

Berkey, Fred & Ester and Family

by Beverly Phillips Christensen

written in 1974

retyped by Dean Bones 2022

She was born Anna Ester Lewis 26 April 1890, and her birthplace was Dublin, Ireland. Her motto was "It is a great life if you don't break, and you don't dare break."

Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Morris Lewis were born in Latvia. Her parents moved from Latvia to Dublin, Ireland, as far as Ester knows, because her father had a brother there and was possibly seeking greener pastures.

When Ester was about two years old her mother died. Ester and her older brother, Joe, who was about 5 at the time were the only two children. She recalls living with her grandparents for awhile after her mother's death, and then when she was about three her father remarried. She never knew her real mother's name or even the cause of her death. It was something that was never discussed.

Ester doesn't know exactly when her aunts and uncle moved from Ireland to Winnipeg, Manitoba. When Joe and Ester were still children, however, their family moved to Winnipeg, also. By this time the kids were old enough to go to school, and it was, at least for Ester, the first school she ever attended. The first day of school when class was dismissed for recess, she and Joe went home thinking school was out. They didn't live far from the school, and one of the aunts straightened things out and sent them back.

The family spoke German, and that was the language spoken in the home. It didn't take the youngsters long to learn English, but it was quite a change.

One winter before her youngest stepbrother, Harry, was born, Ester's step-mother was sick in the hospital all winter. Ester, who was about 8 or 9 at the time, stayed out of school and took care of her younger brothers, Mack, born in 1896, and Billy, born in 1893, all the time her stepmother was sick. She made the same basic soup every day, and she put something different in it depending on what they had - beans, rice, meat, etc. Her father went to work every day, and her brother, Joe, was, as she put it, "banked out" to another family with whom he lived for some time.

The winter of 1900 found the Lewis family on the move again . . . this time to Portland, Oregon. They took a train from Winnipeg to Portland. Some of Ester's aunts were already in Portland.

Her father was a shoemaker - not a cobbler, but a shoemaker by trade. He drew patterns for shoes in a shoe factory. When he came to Portland there was no shoe factory, and since, as Ester put it, "There was no money to go back, he had to cobble to make his livelihood.

The children were very lonely and homesick in Portland. They attended the Failing School, named after an old Portland family, and all of the Lewis children went there. The grade school consisted of 9 grades and the high school 3 grades. Ester and the other children were kept

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back a year because of the absence of American history in their previous training. One incident that stands out in her memory of these years is when Theodore Roosevelt came to Portland. School was dismissed, and the children were taken to see him. It was a big event.

There was only one high school in Portland at that time, Portland High School. Only the wealthy kids were sent to high school because it was too expensive.

Ester's aunt sent her children to high school. She was a dressmaker and a milliner. They didn't sell hats in department stores then - everyone went to a special shop to buy a hat. And everyone wore hats when they went out. She had learned the trade in the old country. Her children had music lessons, too. Ester patterned herself after this aunt. She figured if her aunt could do so well for herself then Ester could, too.

Ester's older brother Joe, didn't go back to school after they left Winnipeg. He didn't want to study any longer. Her dad told him that he wasn't raising any tramps or bums and he was either going to go to school or he was going to work. Joe went to work.

From the time Ester was 14, she worked outside the home. She worked in a store first, but then switched to working in a factory, Old Pacific Coast Biscuit Company, because the pay was much higher. She quit the Old Pacific Coast Biscuit Company and went to work for Lipman Wolfe department store and remained there until shortly before her marriage to Fred Berkey in 1908.

The Berkey family lived right across the street from the Lewis family in Portland. Both lived on Grant Street.

On August 10, 1908, Ester Lewis who was 18 at the time and Fred Berkey who was 25 were joined in holy matrimony.

Between 1908 and 1910 the young couple lived in Portland. Fred was a plumber. He had apprenticed 7 years and then passed certain tests to learn the trade. While he was working in Portland he did part of the plumbing in the Pittock mansion.

On July 6, 1909, Ester gave birth to their first child. The proud parents named their son, Henry.

As Ester remembers, they had plenty of money those first two years. She even purchased a new sewing machine which she told me she purchased for \$48. She paid for it on installments, and at that time people came to the door to collect payments. (She still has that sewing machine.) They had a nice home, and Fred was doing well.

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And then one day in 1910 Fred Berkey came home and told his wife to order all the provisions they would need for a year. This was a girl who had spent most of her life in Portland where the grocers came to your door twice a day, and you told them what you wanted and it was delivered to you. She had no idea what to order nor how much. She does remember ordering flour, beans, coffee, tea and pickling spices. They ran out of flour, and they ran out of coffee. The latter item didn't bother Fred because he didn't drink it anyway, but it certainly bothered Ester.

