

Letter from Margaret MacDonald

Courtesy of The History Museum, Great Falls Montana via Upper Swan Valley Historical Society at Condon

Margaret MacDonald visited her Aunt Isabelle and Uncle Dr. Robert Gordon in August and September 1905 at the Gordon Ranch, near Holland Lake. The Gordons bought the ranch that year from Ben and Charles Holland. Excerpts from Margaret's August 20, 1905 letter to her mother Mims (Williamena, Dr. Gordon's sister) in Scotland describe activities at the ranch, as well as some of the guests, including the Maupins and Shawhans from Mobile, Alabama.

My dear Mims,

The Shawhans have to leave us tomorrow much to their sorrow and ours. We have all had such a delightful time together. Think of coming all the way from Mobile to spend 10 days here! This morning we had service in our pergola, or as little Robert calls it, the Bowery, and we know for certain that this is the first time church has been held this side of Ovando. We had sent out word to the Hollands, so we had quite a congregation with Ben, Charlie, Mrs. Holland, the two children, our two girls, Gus, the big Swede who built our cabin, Jow, a fine looking Russian who can neither read nor write and cannot say one phrase without enriching it with a swear. He doesn't know the meaning of those swears, and doesn't know that they are wrong. When he came to this country he just happened to run across a rough set, and not knowing any English, he learned to speak as they did. Judge Maupin has a Mission Church a few miles from Mobile, preaches every Sunday and speaks at every prayer meeting, so he is well used to holding church.

It was very impressive indeed. Aunt Isabelle and Mrs. Shawhan had our one hymn book and constituted the choir, sitting in the easy chair beside the preacher. Some of us sat in a hammock, on folding stools, and our folding cots, and I tell you we were more attentive than we ever were in our lives. Afterwards we took photos of the entire congregation and photos of our own crowd.

How often we wish you were all here. This is the most ideal life, and certainly the most perfect holiday. We have the most tremendous appetites and seem to eat all the time, so we must be getting stout. I'm as brown as a berry and am considered the toughest and strongest of the crowd. At night we sit around the camp fire, sing or tell stories and occasionally we have comb band concerts. Mr. Bliss, the forest supervisor, was here the other

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day and our band performed for his benefit. He nearly had a fit watching us tramp round the table with our combs at our lips.

One day was very cold. Snow fell on the mountains and rain fell down here, so we had to stay indoors. It was fun from morning to night. We played Bridge, Parchesi, and other games and talked - you would have thought our tongues [sic] would ache. The rain let up in the evening and gave us an opportunity to play croquet - you see we have everything out here even though it is so far away. This is a peaceful life. We go out riding through the woods, and we walk, we play games, eat and sleep. We dress as we please in clothes years out of style, knowing that nobody can surprise us, we bathe in the creek in water that is warmed by the sunshine. From the pine trees hand dark brown moss that grows on the trees in the South. The forest is full of flowers, and is carpeted with a little creeping plant with red berries - called killikinick [sic] by the Indians - they make tobacco out of the leaves. Then there are sarvis berries out of which we have made delicious jelly and oregon grapes which are too bitter to use. There are many squirrels, ground squirrels and chipmunks, no snakes, except an occasional garter snake, perfectly harmless. Did I tell you that the lodge and the cabin still have the bark on, outside and in, and that adds greatly to the beauty of the place. The only drawback is that inside the bark are little insects called Borers, and they scratch and scratch away for hours at a time, so that in the mornings we waken up and find sawdust all over our rooms. With sulphur we hope to exterminate them.

In the beginning of September Uncle Robert, Mr. Bliss and Ben Holland are to climb the Glacier - only one white man has ever ventured there - so we will probably be here until about the 15th. As far as we know tomorrow is our last opportunity to send out letters

With much love from us all to you all.
From you loving girl.