We spent four years in this place, which became a very strong society. Then we were returned to Standish for another year, then to Maple Ridge, Michigan. We stayed there three years and built a church in Turner, Michigan, (He ran a circuit from Maple Ridge, Melita and Turner during these years.)

It was here our health began to fail us. From here we moved to Romeo, Michigan, where we found a nice modern parsonage, but with a large debt and nothing but a little old wooden store building to worship in. After being here for two years and getting the debt cut down on the parsonage some what, we undertook to build a new stone church, which was met with strong opposition. At the first business meeting the time was all utilized by two of the older members in opposing it and when put to a vote it was a tie. Some of the good members along with myself, felt the Lord wanted a church in this place, so I called another meeting and the vote was eleven to fifteen in favor, so we commenced to haul stone and gravel and tore down the old building and a stone structure was built. As we started to build the Lord increased my strength and I was able to do around fifteen hundred dollars of work on the building myself, but have not been able to do much work

since. We were at Romeo five years and moved to Durand, Michigan for another five years where we both are unable to carry on further so I retired four years ago in the fall of 1946.

Notes added by Lottie (McClung) Harrington, November 1963, updated in 1980.

John A. McClung had a heart attack approximately seventeen years ago and was never too well. His wife Ethel's stroke put her in a wheel chair and was in need of much care for a number of years. She passed away in January of 1959. John A. McClung and Cleo Holt were married in November 20 1960 in Arcadia, Florida. John A. McClung passed away June 19, 1963 in Ovid, Michigan. Burial of Ethel and John A. McClung took place in Moore Township Cemetery, Snover, Michigan. Cleo McClung moved back to West Branch Michigan after the death of John McClung. She passed away May 23, 1971 and is buried by her first husband in Brookside cemetery, West Branch, Michigan.

Lottie Harrington is currently Librarian for the Bay County Genealogical Society of Michigan. She would like to hear from anyone who may remember her father or mother. She may be contacted through the society. PO Box 1366, Bay City, MI 48706-0366.