

Nellie Letitia McClung, neé Mooney, suffragist, reformer, legislator, author (1873-1951)



Nellie McClung was born in Chatsworth, Ontario in 1873, and moved to a homestead in the Souris Valley in Manitoba in 1880 when she was seven years old. She did not attend school until 1883 when she was 10, and performed exceedingly well in the short time that she attended.

She performed so well at school that when she was 16 she received a teaching certificate and taught children as a school teacher for seven years, before marrying Robert Wesley McClung in 1896. She moved to Manitou, Manitoba with her husband Robert, where he was a pharmacist. There, she became a prominent member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union at a time when the temperance (anti-alcohol) movement was especially strong in Canada.

In 1908, when she was 35 Nellie McClung published her first novel, called *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, a "witty portrayal of a small western town" which became a national bestseller and prompted McClung to write a number of short stories and articles in magazines published in

both Canada and America.

When she was 38, Nellie McClung, her husband Robert, and their four children moved to Winnipeg, where they had a fifth child. Winnipeg at the time was the heart of numerous social movements, including the worker's union movements, women's rights movements, and of course temperance movements, and Nellie McClung was welcomed by many of them as a speaker who was particularly persuasive to audiences because she used humorous arguments. In 1914 she campaigned actively for the Manitoba Liberal party against Sir Rodmond Roblin's Conservatives, who refused woman's suffrage, making a significant foray into partisan politics. McClung and her family moved from Winnipeg to Edmonton in 1915 before her Liberals ultimately unseated the Manitoba Conservatives.

In Alberta McClung continued fighting for female suffrage and for the prohibition of alcohol, worker safety legislation and many other progressive reforms. She gained further prominence as a leading female reformer from conducting speaking tours in Canada and the US, and particularly by being elected as a Liberal Member of the Legislative Assembly for Edmonton and serving in that role from 1921-1926.

In 1933, when she was 60 years old, Nellie McClung moved with her husband to Vancouver Island, where she focused on her writing, completing the first volume of her autobiography, called *Clearing in the West, My Own Story* in 1935. She continually wrote short stories and authored a regularly syndicated newspaper column. She continued public life as well, as a prominent member of the Canadian Author's Association, as a member of the CBC's first board of governors, and as the Canadian delegate to the League of Nations in 1938, which was the important but ultimately-doomed precursor to the United Nations.

In the post-WWII period, Nellie McClung became all but forgotten for the important reforms and debates she commenced, particularly about the role that women played in contemporary society. However, her life and background were rediscovered by feminists in the 1960s and she once again became an important figure in the battle for an expansion of women's rights.