Memories of the 1940s

Memories Never to be Forgotten (1940s)

- The Great Hallowe’en Raid, when the men invaded in the wee hours of the morning, entering every room that wasn’t locked, up-ending the beds, and leaving as quickly and quietly as they came in.
- The bridge games played for hours by small study lamps.
- The race for the bathroom just before 11:00 pm, when the hot water and heat were turned off in the rooms for the night.
- White corn syrup all over the biffy seats one morning, and the culprit’s underwear tied end-to-end and hung from the window, when she was found out.
- The Residence Formal in the East Gym during the winter—everyone all dressed up, and on their best behaviour.
- Sunday night concerts in the Aud with some excellent entertainment. For some reason, only those who lived in Residence understood “Cattle Call” as a very special song.
- Searching out, removing, and sleeping well on the only backboard in Residence. Then only to crawl into a saggy bed the next night to find that someone else had discovered the board.
- The night that someone put a very confused calf in the basement of the Women’s Residence.
- Two phones on the 3rd floor for the use of all female Residents—lots of exercise for the girls on phone duty who had to find the recipient of the call.
- The rules that forbade any electrical appliances, except for the study lamps and a small radio.
- The nights when the Dean went out, and the Residence was alive with the smell of popcorn.
- The surprise room checks—the never-discovered or understood grapevine that spread out all over campus that ensured forbidden equipment would be locked away in trunks before the authorities arrived at the door.
- The desperation technique for roasting marshmallows by impaling the marshmallow on a nail file and turning it over a penny match.

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If one of these mornings one sees a nine-foot barbed wire entanglement surrounding the Manitoba Union, it won’t be a morning-after-the-night-before illusion (or should I say hallucinations?—I donno). And it’s not put there as a trap for the Freshies who’ve finally discovered the possibilities of a fire escape. It just means (mark my words, co-eds!), that the Army’s arrived.

Now I don’t know if all this is true. BUT, a friend, of mine who met a friend of a chappie who knows one of the Army, says that some time next week things will be popping around there (must be using pop-guns!). Anyway, by the time they reach their full capacity (six to a room) there will be 3,000 soldiers living in the Union.

Last weekend found the Union emptied of all its furnishings from towel racks to a ping-pong table. All the students left during the past week, and last weekend Mrs. Macdonnell, Miss Panton, Miss Brownlee, and all the other permanent Residents vacated, in honour of the Army, to their new quarters elsewhere.

The other day a letter came from an friend of the Training Centre. It is the letter of an old soldier who was here at the start of this Training Centre when the Infantry took it over from the Artillery in May 1942, and his memories of the 103 C.I. (B).T.C. It read:

Sitting at home convalescing after my recent illness, my mind travels back to the grand old days at the 103rd. I was in at the beginning of this training Centre in May 1942, and remained until August 1943, so have plenty to bring back to memory.

I often wonder if the recruits passing through Fort Gerry realize how lucky they are. Their quarters are away above the average of other training centres; athletics and entertainment for the boys is a large feature and I venture to suggest not one recruit that passes through is not better in mind and body for the experience.

The company officers and NCOs are imbued with that spirit of efficiency, each striving their best to have the men under them the best in the whole Training Centre.
Is it then to be wondered at, that the 103rd has established a reputation second to none for training efficiency.

Basic Training completed, full of hopes and ambitions that their Advanced Training would be completed and they would then be on their way across the "Pond" for the Supreme test. On leaving, the men always seemed alert, very appreciative of the good time they had at the 103rd and in every sense of the word real Good Soldiers.

The 103rd has done and is doing a wonderful job and may it continue is the sincere wish of one who was proud to belong to that Training Centre. We have much to be thankful for and the following activities attest to the wonderful opportunities Fort Garry provides.

Boxers of the 103 C.I.(B).T.C.; 3 Wireless School, RCAF; and HMCS Chippawa put on a spirited boxing show, January 27, in the Auditorium of this Training Centre, which was a build-up to the Inter-Services boxing championships to be held sometime in March.

The West Gym is available to men in training after supper from 1830 hrs to 2000 hrs Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for the purpose of apparatus work. Take advantage of the chance, men, to really get out and learn balance and the knack of clearing obstacles. This training will be of great value to you and you will never regret the few hours each week in the gym after duty hours. It may, at some time, save your life when you are in action.

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President Trueman and the Veterans (1945)

Right after World War II, many returning veterans resided in the Residence while pursuing their academic studies. These men were much older and more mature than the average student. The year was 1945. I was an undergraduate in Science and Dr. A.W. Trueman was President of the University.

One evening, two of these veteran students were spending an evening in the pub at the Montcalm Hotel. Upon leaving, they purchased a 24-case of beer from the vendors and somewhere found an empty Campbell Soup carton in which to hide the beer because, at that time, there was a rule forbidding bringing beer into the Residence. They were walking back to the campus when a car stopped and the driver asked if they were on their way to the University and did they want a ride. They jumped into the car and the driver introduced himself as Trueman.

