

Published in  
"Woodsbrook"  
for C. G. G. Guide

"MUCHIAS"

Ask your father or your mother if they remember Muchias-- Muchias, the funny little gnomelike man who once lived down by our river. Close beside the Saskatchewan's swirling waters, across the stream from where the provincial capital building now stands, he had a wee house, all his own. All its furnishings were made small to fit his diminutive proportions. For Muchias was no taller than a Brownie and even a little Brownie at that. So his bunk was tiny, and he sat in a sawed down chair at a table that had the height you commonly see in nurseries.

What a sight he must have made-- a bushy-bearded man eating at a child-size table! For Muchias had the head and shoulders of a man but scarcely any length of leg at all. This gave him the same stocky sawed down look of the chair he sat upon.

In the records of his church we find that Muchias was born near <sup>at Fort Ste Anne</sup> ~~Fort Edmonton~~ in 1853, the son of Richard Collin and Genevieve Bruyeres who <sup>later</sup> worked in the Fort. The records tell too, that he was baptized Mathias Collin, and his Godmother was Cecile Kalliou, who was one of the forebearers of the family from which the Alberta town "Calihoo" is named.

Muchias, like his father, worked in the Fort too, and his chief task was carrying up water to the palisaded Fort from the river. Old Fort Edmonton, as you know, stood on the site of our present Legislative Buildings. Many were the times each day that Muchias, the water boy, must go down the hill to fetch more water to supply the kitchen needs of the Factor's big house. He liked his task, and loved to be near the river--the river was like a friend to him. He knew its ways and dangers too.

*woole  
woolen*

He became a familiar figure to all the people at the Fort, carrying the water vessels on a cross beam over his broad shoulders.

He always wore a wide brimmed hat, which served him well as a sun-shade on hot days and as an umbrella when it rained. One very wet day, when nearly to the top of the steep trail, he slipped on the muddy path, and ~~down~~ <sup>over</sup> he went, ~~falling~~ <sup>headlong</sup> tumbling ~~downwards~~ towards the river level. As he hurtled down, he did an amazing thing: he buckled up his stumpy legs, and wrapped his arms ~~round~~ about his head and knees, thus making himself into a ball, and rolled down the bank like a pinwheel. The rough workmen beholding this laughed aloud at this odd sight. On coming to a halt at the river level did our little dwarf show himself to be angry at his companions for this? Not he! Instead, he stood upright at once and even pulled off his big hat to wave triumphantly at his fellow workmen above who witnessed his feat.

Surely he must have suffered some hurts and bruises bounding down that rough embankment. But Muchias was not one to complain or shirk in the line of duty-- he was a plucky sort!

A tale of real heroism is told of Muchias, too. In his long life beside the river he became an expert swimmer. He would kick out swiftly with his short legs and stroke steadily on with his strong arms, looking for all the work like a big bull-frog skimming the waters.

One May day when the river was very high he noticed some Indian children playing on the opposite shore. Then suddenly he heard them screaming loudly and saw that one of the smaller ones had slipped from the bank into the water, <sup>being</sup> and was rapidly carried downstream with the current.

Few would have attempted to swim across the river at flood level, but

Muchias leapt in without hesitation and actually reached the little one before she had gone under, as the woolen blanket and leather garments she wore floated her light body on the water's surface like a rubber boat. So she was saved without even being thoroughly chilled and wet when her rescuer pulled her back to shore.

In later years when wells were dug (even on hill tops!) our little water boy did other work but he still stayed beside his beloved river as a helper in John Walter's saw-mill. For many years he was the trusted servant of the pioneer lumberman, and lived close beside him in that wee house which was demolished only last summer (1950).

As he grew older-and the town of Strathcona grew larger-many of the neighboring children came down to see the curious looking dwarfed man. They even teased him and this made Muchias cross. Some children would be frightened of him then but Muchias never harmed children and was always their friend.

He died in the Fall of the year of 1939-when the water of the river was low and slow moving. Perhaps it became altogether becalmed for just a moment with the passing of ~~their~~ <sup>this</sup> beloved friend of the waters, and I like to think too, that they murmured a little sadly as they now pass beside the bank where once stood <sup>little</sup> the house of Muchias, the dwarf.