

Biography of the Craig Family of Parksville

This pioneer family profile is being compiled from public records. Family members have not been contacted. Please forward any comments/corrections or additions to our society.

JAMES CRAIG 1863-1946

1863-James Craig is born on May 26th in Malpaque, Indian River, on lot 18 in Prince Edward Island to James and Flora Craig. James has at least one brother, Robert John.

-James was involved in working the family farm, did some oyster fishing on Richmond Bay and sampled the Carpenter trade. James remembers what it was like to cross the Strait of Northumberland from PEI to Nova Scotia on the mainland. The floating ice made the use of small boats imperative. The passengers alternately rowed and dragged the craft across the ice floes, so the boats were equipped with runners and leather harnesses. The distance was 9 miles across but the journey was often much longer as the tide would carry them off course.

1882-The two brothers, James and Robert, left home on March 28th made their way across the Strait of Northumberland and then travelled 40 miles by sleigh to Amherst, Nova Scotia. James recalls that he was asked to drive one of the sleighs and by misadventure upset it three times. After the last time the passengers refused to get back on the sleigh preferring to walk the last two miles to Amherst. From Amherst the two men travelled aboard a crowded railway car with slat seats for seven days and nights. The two men then took work with the Canadian Pacific Railway. James worked first as a cook for construction gangs working the north shore of Lake Superior, the prairies and the mountain sections. James was stricken with Typhoid fever at Whitemouth, Manitoba and again a year later at Little Pic on Lake Superior. After the second bout James took lighter work and began work as a teamster in charge of the contractors "black" cutter team in St. Pauls. James also worked as a bridge carpenter. James rode with the "\$80,000 in Gold" that the CPR carried to pay the hard-working crews from Revelstoke, B.C. to Three Valleys Lakes. In those days they still worried about the likes of Jessi James but the Mounties were also near by. James had been advised to go west for his typhoid and both James and Robert worked their way across Canada.

1885-The two men quit the railroad in Kamloops in November. They took a boat 30 miles down Shuswap Lake from Kamloops to Lytton. and then hiked from there to New Westminster on the west coast. James estimated that they carried 40 pounds a piece on their backs and hiked 30 miles a day and enjoyed the whole trip. They spent only one night in New Westminster and then travelled to Victoria on Vancouver Island on the side-wheeler steamer "Yosemite". James and Robert purchased a one ton canoe in Victoria, and after only one night there loaded it with supplies and headed up island to farm. Their aim was to reach the El Dorado farm at Campbell River. Their canoe was wrecked in a storm at Comox and they lost all their supplies except for a bit of flour. The two were left to drift slowly down the island until they reached French Creek. They made their way to shore and spent the winter there. They busied themselves cutting 80,000 shingles with the aim of shipping them back to Nanaimo for sale.

1886-In the spring James and Robert bought a twenty ton sloop for transporting the shingles. When the sloop was loaded they set sail but again had misfortune. The first day the wind died and they floated about helplessly in the Georgia Strait. That night the northwester wind came up, the sloop sprung a leak and the bottom dropped out. Some 10,000 shingles began to float away and James went up the mast because he couldn't swim. Again the two men drifted ashore and landed somewhere just south of Englishman's River. When the storm abated they managed a tow into Nanaimo where they promptly sold the remaining shingles and ended their business. It was

regarded as fate and the two men twice found shelter in the same area so they abandoned their Campbell River hopes and decided to settle in the mid island. James settled near Englishman's River and Robert at French Creek. James' father, James Sr. dies in Prince Edward Island.

1887-It is said that on one Sunday in June Jim walked from Cedar to a pretty cove just south of Englishman's river and staked out 160 acres for his own and would begin to establish a homestead. The price at the time was \$1.00 an acre. That night he walked back home and was at work on Monday with a road building crew. James now began erecting buildings on his property, making a small barn out of logs. He also built a small temporary cabin. At the time there was only one woman, (Mrs. Albert Hirst) and eleven bachelors in a 15 mile radius.

1888-James began building a permanent family home. James did some work on Texada Island and began a sheep ranch. He earned cash for teaming.

1889-It is said that the population of the Parksville area was 38 people, enough to become an official settlement. The boundaries were set from Englishman's River to French Creek. On April 18th, James Craig entered into a contract with John Hirst. James Craig was to slash and pile five acres of alder bottom at Englishman's River for the price of \$20 per acre. Only the trees less than eight inches across were to be cut. The job was to be completed by the end of June, but it was later revised so that the job was to be completed by the end of July.