One of the two veterans who was a bit worse for wear said, “Oh Truman, eh. Well my name is Eisenhower and my buddy here is Montgomery.”

They continued until the car reached the Residence where the two got out and thanked the driver. They still did not know that he was the President of the University.

At that time the Residence was divided into a women’s and a men’s section. Off the foyer was a suite for the Dean of Men on one side and one for the Dean of Women on the other side. As the two men entered they made some noise, which was heard by the Dean of Men. He hurried into the foyer and saw the two fellows with their carton. The Dean demanded to know what was in the carton. They replied that it was soup. The Dean, being rather suspicious, asked what kind of soup and moved to inspect it. One of the men replied “Campbell’s Soup” and took a swing at the Dean.

An investigation was held later, but it was handled discreetly. The men apologized, the Dean accepted the apology, and that was the end of the story. People who heard the story were certain that the President who drove them to the Residence was aware that the men were carrying beer, but he was too discreet and understanding to question them.

Just To Be Bad! (1947-1951)

I lived in Taché Hall from 1947 to 1951 and LOVED every minute of it. Some of the fondest memories in my life of 78 years were lived there. Residence was a definite choice; no other thought was considered! Looking back it was wise and I am grateful; I had marvelous years in Residence and have great memories. Most of my oldest and dearest friends to this day were there at the same time I was. In total it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I hate to think of it changing, but I’m much more relieved to know it will be refinished and refurbished and have another new life, rather than being demolished.

I always lived on the 4th Floor near the West end (possibly Rm 424?) of the Women’s Residence. I can’t recall for sure, but it was the last door before the corner room. We faced north and were not too far from the washrooms. Our rooms were adequate for then. Mine was a double room with a closet, and one window that faced north to share with my lovely roommate.

The windows had no screens and many a time I went out that window, pushing the lower half up, and then held onto the small ledge outside and above until I could inch my way over to the next room, go inside, and open their door. My roommate would then join me and we would “french” or “apple-pie” their beds and do all kinds of silly things to their room. Then we’d go back, locking their door behind us and wait until they arrived home to the mess! Great Fun!!

We had two beds in our double room. They were brown iron singles, with a steel cord or cable crisscrossing the bottom for the mattress to rest on. This cable was held to the sides of the bed by small sturdy coil springs along the sides and top and bottom. I believe we had one dresser with drawers and a mirror. We brought our own bedspreads, pillows, and whatever from home to decorate the room. There must have been a table or two or a desk, but I cannot recall.

On each floor there were telephones and we all had to take turns answering in-coming calls and then get the person the call was for to come to the phone. This was called “phone duty.” The room was an all-purpose space where we did extra sewing or design projects, etc.

At the front door every evening we had a wonderful old gentleman. He was always at our Residence’s main doors. He checked us in and out. We all generally liked him very much. We called him “Pops.” He was fair, if you were fair with him.
We had definite times to be in every night (usually 11 pm) and a few “Late Nights” a Month (1 am). There was a Cafeteria between the Boys’ Residence and the Girls’ Residence where we ate our meals and used our meal tickets. Above this was a small Auditorium where we had entertainment and casual “Tea” Dances (sometimes in the afternoon around 3:00 to 5:00 with recorded music).

There were elevators and sturdy marble stairs to all floors, with strong metal and wooden railing. Below the basement were the heating pipes and we would often sneak into that area and wander about. It was quite warm down there and we were careful not to get caught (and we didn’t stay long with the heat).

Metal fire escapes on the south side of the building were very strong and adequate. I heard that students who were too late to come back through the front door and didn’t want Pops to catch them often came back into Residence that way (with a little help from inside). I never did, as family connections to officials at the University would have made it fatal for me!

The boys from Residence raided the Girls’ Residence a few times, but as far as I know, it was “just good clean fun.” The boys thought it was fun to hear the girls squeal! They tried to steal panties etc. that the girls often threw at them just to be bad! My cousin and his roommate came across the roof from the Boys’ Residence and visited my roommate and me one night. MY! We really thought we were devilish!

There was a Residence Council elected by the students each year. I think there was a representative from each Residence (one boy and one girl) and they had different duties designated by an adult woman in the Women’s Residence and a male adult in the Men’s Residence. Any major problems that might occur were to be told to those adults by the elected boy or girl from each Residence. The adult rep then had to give approval or not of these questions or problems. These adults usually lived in each Residence for a year or a specified time (usually the school year). The Residents had to answer to their elected representative and they in turn had to answer to the appointed adult representative in charge for that year. I was the representative for the Women’s Residence in my final year, and I don’t recall a problem. I did have to welcome all parents who attended and came to inspect the Residence at the end of the year. We were all polished and keen to impress!

No doubt I could ramble on and think of other things, but our old Residence could not have been a better or happier place. I am most grateful for having had the experience. May her next occupants appreciate and love her as much as we did.

Phone Box Is Full (1947)

In Residence days back in the forties, there was only one pay phone booth in the Men’s Dormitory. So there was usually a line-up of students wishing to phone out. If somebody in the booth was taking too long, the waiting students became impatient and tilted the phone booth horizontally as a hint for said “phoner” to finish off pronto.

