

The STILL family- from Sussex to Canada

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Large-scale migration between countries is sometimes thought to be a modern phenomenon. It is clearly not. Somewhat surprisingly, my own researches into my mother's family, by any standards a fairly ordinary Sussex family, revealed that her grandfather and grandmother both emigrated to Canada and that another relative emigrated to America.

This article describes the origin of the family in Sussex, and then how the family became transatlantic.

The ancestors of Richard STILL (1820)

Richard STILL was born on 16 April 1820 in Portslade, now effectively part of Brighton. Henry STILL, born in Nuthurst, Sussex in 1700, is the first confirmed ancestor of Richard STILL. On 14 August 1726 Henry married Anne BENNET in Slaugham. Anne was the daughter of the landlord of the White Swan in Slaugham, a pub that stood in front of St Mary's church. The pub was demolished in 1922. Henry was a journeyman carpenter. After Anne died Henry married Elizabeth GOODJER in 1757 in Petworth. Henry and Anne are buried in the churchyard at St Mary's church.

Henry and Anne had eight children, all born in Slaugham: Anne (1727), Mary (1728), William (1730), Anne (1731), Henry (1734), George (1735), Jasper (1737) and Francis (1740).

Jasper, also recorded as Jesper, the seventh of eight children of Henry and Anne, was born on 21 August 1737. On 21 February 1754 in Itchenfield he married Frances KING with whom he had three children in Shipley: Frances (1756), Jasper (1758) and John (1760). Frances died shortly after giving birth to John. Jasper then moved to Hurstpierpoint, where he married Elizabeth May (the sister of the wife of his brother William), on 2 February 1761 and had six more children: Charles (1762), William (1764), Elizabeth (1767), Henry (1769), Mary (1772) and Jasper (1777). Jasper, who, like his father, was a carpenter, died in 1810.

The second Jasper STILL, the second child of Jasper and Frances, was born on 27 July 1758 in Shipley. He was apprenticed to a blacksmith when he was 10. He married Martha SHELLEY, the daughter of Richard SHELLEY and Anne PARKER, on 29 December 1789 in Bolney. Jasper and Martha had nine children: John (1790, Bolney), Edward (1792, Bolney), Sarah (1794, Bolney), William (1795, Twineham), Jasper (1796, Twineham), Henry (1798, Albourne), Martha (1803, Preston) and Mary (1806, Preston). He died on 13 March 1836 and is buried at St Peter's Church, Preston Manor. It was this Jasper who sometime between 1798 and 1803 made the significant move southwards over the South Downs to the Brighton area.

The third Jasper STILL, continuing the first name of his father and grandfather, was born on 5 March 1796 in Twineham. On 19 October 1816 he married Sarah ROLFE. Sarah was born in Patcham in 1794, the daughter of Thomas ROLFE (also spelt RALF and ROLF) (1769, Rottingdean) and Barbara LELLIOT (also spelt LILLYET, LILLIOTT and LILLET) (1770, Woodmancote). They had five children –

- Louisa (1817, Preston) died in 1818.
- Richard (1820, Portslade), covered subsequently.
- Walter (1823, Portslade) died in 1825.
- Mary (1824, Portslade) married William Barnett in 1845. They had eight children.
- Ezekial (1827, Portslade), covered subsequently.

Jasper was recorded an agricultural labourer in the 1841 and 1851 censuses. He died in 1855. His wife Sarah lived for another 30 years, dying at the age of 91 in 1885. His eldest and youngest sons, Richard and Ezekial, were to emigrate to Canada and America respectively.

Ezekial STILL (1827) – an emigrant to America

Ezekial STILL, the youngest son of Jasper STILL and Sarah ROLFE, was born in Portslade on 18 July 1827. In the 1851 census he was still living with his father. On 6 October 1851 he married Sarah HALLETT in Portslade. In the 1861 census Ezekial was a gardener, lodging at stables in Walberton, to the west of Brighton, near Littlehampton, with his wife and two sons, Walter, aged 7, born in Portslade, and Edwin Ezekial, aged 2, born in Southwick. In the 1871 census the family was living at 16 and 17 Clarence Street Portslade (“connected internally – greengrocer shop”). Ezekial was a gardener and greengrocer, and his eldest son, Walter, was a railway clerk.

In about 1876 Ezekial, Sarah, Walter and Edwin moved to America. In the 1880 US census Ezekial was a gardener, with wife Sarah, in Seattle, Washington State. Ezekial died of a heart attack on 14 July 1903. He is recorded as having been a gardener. Sarah died on 5 January 1905.

Ezekial, eldest son, Walter, married Sarah DIXON in San Juan, Washington in 1883. Sarah was a half blood of the Skagit tribe. They had one son, Thomas Allen, born at East Sound, Orcas Island, Washington, in 1883. In 1908 Thomas married Effie Mae SAWYER in Vancouver, British Columbia. It is not clear why they chose to marry there, as there is no evidence that they lived anywhere other than Washington State, although Vancouver was close to the part of Washington where they lived.

Ezekial’s younger son, Edwin Ezekial, married Mary SHOEMAKER, a native Indian of the Tulalip Tribe, born in Washington State in 1862. Edwin and Mary had four children, all born in Port Blakeley, Kitsap County -

- Albert (1881), who married Marie NAY (but also recorded as Marie RYAN) in July 1904.
- Katie, born in (1883), who married JOHN MCCLLOUD, a milkman from Stockton, California in 1902.
- Mark Ervin (1884), who married Agnes SHEWAN in 1907.
- Adelaide (1887), married Hugh Fay SHULLENBERG, in 1907.

