

# GLEN LESLIE NEWS

Written by Wanda Zenner – July 2020

Imagine my surprise when I arrived at the Glen Leslie Church to do a little weeding and found a young man face-timing his grandparents in Ontario as he was viewing the Church. The young man was William Leslie Gutierrez (goes by Will), great grandson of the last teacher at the Glen Leslie Church, William (Bill) L. Gutierrez.



Will who was named after his great grandfather had been residing in Dawson Creek, BC for the past five years and always had intentions of stopping at the Church to take pictures for his grandparents; however, the opportunity never arose until he was actually leaving BC to move back to Ontario to be close to family.

Will was very interested in the story of how the area became known as Glen Leslie and the story of the construction of the building in 1915. He was especially interested in the fact that that his great grandfather was the last teacher at the Church and how Bill was so young when he headed north looking for a new adventure when he applied for the position to teach at Glen Leslie.

*Left – Will Gutierrez – great grandson of Bill Gutierrez*

The following is the biography on Bill Gutierrez that was published in the “Glen Leslie Church Centennial Celebration History Book”:

## **William L. Gutierrez**

### **6<sup>th</sup> teacher for Somme School District held in the Glen Leslie Church**

It was the beginning of January 1928 and I, a nineteen year old greenhorn from Edmonton, was about to begin an adventure that would live with me the rest of my life. After arriving by train at Grande Prairie, I hitched a ride by sleigh to Glen Leslie about fifteen miles to the east where I had been appointed teacher of the Somme School.

At Glen Leslie, Mrs. Bryenton, the post mistress, directed me to Grandpa and Grandma Wales home about ¼ mile south. There I was to board for the first six months of my 5 ½ years sojourn



in the Peace River Country. Although they were both fairly old, they treated me royally during my stay there and Grandpa Wales even taught me to play "High-Low-Jack" a card game.

School at that time was held in the little log Church that had been built by the Presbyterians in 1915. It was situated a mile east of the Post Office, perched on a barren treeless knoll with not a flower or tree around it, not even a fence to enclose the yard. Inside was as bleak as the outside - rough, log walls chinked with cracked plaster, ten or so double student desks, a blackboard across the front made of painted wallboard, a teacher's desk with a little bell, a few maps on the walls, a little book cupboard with a few dog-eared school books. In one corner stood the big barrel-like wood burning stove. Such was Somme School 1928.

Here on the first school day in January that year gathered about 15 boys and girls - 7 to 15 years of age in grades 1 to 8, all anxious and eager to meet the new teacher and get on with the serious business of education. Some families represented that day were the Ross Wales' - Alfred, Charles, Jack and Betty; the Ott Patterson's - Neil and Earl; Guy Patterson's - Minnie and Mildred; the Hackwell's - Emily, Archie, Grace and Helen; and the Ralph Witherly's - Evelyn, Marjorie. They were an alert group of children, bright and cooperative and as the years progressed, I became very fond of them. Although books and equipment were rather scarce, we all worked and played hard and a busy interesting six months passed quickly.

In September and a new term, I moved to board with Mrs. Witherly, mother of Ralph Witherly, a mile east of the school and ½ mile north. This move enabled me to broaden my association with parents throughout the district and to

improve communications with the pupils. Although supplies and equipment were still limited and the school surroundings bleak, 1928-1929 school year was reasonably productive.

In June of 1929, I took leave of absence to return to school in Edmonton to successfully complete my Grade 12 and even do some substitute teaching to replenish my depleted money supply, for this was the beginning of the "Hungry Thirties".

In September 1930, I returned to the Somme School. Now a year older and wiser and with a first class Teacher's Certificate things looked brighter. I even had a new boarding place, the Ott Patterson's, only a mile from school. Two Patterson boys, Neil and Earl, attended school and Art my own age, was good company. The whole family was very compatible and so we had an enjoyable year despite the usual crowded conditions familiar to all homes in those pioneer days. And to add to the other improvements, we now had a new school, a real school. During my 14 months' absence, a modern school for those days had been built ¼ west of the Church.

After school hours and on weekends, there were the social visits to families in the district - the Ed Leslie's at the store, the Norman Moon's, Charles Moon's, Alf Moon's, Ray Patterson's and the Ross Wales', to mention a few families; the bridge games where I and Art Patterson went looking for opponents at Guy Patterson's, or the Jensen's; harvesting grain in the fall; hauling ice from the Wapiti for summer drinking water and walking to Grande Prairie behind sleigh loads of wheat. I remember a moose hunting expedition to the south of the Wapiti, camping overnight and tramping through the snow during the days but seeing no moose. I

remember Reverend James McNeil from Clairmont coming to hold church services in the old Church and also at the Bezanson hall.

Such are some of the faint recollections of days long past in the early 1930's in the Glen Leslie and Bezanson communities of the Peace River County. Although any impact of mine on the lives of the pupils in the Somme School was minor, yet I am proud to have served in some small way in their educational, physical and

spiritual upbringing. The memory of those years, though dim, will always bring me happiness and contentment with just a wee touch of nostalgia and sadness thrown in.

Note: Charlie Wales recalled that Mr. Gutierrez built grain elevators during the summer holidays from school.

**The following summary was provided by William's son, Ken:**

*After one year of teaching at Glen Leslie, 1928-29, Bill spent the next year in Edmonton completing his high school diploma. In 1930 he returned to Glen Leslie and resumed teaching at the one-room school there. He taught there for 5 years, leaving in 1935. He continued teaching in rural schools in and around Edmonton for five more years. While teaching he met his wife of 61 years, Margaret Ramsay. In those years he taught in the winter and attended the University of Alberta in the summers. He graduated from the U of A in 1940 and then took a one year meteorology program at the University of Toronto and became a meteorologist. He worked for the federal government for the next 33 years. During the war years meteorology was treated as a critical service and Bill was posted in Saskatoon, Prince Rupert and Vancouver. In 1946 he and his growing family, Margaret and sons Doug and Ron, moved to Edmonton. A third son, Ken, joined the family in 1948. Bill worked first at the Edmonton Municipal Airport then spent the last 15 years of his career at the Edmonton International Airport. Over his life Bill continued his interest in learning; any and all subjects were fun for him. He was active in the Masonic Lodge and enjoyed gardening and having the best looking yard and garden he could! He often recalled his times in Glen Leslie with fondness.*

Researched and written by Wanda Zenner  
Smoky to Grande Prairie History Book pg 429  
Correspondence with Ken Gutierrez

*It was the utmost pleasure to meet the great grandson of Bill Gutierrez. He was very interested in the history of the church and the information provided about his great grandfather for whom he was named after.*