As I recall the phone booth was located in one of the hallways, and there weren’t any time restrictions that I remember. Yes, the girls had their own booth. It was in the Girl’s Dorm on the east side, back when the dorms were separate.

When the pay phone coin box was full, the calls were free, since the last nickel in held the switch open. This usually happened on weekends when no one came to empty the box, and word got around the dorm very quickly, “Hey, the phone box is full!”

Panty Raid (1948)

Thinking of the dorms reminds me of the panty raid carried out by the boys on the girl’s side. This was about 1948. It was well organized including details such as having someone ensure that the University security man, otherwise known as Fearless Fosdick, was out of sight.

It was noted that one room was off-limits because the gal had a broken leg. All other rooms were raided all in good fun. Apparently the raiding boys had inside help from the girls who arranged to leave the back door unlocked.

Somehow the media were advised and they blew it up as if every girl was molested or raped. The newspapers and radio stations gave it a really big airing, and it even ended up in Time Magazine.
The University President received many, many, phone calls and telegrams from parents who wanted reassurance that their daughters were not sexually assaulted. The President called all the boys on the carpet and gave them a stern lecture, but no one was ejected from Residence. I guess with the co-ed dorms now, nothing like this could happen.

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**Veterans’ Villages (1948)**

Following the Second World War, veterans were given a choice of benefits. One was tuition at a Canadian university, together with a stipend to supposedly cover living expenses. A single veteran would receive $60 a month, a married man $80. The maximum, for a couple with two children was $102.

For those attending university, finding affordable housing was a real problem. In Winnipeg, the University of Manitoba, together with a veterans’ committee and provincial and federal agencies, came up with the idea of “Veterans’ Villages.” Small but functional two-room bungalows were constructed from salvaged lumber and organized in circles of 24 huts built around a central facility containing men’s and women’s ablutions [washrooms] and a coin laundromat.

Conditions were primitive. Paint, insulation, running water, and floor coverings were non-existent. Heat was provided for the entire structure by a Quebec stove. However, the big advantage for the veterans on their limited budget was the rent—$18 a month. Porches, shelving, and other amenities were added—the ingenuity of the vets was supported by the fact that on their way back from classes they passed through the university “scrap yard” where they were able to pick up usable lumber and other material.

The social life of the community played a great part in maintaining a high morale. A great deal of credit went to the veterans’ partners. The village residents included veterans of all services and all ranks—from naval ratings through soldiers to aircrew officers. Ranks were forgotten—they lived in close harmony and elected their own council.

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The Veterans’ Villages are seen at #3 - three on the south side of campus and one on the north side.
A Special Visitor (1949)

I entered the Faculty of Agriculture at the U of M in the fall of 1946, having graduated from Melita Collegiate with my Grade 12. I was enrolled in 2nd year Agriculture, but I did not have the four Agriculture subjects that were offered to the 1st year students. Therefore, I had to come back for those subjects in the summer of 1947, and that is when I was in the Men’s Residence for a couple of months. It was a new experience for me, as I had boarded in a private home on Gertrude Avenue for the first year at the U of M.

I shared my Residence room with another student. The room was somewhat Spartan but adequate, and the food in the Dining Room was also basic, but good. I recall the Dean of Men’s Residence was a professor of Economics—his name escapes me now.

During my years of study, many of my classmates were in the Residence and I heard about various “hijinks” that took place in the building! I look back on those years with fond memories.

I remember a number of social events in the Residence Auditorium such as “tea dances” etc., but there were also more formal events such as the time Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the late US President Franklin Roosevelt, addressed the students in 1949 at my Convocation. I had a seat on the aisle and Mrs. Roosevelt passed by my side as she departed the room! It was quite an event.

Eleanor Roosevelt’s Speech

On March 1, 1949 Eleanor Roosevelt, a stateswoman, diplomat in her own right, and the wife of the late American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, delivered a speech to graduates at the University of Manitoba. She was at the University to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

In his speech introducing Eleanor Roosevelt, University of Manitoba President A.H.S. Gillson remarked: “Throughout her life she has constructed a career in the field of social service which has entailed travelling many hundreds of thousands of miles, writing well more than a million words, giving innumerable lectures on the platform and over the radio, becoming in the deepest sense the First Lady of the United States.” She was the American delegate to the UN General Assembly meetings held in Paris in 1948 and Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1949.

In her speech, Mrs. Roosevelt enunciated her vision for the direction that the post-war world needed to follow, as well as the longstanding relationship between the United States and Canada.

Mrs. Roosevelt's speech began with her observations of the relations between Canada and the United States. She then directed her comments to the students and the returned student veterans and their role in preventing war in the future. She talked about the devastation of war and its physical effects.

Comparing physical destruction with mental destruction, Mrs. Roosevelt again asked the veterans to help in ensuring that war would not occur again, and then went on to talk about the roles of the United Nations and governments in achieving peace. Her final remarks were to the students and the value of education.

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The 1950 Flood caused a great deal of damage to the Manitoba Union Building, especially to the Gym floors.