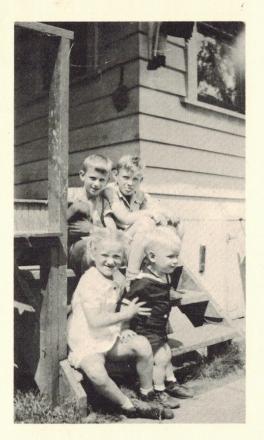
## FAMILIAR



bpNichol

## **FAMILIAR**



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drove into the country for hours roads we'd never been before

shelburne

grand valley

ellie & me driving down till we came to nichol township wellington county

& i thot
"i am home"

not knowing where i was or where home might be

as cabot in 1497 discovered the west was good for fishing

lief the lucky had

500 years earlier found such grapes he thot it was the gods' home

as hunters had

before him

found the hunting good & come thru alaska

into america

& the mass of land which was said to lie between africa & some western shore promoted the spread of culture from egypt to the olmecs

the lack of substantial fact makes history the memory of an amnesiac

makes anything his who works it with his hands

& such lies as are made myths

accepted

as planned

"this was in south dakota" near iroquois

my great grandpa & grandma leigh

broke 40 acres

1885

near ed fry & old jimmy davis who lived in a cave in the hill (the only shelter he could build)

gave birth to their first child (a girl) florence leigh stayed on a pillow till she died 3 months later

"what god gives god takes away"

& great grandpa caspar with his one arm broke the ground for her grave

"o lord please save this child from harm"

my great aunt maggie married four times

the first was a man died of the his name was max tease

the second (a butcher) shot himself accidentally

& when she met Merry hell well he was number three

& swept her off her feet

it was almost a year before he ran away took all the money she'd managed to save & left her

at least he didn't die

i can almost hear maggie heaving a sigh of relief

then stepping out the door into the arms of number four

june 12 1911

walter workman wife & two children

1911 broke 3 acres cropped none

1912 broke 9 acres cropped 3

1913 broke 11 acres cropped 12

1914 broke 17 acres cropped 23

worked on a farm south of viscount to support himself

under livestock listed 1 cow

my father was raised in goodwater faded photo of him standing by a car an old fur coat he looks 15 his sister marie is at the wheel his father beside her

the street is dusty

the land is flat

somewhere below his feet two oceans meet one of salt water one of sweet

we know there are wells

in ten more years it will be 1929 shortly after that the drought the good water dries up noone eats well

he & my mother are married their first child dies they never manage to get her picture taken

none of this is there in the photo

it is so obvious his smiling face is unaware of history the future force it was/is/will be all my life having searched in the west to discover the name in a book

robert nichol

1806

how he had owned two lots 6 & 7 6 concessions over from

yonge street
in the township of east gwillimbury
york county
& to know nothing more
is (as they say)
to find new mysteries in the east

(these lines stretch back farther than i remember farther than i've been able to go

break awkwardly in the middle like a poem

or a son born at the wrong time

the workman & the nichol line passing thru ontario a half a century before they finally met

in a hotel on a corner in plunkett) robert nichol came to america 1860 with his brothers john & hugh

started a flax mill near the city of salem

& then

when the civil war was thru went north

into ontario

did he know that a robert nichol had been thru there before

that in any history there is nothing new

only a few things rearranged

paths which cross

worlds (which grow smaller)

different points of view

like every other crazy robert nichol going into something over his head

named a township after him just because he'd been brock's friend

commissary in the war of blunders one of the natives brock never trusted

driving his horse & carriage thru the dark to lundy's lane

plunged over the bluffs at queenston pulling everything down behind him

backing those idiots dickson and clarke used him to rob the government blind

trying to be a man who spoke for his people and his time

raised the question of immigration of the government land preserve

fought the clergy reserves sucked in again by speculators

sailed over the cliff walls screaming lost in the falls' thunder

never stopped to wonder who his friends really were

picked him up off the shore & laid him to earth

for what it's worth

did i tell you bout my uncle fred

fell

head over dead into the paddle wheel of a mississippi steamer

or so it's said

never found a trace of his body

nobody knows for sure to this day except to say he died

on that ship

on that night

who cares for history?

it is his story or her story or the story of someone noone knows

& now that you know what do you know?

questions

always it seems there are questions

once there was a man emigrated from england passed thrusontario into minnesota married and raised some children then was gored by a bull

that is history

that's how his story goes

name names place places

put your history in your head

bury the dead with honour.

honour the living with love

& when your time comes it comes

when you are gone you are gone & leave behind a son or a daughter or noone



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Phyllis webb Bust, Edie + bp

