

On his hands and knees – a good place for my man who gets so generously distracted. Truly, gardening grounds my husband – gives his mind a place to rest, creating beauty. The folks of Deloraine simply call him ‘The Doctor’. I know him as ‘My Robert’.

Dr Robert J Thornton and I literally fell into each other's lives in 1888.

I'm Mary Jane Johnston. At the age of 33, I came from Ontario because my four brothers were among the earliest farmers. They spoke highly of Turtle Mountain and of this village's potential.

Robert arrived shortly after.

We both enjoy being out and about, skating, church, community projects, you know. And, as the only doctor in the region I was 'forced' to see him in his office. He's several years younger but mature, disciplined and motivated. Scottish. I'm Irish. We carry the fire of that tension as a twinkle in our eyes!

We don't let the trifling things get in the way. My Robert is the first doctor for Deloraine. Such is his charm that not only I, but the entire community, fell in love – and he with us.

Due to my brothers' marriages, we have a large family, most notably our six nieces – who we pamper and adore. Ours is the home in town that attracts farm folks – especially women with their little ones.

We women got together last year, 1910, to form the Deloraine Women's Institute – and I'm its first president. I chuckled when the newspaper declared “Mrs. Robert J Thornton (Dr. Thornton's wife) First WI president!”

As sweet and active as he is, my Robert has nothing to do with it! WI's are created by women, who tend to be consumed by home and family, so we get to visit and to discuss ways our communities can thrive.

Happy women, happy homes, happy

community, I always say. Mrs. Dr Thornton indeed!

Robert's a firey Scotsman for certain! He uses his passion to advance everything he encounters. His patients' health of course, the tennis club, municipal council. He was the president of the Manitoba College of Physicians, Grand Master of the Masons of Manitoba, President of the Medical Council of Canada. He's known by his peers as the “lawyer of the medical profession”. He was elected to the Manitoba Legislature – twice. And became the Education Minister for 7 years.

So, when the idea of starting a horticultural park along the rail track in the centre of Deloraine was proposed. He was in it thick as thieves! And I encouraged him. Having his hands in the soil slows his mind – and, well, helps him attend to the softer parts of life. Happy wife, happy home, I always say!



**Dr. Thornton's gardening skills were put to good use in the creation of this park in Deloraine.**

Betty Sawatzky and David Neufeld adapted ‘Mrs. Doctor, Indeed!’ from a story written for Vantage Points 4.