

HEBER'S STORY



Heber West, 1886 - 1944
Researched by Bruce More

Heber was born in 1886 at Venn mill, near Wantage in what was Berkshire, but is now Oxfordshire. He appears in the census of 1891 (4 yrs) with his siblings Frederick (16), Percy (13), Elsie (11), John (9), Molly (Mary 6) and Ruth (6mo). His older brothers: Will (22) and Asher (18) seem to have “left the nest” by this time. Within a year, Heber, with sister Molly and brother John, had witnessed the tragic accident in which a family gun accidentally went

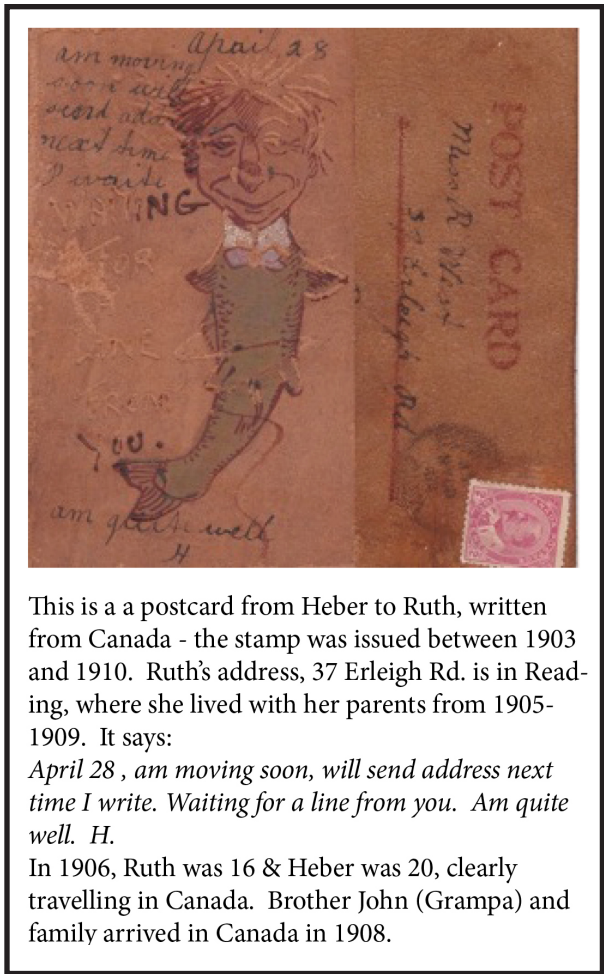


off, killing a 10 year old cousin (Fanny Amelia Simmons). In the 1901 Venn Mill census, Heber was 15 years old and the older family members had dispersed considerably. He and Ruth (10 years old) were still at home, as was mother Sarah and older brother Will (31) but curiously not Father W.W.W. Judging by photographs and Mary Irish’s memory, he and Ruth were very close. He probably named

his first daughter Ruth (Arlet), who was born in 1920, after her. In the 1901 census, his older brother Asher was listed as an “engineer” at Bridge Farm, Wantage, living with cousins: the Collins family. His brother John was fighting in the Boer War. After 1901, his father and mother were planning to move to Reading for studies prior to entering the Strict Baptist ministry. Will had already visited Canada and had a reportedly dramatic experience



getting lost in the wilderness and fighting wolves. In 1906, brother John went to the U.S., intending to go to the Klondike gold fields, but he was shanghaied out of Tacoma and returned 6 months later. His brother Percy told me a story about this time when he was planning to accompany his brother to the gold rush. In passing his father in the hallway, he said “get a return ticket boy!”. Asher emigrated to Canada in 1905 and Frederick went about the same time. It seems clear that these departures held



This is a postcard from Heber to Ruth, written from Canada - the stamp was issued between 1903 and 1910. Ruth's address, 37 Erleigh Rd. is in Reading, where she lived with her parents from 1905-1909. It says:

April 28, am moving soon, will send address next time I write. Waiting for a line from you. Am quite well. H.

In 1906, Ruth was 16 & Heber was 20, clearly travelling in Canada. Brother John (Grampa) and family arrived in Canada in 1908.

Heber's interest as well. Heber sailed to Canada on the “Lake Manitoba” in early 1906. The census of 1906 shows Heber in Edmonton in service with the Cresswell family of Namao, Alberta (near Edmonton). This discovery is of great significance since his brother John, wife Emma and babies Jack and Elsie arrived in Namao in March of 1908. Why they would emigrate to a tiny community like this had been a mystery until the discovery that Heber had been with this prominent family in Namao a year or more before and had undoubtedly made that connection. Shortly thereafter, Heber made his first homestead application for land in southern Alberta (NE-4-32-21-W3), in July of 1906. His address by this time was Beaverlodge, Alberta (near Grande Prairie). In 1910, he applied for a homestead