It is quite probable that Ezekial had no contact with his Sussex relatives after he emigrated. But 20 years later more of the STILL family had crossed the Atlantic.

Richard STILL (1820) – emigrated to Canada to join some of his family in 1894

Richard STILL was born on 16 April 1820 in Portslade, the second of the five children of Jasper STILL and Sarah ROLFE. By the 1841 census he had left the family home and was living in Southwick Green, although seemingly not part of a family.

Richard married Charlotte BEAN at St Nicholas Church, Brighton on 25 March 1846. Charlotte was born on 1 May 1823 in the nearby village of Wivelsfield. She was the daughter of Stephen BEAN, a shoemaker and the Wivelsfield Parish Clerk, and Mary Ann HOLDEN.

Richard and Charlotte had eight children all born in Southwick, three of whom moved to Canada and one to America –

- Selena (1847).
- Richard (1848), who moved to Canada after the death in 1905 of his wife Eliza NYE.
- Emma (1850), who married Maurice (Morris) MARSH in 1869. They emigrated to Ohio, USA in 1869 but Emma died later that year.
- Elizabeth, 1857-1920, the first of the family to move to Canada with her husband Philip MOON.
- Mercy Sophia, 1859-1927.
- John, 1861, who married Henrietta YOUNG and who also emigrated to Canada.
- Kate, 1864.
- Alfred, 1866, who married Jane Harriet WAKELING in 1899. Alfred also travelled to Canada in 1893 although he probably returned to England quite quickly. However, there is a record of him travelling from Canada to Liverpool in 1906.

Charlotte died in 1888. As was common his children took responsibility for looking after Richard. In the 1891 census, when he was 70, he was still living at 6 Leylands Road, Fishersgate, as was his granddaughter Selena Payne, aged 15. Next door was his daughter Selena, the mother of the younger Selena, described as head of household, with five children.

Richard was STILL a baker, his granddaughter being an assistant baker. Richard's daughter Selena was a needlewoman.

In 1892 and 1893 there was a significant emigration of STILLS to the new City of Brandon, Manitoba. The City was isolated, being over 200 kilometres from the nearest big town, Winnipeg. The climate is extreme, the average low in winter being -22 degrees centigrade. It was no more than a collection of tents in 1881, when it was chosen as a railway junction. It was designated as a city in 1892, when its population was 3,700. 1896 to 1912 were boom years when the population increased from 4,000 to 14,000.

What made the STILLS travel to Brandon is not known. The first to make the move was Philip MOON, a wheelwright by trade, his wife, Elizabeth STILL, daughter of Richard (1820), and their three children Grace, Philip and Bernard. They travelled on the Sardinian, leaving Liverpool on 21 April 1892.

In 1893, Elizabeth's brother John (1861), his wife Henrietta YOUNG and their children, Florence and Urban, made the move to Brandon, as did another brother, Alfred (1866). Philip's brother, William MOON, moved to Brandon at the same time. Shortly afterwards, travelling on his own, was Richard STILL, the father of Elizabeth and John, then a 72 year old widower, recorded in the records as Richard Steel.

In the 1901 Canadian census all the families were living together except that John STILL's wife, Henrietta YOUNG, had died and Alfred could not be traced, probably having returned to England. John himself returned to England with his children where he married Ellen Louise SANDS on 2 June 1903. Her father's second wife was Mercy Sophia STILL, John's sister, who therefore also became his step mother-in-law. However, John returned to Canada with Ellen in 1912 and they are recorded in the 1921 census as living on their own in Streetsville, Peel, Ontario.

Urban, known as Frederick, returned to England with his father John and served in the British Navy. He then returned to Canada with his father, joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and died at Ypres in 1916. His sister Florence married Frank LAW, born in York, England, in Thunder Bay in 1913. In the 1921 census they were living in the McIntyre Township of Port Arthur, Ontario, with three children: Frank (1910), John (1915) and Thomas (1917). Florence died in 1962.

In 1905 Eliza NYE, the wife of Richard's eldest son, also Richard (1848) died. Richard then followed other members of his family to Canada although he settled in Toronto rather than Brandon City. He died in 1908.

In the 1906 census the elder Richard was living with Philip and Elizabeth MOON, his daughter, and their children.

Another member of the family emigrated to Canada in 1907 – another Richard STILL, born in 1889, the son of Richard STILL and Eliza NYE, so a grandson of Richard (1820) and nephew of John (1861); the ship’s record gives a final destination of Brandon City so perhaps there was a plan to join the rest of the family. However, the 1910 census shows Richard living in Toronto, a butcher, married to Florence THOMSON from Scotland and with a daughter Margaret. In the 1920 census he is at the same address, still a butcher, his wife is called Helen rather than Florence (although it is clear that it is the same person) with two children, Isabel Margaret (10) (recorded as Margaret in the 1910 census) and Richard Allen (8). Helen died in 1923 and Richard in 1969. Richard lived with his daughter Margaret until his death. It is understood that there are no living descendants of Richard and Florence.

The elder Richard died at the age of 92 on 28 February 1911 and is buried in the City’s cemetery along with his daughter Elizabeth who died on 21 June 1920, and son-in-law Philip MOON.

Why did the Stills emigrate?

It is not at all clear why the STILLS – and the MOONs – chose to emigrate to Canada, still less why they chose the city of Brandon. Nor is it known why Ezekial moved to Washington State or why Emma STILL and her husband moved to Ohio. Was this a series of isolated moves, was there something about the family, or rather did it result from local issues in Brighton? Did any other families from Brighton move to Brandon? Establishing the “what” has been something of a challenge. Establishing the “why” would be far more interesting.

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