1891 - James is listed in the **North Nanaimo census** as single and aged 27. He is listed as a farmer, born in PEI and a methodist. He is censused next to the Rath family.

-James Craig was instrumental in pushing the government to build a wharf in the Englishman's River area.

1893-A wharf was completed at Arbutus Point and ships were now able to dock to unload their cargo. James Craig acted as the foreman for the jury looking into Coroner Walkem's inquest into the death of James Kennard at Englishman's River. James led the jury of 6 gentlemen that included; R. Alger, H. Gaetjen, C. Welrich, W. Redmond and G. Gaetjen along with himself. The verdict returned was that of accidental death.

1898-James married Gertrude Ellen Busby on New Year's Day. The wedding took place at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick A. Busby, Gertrude's brother, in Nanaimo with the Rev. T. W. Hall presiding. Miss Jennie Miles acted as bridesmaid and Mr. James Lowry was the best man.

1900-A daughter Barbara was born on December 14th.

1901-In the **Census for Nanaimo North**, Englishman's River district, James, now aged 38 years is listed as a Farmer and of Scottish heritage. He is listed with his wife Gertrude, aged 27 years and new born daughter Barbara.

-A daughter Clara was born.

-A son Duncan was born.

-A son Fred was born. This completes the family at 4 children, 2 girls and 2 boys.

1908-A cabin was built on James' property for the engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

-James bought back the cabin built for the CPR and planned to rent it out as a school. It is said that when the inspector came out for look he was not going to approve the school. James then announced that he planned to call in Montrose School. The inspector smiled saying that James was quite a diplomat. The inspector was from Montrose on Prince Edward Island.

1928-Gertrude Ellen Craig nee Busby died in July at Craig's Crossing area of Vancouver Island at the age of about 54 years. She was buried in the Nanaimo City Cemetery on July 4th.

1930-James and his two sons Duncan and Fred, opened an auto camp on the property and eventually offered 15 cabins as accommodations. It was one of the first facilities for tourists in the area.

1946-James Craig died on April 20th in Parksville at the age of 82 years. The funeral was held from Westwood Hirst Parlours on April 23rd and James was buried in the Nanaimo City Cemetery. His son Frederick took over the family homestead.

James "Cougar" Craig was a renowned cougar hunter and estimates of up to 150 cougars are said to have fallen to his guns and hounds. James kept a pack of "Louisiana Raccoon Hounds" and it was customary for many years to send for Jim and his dogs when a cougar was seen within a radius of 25 miles. James began his hunting of cougars after losing many of his sheep to them in the late 1880's. He was often known to hunt with Alec Tranfield.

ROBERT JOHN CRAIG 1861-1930

1863-Robert John Craig is born on January 21st in Prince Edward Island to James and Flora Craig. Robert has at least one brother, James.

-The two brothers, Robert and James, take work with the

Canadian Pacific Railway and work their way across Canada to the west coast.

1885-The brothers purchased a one ton canoe in Victoria, loaded it with supplies and headed up island to farm. Their aim was to reach the Comox Valley but a storm hit and the men were forced ashore at French Creek. They spent the winter there and busied themselves cutting shingles and shipping them back to Nanaimo for sale.

1886-Robert's father, James Sr. dies in Prince Edward Island.

1887-Robert and James took a liking to the area and established a homestead in the Nanoose area just south of French Creek.

1889-It is said that the population of the Parksville area was 38 people, enough to become an official settlement. The boundaries were set from Englishman's River to French Creek.

1891 - Robert Craig is listed in the **census of North Nanaimo** as single, and 29 years of age. He is listed as a farmer, born in PEI and belonging to the Presbyterian Church. He is censused next to Lee family.

1893-Robert John Craig, married at the age of 32 years, to Elizabeth Ann Tippett, 20 year old daughter of John and Mary Ann Tippett. The couple is the first marriage listed in the Registers of St. Anne's Church of French Creek occurring on September 23rd.

1894-The building of St. Anne's Church is completed.

1895-A daughter Florence Ramsey is born on June 28th in BC.

1897-A son Robert John is born on November 10th in BC.

1901-In the **Census of the Nanoose District**, Robert and Elizabeth Anne are listed. Robert is described as 40 years old, born in Prince Edward Island, and of Scottish descent. Elizabeth is

described as 28 years old, born in the United States, immigrating to Canada in 1875 and of English descent. Robert is a farmer and listed as Presbyterian. Elizabeth lists herself as Methodist. They have two children, F. Ramsey who is 6 years old and Robert John who is 4 years old, both born in BC.

1956-Elizabeth Ann Craig celebrated her 84th birthday in Parksville and her 81st year in that area.