in this area just west of Grande Prairie (NW-10-71-8-W6), and over the next 4 years, after successfully completing homestead requirements for this land he received a patent (ownership) in 1915. By July of this year, he returned to Edmonton to enlist in the CEF 66th Battalion and sail for England on Sept. 11. While in England, on leave, a family story tells of him proposing to a cousin, Miriam Smith, who subsequently turned him down. He remained in the War Theatre for at least 4 years, sailing to France with



his unit (9th bde Marine Gun Company) on April 1 of 1916. In each of the following years, he had a 2 week leave of absence to England, during which he would mostly likely have visited his family. I have his complete war records from 1916-1919, but they don't give any details as to what battles he actually fought in. He was



in a machine gun company, a very specialized unit which chose men who had the particularly keen mathematical minds needed to operate these weapons. On December 27, 1918, he was confirmed to the rank of Corporal (his gravestone says "Sergeant") and awarded the Canadian Army Class A Medal. What is particularly clear, however, is that in spite of several hospitalizations for Trench Fever, he spent 4 full years



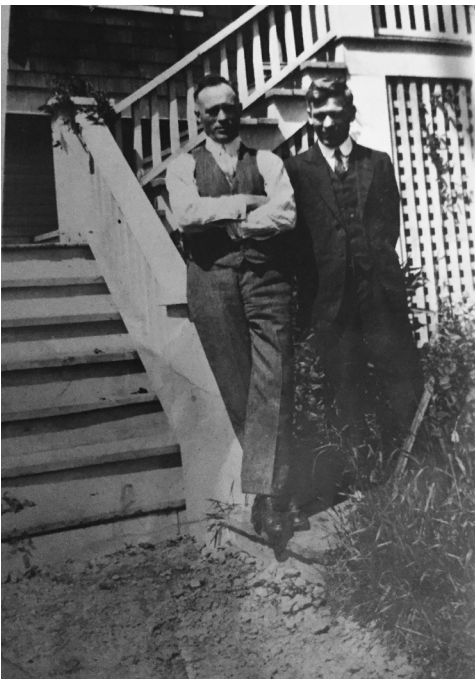
in that “horror” and these years likely had a profound effect on his life in the years to come.

At this point, dates are bit confusing, since one document shows him marrying Ellen Victoria Lawrence in 1918, but not returning to Canada from the war until March of 1919. In any case, at some point in 1919, he had met and married Victoria in Grande Prairie and settled on their homestead just south of Wembley, Alberta (NW-10-71-8-W6). In the same year, he applied for a soldier’s grant for this property and in 1920, Ruth was born.

His connection with his Canadian brothers continued with brother John listing Grande Prairie as his intended address after military discharge. This, however, never happened since John, a victim of

mustard gas in Belgium, was advised by his doctor to move to the “healthier” climate of Vancouver. In 1922, Heber and his new family moved to Vancouver where Robert was born in 1924. Heber worked at Canadian Cannery, the family living at 2326 w. 4th Ave. in 1925 and 733 Nicola in 1926.

In 1928, his wife “Vic” left him and the children. For about a year, the children lived in Foster care, visiting with gramma Emma and grampa John on the weekends. Vic wanted Ar-



let to stay with Heber and Robert to come with her, but Heber insisted that the children stay together. A year later Heber’s niece Edna (age 18) delivered the children to their mother in Calgary. It seems that the family was never reunited. Heber’s life problems seem to have been augmented by the loss of one of his Grand Prairie lands (NE-33-70-8-W6), which was repossessed by the Soldier’s Settlement Board in 1929. It’s not clear what became

of his 3 other homestead lands.

Between 1928 and 1930, Heber lived at 1125 Davie and 776 Homer. He is not listed in Vancouver between 1931 and 1934 but reappears in the directory from 1935 to 1944, residing at 1243 Alberni and continuing to work at Canadian Canneries, where several other family members had worked.

As sad as many aspects of his life were, he seems to have maintained a relationship with his brothers Asher (Cloverdale), Frederick (Langley Prairie), and he appears fairly often in photos and is mentioned in gatherings of his brother John's family. It appears that Heber was instrumental in getting Grampa John and his large family settled in Canada, and I'm sure that Grampa never forgot. Heber died on June 14, 1944. Funeral services were held at Center & Hanna Chapel and he was buried in the soldier's plot in Mountain View Cemetery.



PHOTOS:

Cover - Heber at Venn Mill in 1889

Page 2 - Heber in 1897, Heber & Ruth in 1917

Page 3 - Postcard from Heber in Namao to Ruth in Reading - 1906

Page 4 - Heber with Grampa John - ca. 1910

Heber, Arlet & Vic - 1923

Page 5. Vic, Arlet & Robert - 1925

Page 6 - Ruth and Robert in 1929

Grampa John and Heber 161 e. 62nd in 1925

Page 7 - Heber in 1930



3rd Battn. Sergeant Heber West C.E.G. June 14, 1944 "Lest We Forget"