She tells now that she isn't sure where she figured she would get the cucumbers to make the pickles, but still in 1917 all the neighbors were using her spices. The nearest store was 25 miles from Blaine in Tillamook. Later a store was built in Beaver which was 8 miles away. When they were building the store in Beaver Fred worked for the owner, Gilbert, in exchange for some of the food they needed. But until then they just did without.

So, in 1910 the Berkeys moved to Tillamook County and rented a place in Blaine. It was a 3 day trip from Portland to Blaine in those days. Fred and Ester and their son, Henry, went by train to Sheridan from Portland. They spent the first night in Sheridan and the next morning hired a rig and a driver to take them into Blaine. They had to pay the driver's expenses for both ways even though they didn't go back on the return trip. They sent the bulk of their things by boat from Portland to Tillamook. That was the only way to get them there. Their practically new furnishings had to lay out on the dock in Tillamook all winter because there was no way for Fred to get them.

In Ester's opinion, there was only one reason why they pulled up stakes and came to Blaine. As a youth, Fred had hiked over the Wilson River Pass from Forest Grove to hunt and fish in the Tillamook area. He had a passion for the two sports, and most of his spare time was spent doing one or the other. He and a pal, George Burckard, would hike over in mid-winter. As Ester put it, "Dumb kids!"

George Burckard also was a plumber in Portland, and together the two boyhood friends decided to come to Tillamook County.

The first winter the two families rented a house in Blaine. By the 28th of April, Fred, Ester and young Henry moved on up to what they called "The Homestead". Ester remembers walking through knee-deep snow that April, and that first winter and spring it rained and rained. She was commenting on the weather later to a friend, "Don't you remember how it rained that first spring. I know it rained every day in May, " she said.

The friend smugly answered, "Ester, why wouldn't it? Look at the way you bawled!"

When they first moved up on the homestead there was a little one-room shack, a relinquishment. Fred was working in town so he wasn't home nights. Ester and the baby

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stayed all alone in the “shack” with only a piece of matting for a door. She “didn’t have sense enough to be afraid.”

After Ester and Fred came to Blaine Fred would go to Portland long enough to work at his trade and earn enough to buy the necessities. Then he would return home. Before he left he would chop enough wood to last until he came back and do all the chores. Sometimes he wouldn’t get through with everything until it was dark, but he would still walk that trail quite well. If he got off the trail, since he didn’t have a light, he would get down and feel where he was and get right back on the main path.

Because of the homestead law at that time, Ester was required to stay on the homestead. Fred could go away and work, but the family had to stay on the property. Later the law was changed.

When their daughter, Mildred, was born in 1911 Ester had to write to Washington, D.C. to get a leave of absence for 6 months to go into Portland to have the baby. Ester stayed with the Berkeys as Fred’s mother was a midwife. When Mildred was a month old the family returned home. Note that when Ester went to Portland she went on the stage to Sheridan and then took the train into Portland. On the return trip, however, the railroad into Tillamook had been completed, and she had an easier return home.

When asked if Ester was scared being up there by herself while Fred was in Portland working she replied that yes, she did worry a little but that she got used to it. She’d lock herself in, and she certainly didn’t have to worry about humans causing trouble because they were well off the beaten path. The nearest neighbors were about 3/4 of a mile down the pike. As far as wild animals go, Ester told me that for the 7 years they remained on the homestead she never even saw so much as a wild deer. Fred brought home game to eat, but she never saw it alive.

During one of his trips to Portland in 1912 there was a fire around the Blaine area. Fred was working and called Ester and told her to come out of there. Ester said that took money which they didn’t have. Fred told her either she was coming out or he was coming in after her. She left. The schoolhouse in Blaine even caught fire.

When the town of Tillamook began to grow, Fred worked there instead of going to Portland. He worked for R.F. Zachman who owned the local plumbing shop in town. Fred came home 25 miles every Saturday night on a bike. Before he left he would stop at the local drug store, Lamars, and fill a vacuum bottle with ice cream and take it home on his bike for the children. Ester still has that same vacuum bottle.

Fried and Ester celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on 10 August 1958.

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Fred passed away 25 May 1968, after almost 60 years of marriage. Ester is still living in the same house that Fred had built for her in 1923. She lives in the big house by herself and manages remarkable well for someone 84 years young. The house is always spic and span, and Ester, herself, is as sharp as a tack.

Henry is married and has 1 son and 1 daughter. He is an engineer for General Electric and travels all over the world installing turbines.

Mildred who resides in Tillamook is married and has a son. She works at the local radio station, KTIL, and has her own talk show. She is very, very active in the community and is well-known by everyone in the county.

Don, born 1918, is the manager of the Western Bank in St. Helens. He is married and has 3 children, two boys and 1 girl.

Bob, born 1926, is also a banker associated with the Western Bank in Tillamook. He is married and has two children, a boy and a girl.