**GRACE FLETCHER (1850 – 1907)**

**Grace Sarah Hall Thompson**

Grace Thompson was born to Scottish immigrants in Ontario in 1850. She was the oldest of 14 children.

In 1879 she married Joseph Fletcher, and a few years later she and their first three children followed him to Saskatoon to homestead on land granted to the Temperance Colonization Society.

 In 1888, the year her youngest daughter was born, she established and ran a general store, a livery stable and a land agency in the tiny town of Saskatoon.

In 1890, the railway built a link to the small settlement and for the next three years Grace and other dealers bought up buffalo bones that littered the prairies. These were shipped over the Old Bone Trail to Saskatoon, from where Fletcher sold railway carloads of them to the United States for manufacture. That would make Grace Fletcher the city’s first industrialist.

By 1905 the Saskatoon had economy improved, the population had grown to over 3,000 and Grace had made enough money from her business ventures to start buying real estate. She became a wealthy woman owning property worth almost $70,000.

At the first meeting of the official board of the Methodist church in Saskatoon, Grace was appointed as a Sunday-school teacher and was very active in the church throughout her life. She was unhappy with male domination of the church and when she eventually bequeathed $10,100 to the church she stipulated that the money was “to be put out in good security, the Church to use the interest each year after the women of the church get their full franchise in all church courts”.

In 1910, three years after her death, Grace Methodist Church was named in her honour.

Along with her work in the church, she was committed to the temperance movement. In 1890 a hotel owner was charged with illegally selling liquor after Grace saw her husband and some other men who had been drinking leaving the premises. As evidence she produced a bottle she had taken from Joseph, who claimed he had bought it to make horse liniment – an excuse that was not accepted by the court.

As did many women who had been affected by the evils of alcohol, Grace joined the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and was an advocate for women's rights and voting rights for women. She later bequeathed the Saskatoon branch $2,500 “to pay a good speaker to visit our unions and lecture on Temperance and work for our Woman’s full franchise in all elections”. In 1905 she and several other Saskatoon women presented a petition to the town council asking that it urge the government to grant the vote to women who owned property. After 1910 women campaigned successfully for the vote, which was granted in 1916. Grace Fletcher is considered to be an important forerunner of these feminists.

In 1925, when five denominations amalgamated to form the United Church of Canada, Grace Methodist became Grace United. The name was further changed in 1968 when the congregation of Westminster Presbyterian, two blocks away, decided to join with Grace. Together they became Grace-Westminster United Church.

Grace and Joseph Fletcher, along with a son who died in infancy are buried in the Nutana Pioneer Cemetery.

Under their names on the large red/brown granite stone is "Until the day break and the shadows flee away."

The text on the south face of the monument reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
JOSEPH FLETCHER
DIED OCT. 1, 1907 - AGED 70 YEARS
GRACE HALL FLETCHER,
DIED AUG. 3, 1907 - AGED 57 YEARS