

GIBSON FAMILY HISTORY

The North American history of the Gibson family begins with the arrival of Jemima (Sinclair) and Jeremiah Johnstone Gibson to Canada sometime in 1844.

Jemima Mary Sinclair was born June 10, 1820 in the Castle of Mey in Caithness, Scotland. She was the granddaughter of the 12th Earl of Caithness. Her father, James Sinclair, was the third son and an honorable colonel in the army. He married Elizabeth Tritton. The Castle of Mey is now the Scottish home of the Queen Mother and there is a gardener and caretaker who live there year round.

Jemima was sent to her relative, the Earl of Rosslyn, to be raised. She was well educated there.

Her father served with his brother in India and upon his return wanted Jemima to enter into an arranged marriage with an older man. Jemima balked at this, and ran away with the gardener at Rosslyn - Jeremiah Johnstone Gibson. (Johnstone). He was a Presbyterian and she an Episcopalian. The Sinclairs were a very strong and influential family in Scottish history and they appeared to have disowned Jemima because of this, although they were later reconciled. Letters to Jemima from her father are still in existence.

Johnstone and Jemima appear to have run away to Kirkinner, Wigtown, Scotland. A 'Proclamation of Marriage' has been found in the records there. Two children were born in Kirkinner - James and Louisa - their birth certificates have been found at the Kirkinner Old Parish Register of Births (1841 - 1845).

Johnstone Gibson was one of eight children born to James and Elizabeth Gibson (Kelly). The records at Kirkinner show that both his parents and his grandparents died at Sawmill Cottage, near Kirkinner.

At some time in 1843/1844 Jemima and Johnstone set sail to Canada. Their first son, James, died and was buried at sea.

Once in Canada, they went first to Smith Falls, Ontario, and then on to Guelph. Johnstone was a millwright; he worked in the Guelph area and there they had ten more children. All the children and grandchildren were baptized at St. George's Anglican Church in Guelph.

Johnstone apparently suffered from tuberculosis; he also had an alcohol problem. Jemima's father wrote a stern letter to his son-in-law, dated November 9, 1853, entreating him to reform his ways. Letters from his sister, Matilda, however, indicate that he was a loving father and brother. There are also letters from Johnstone to Jemima that are full of affection toward his wife and family.

Johnstone and Jemima felt that you had to own land to get ahead in the world; they bought land at Kingsbush, near Eden Grove, Ontario. Johnstone left home with two of his sons, Bruce and Sinclair, to clear this land.

Sinclair and Bruce married Mckaig sisters. Jane Mckaig and Bruce had four boys: John Sinclair, William Frederick, Irvine Bruce (our father and grandfather), and Douglas Clinton. Jane Mckaig died shortly after the birth of Douglas, and the boys were sent to their Grandmother, Jemima, to be raised.

Johnstone apparently continued to live on the Eden Grove property. He died in 1876 from tuberculosis but his gravestone has not been found.

Jane Mckaig came from a family of thirteen children in the Owen Sound area. Her father's name was Colin. The family originally came from the Isle of Ilay in Scotland; Jane's parents apparently spoke Gaelic. Irvine would often reminisce of the large number of Mckaig relatives he had.

Jemima lived in Guelph until her death in 1901. Her daughter Adelaide resided with her. Irvine Bruce would recall "Aunt Addy" as a very strict woman who resented the four boys living with them.

Irvine recalled his grandmother, however, with great love and respect. She was a "lady" who provided her children and grandchildren with a good education. She taught French and Latin at a school in Guelph. She was in a wheelchair in her later years, due to a carriage accident. She told stories to the boys about Scotland and Scottish history. She also read tea leaves for the residents of Guelph.

Jemima is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Guelph, Ontario.

Much time has been spent by Margaret Brown and other relatives, searching out our family history. The Sinclair story, Jemima's in particular, is a fascinating one. There are many "blanks" in her story, and unanswered questions. The Scottish Peerage, for example,

indicates that the Honourable James Sinclair, married to Elizabeth Tritton, died in 1856 "with issue." Burke's Peerage, however, indicates that he died without issue. A story handed down is that her mother died in childbirth; Elizabeth Tritton, however, lived until 1856.

We are fortunate that several letters written to Jemima from her family in Scotland survive. Some are from Louisa Tritton, who often mentions her sister, Elizabeth and other family members. Others are from her father and from Johnstone's family.

From what we know, Jemima did get back to Scotland for a visit, in the year 1854. There was also a visit to Jemima from her cousin, James, Earl of Caithness, who traveled by private rail to urge her to return to Scotland and accept her inheritance. Jemima, however, would not leave; she had become established in Guelph, with a large family and also had endured enough to get where she was, including burying a baby at sea. After this Earl's death, the title passed to another branch of the Sinclair family.

Jemima kept a journal in which she wrote poetry. One of these poems tells of her feelings upon leaving her home in Scotland:

I have taken a long, a last farewell
Of the heathery mountain & flowery dell,
Of the gurgling _____* & mossgrown tree,
And there's nought now but sorrow remains with
me.

I have sat and wept in my garden bower,
And watered with tears each favorite flower
And I have said to my sweet companions farewell
And I've heard each voice falter the farewell
knell.

From the home of my childhood I hasten away,
For on the stage of life I've my part to play.
I must wreath my lip with smiles & deck my
temples with gladness
While my soul spurns the mockery & whispers
_____.*

* indecipherable