



Chapter Three

John Aldworth West

Grampa was born on May 25 of 1881. To say he lived an interesting life would be an understatement. Thanks to a large number of grandchildren, all of whom were directly touched by this complicated yet gentle man, and their manifold recollections of him at various points of his “journey”, we know a great deal about him. His war service in South Africa, twice to North America and around Cape Horn of South America are legend in our family.

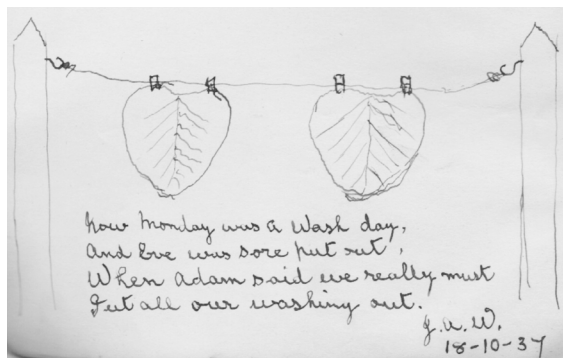
Yet there are some mysteries about Grampa. To begin with, why does his birth date alternate between 1881 and 1883 on various official documents? Of course we know that it was 1881 because Loreleigh has a memory that Grampa used to delight in telling us that it was the same right side up as upside down. What kind of demons must have stayed with

him throughout his life as a result of the shooting at Venn Mill in 1891, or the horrors of war in South Africa, and poison gas in France? He was clearly a man of his time, a patriot and an adventurer, who saw his duty to his country. He was dramatically lured toward the Klondike gold fields in the late 1890s. In his later life, we saw him as a loving family man who took us in his self-built clinker boat around Howe Sound, gathered little groups of us, his grandchildren, around him and took us to the PNE (Pacific National Exhibition), giving us each the treasured 1 dollar bill (which went a long way in the mid-1950s). We also knew him as a fun-loving man who, if you were brave enough to



walk up the stairs to his room on 27th Ave., had humbug candies for sugar-crazed grandchildren, and if you were lucky enough to sit next to him at a family dinner, he would give you the icing off his piece of cake, claiming he didn't like icing. We remember him also as a religious man. Whether it was the fundamentalism of the Strict Baptist church of his parents, the oft-mentioned Church of England on his various military documents, or the Presbyterian Church in Edmonton, he always spent Sundays at rest, frequently alone in his room, reading his bible. Because of his broad farmer, machinist, carpenter background, a visit from Grampa could mean gardening help, the construction of a new paddleboard or raft at Boundary Bay, a bridge over a creek in the backyard at Aldergrove or a pruned tree in Gibsons, using the pen-knife which he always carried with him. And of course, he would never say goodbye without a game of "touched you last". Sometime in 1918, probably on her birthday,

my mom (Elsie) received her first autograph book from her grandparents, "salted" with entries from many friends and family members. Later entries, many from her university days (1923 onward), were filled with religiosity and romanticism so typical of the early 20th century: "life owing like a song"; "twilight draws its curtains down"; "God bless you every day!"; "a garden spot, where all my friends may sow", and so on. Then Grampa got his hands on it....



Now Monday was a wash day, and Eve was sore put out.
When Adam said we really must put all our washing out!

But Grampa was no stranger to tragedy either. On August 25, 1891, Fanny Amelia Simmons, the 10 year old daughter of Fanny Ann Simmons (WWW's eldest sister), was visiting the family at Venn Mill. Grampa John (age 10), with his 8 year old sister Molly and his 5 year old brother Heber were playing in the mill with Fanny. 18 year old Asher had borrowed a gun for rat extermination and had hidden it behind some sacks in the mill. Grampa had apparently seen him hide it and took it out to play with it. The gun slipped, he reached out to catch it, and the gun went off, killing Fanny. The Coroner's jury reached a verdict of accidental death. It's hard to imagine the guilt Grampa must have carried over this incident. Likewise, there must have been a fair amount of blame on Asher, who left the gun loaded. The gun accident story was told to me in 1994 by Jack Ireson, although he didn't have any details, certainly not who the "shooter" was. Furthermore, the incident was unknown to any of the Vancouver aunts or uncles. The accident was reluctantly confirmed by Mary Irish a few years later, who said "I can't tell you which brother it was, but it wasn't my dad" (Percy). From then until 2012, I wondered if it was Grampa. Then during the "kuzzins" visit to England in 2012, Becky Harris (a "Long" cousin) presented me with a digital copy of an actual Thames Valley Times newspaper article from 1891 which gave the tragic details. Another family story suggested a related ongoing rift between the Venn Mill family and the Lower Hanney Mill family (upstream from Venn). Sometime in the 1890s, the upstream miller (probably Daniel West Jr., Fanny Simmons' brother) cut off the water to Venn Mill, rendering it inoperable. However, cousin Colin Smith sheds doubt on this story by suggesting that water must go somewhere, and such an action would probably have flooded the adjacent lands in short order.



The Boer War

Grampa served for one year and 48 days in South Africa and was discharged on July 3, 1901. Family verbal history has it that Grampa signed up prematurely at age 17 for the army, but he was "bought out" by his father shortly thereafter. His first attestation form (sign up), dated January 24, 1898 bears this out and lists his age as 18 years and 7 months (his actual age was 17 years). The form was signed in London, suggesting that he left home and travelled to a different jurisdiction to sign up. On January 29th, 1900 (now at the legally permitted age of 18 years and six months), Grampa successfully signed up with the newly formed 58th Company, 15th Battalion Imperial Yeomanry. This was a cavalry regiment for which he had to provide his own horse. His age was listed as 21 and 2 twelfths years (military fashion), which is odd since he was born in 1881 and actually only 18 at the time. We know that Grampa received a good education, so his penchant for listing his age incorrectly is puzzling. (He listed his birthdate as 1883 on all three of his Canadian attestation papers.) It is clear from the documentation that he fought in the Relief of Mafeking, but no records exist showing how much longer he remained in action, other than the fact that the term of his contract was one year. Like all soldiers in this conflict, he received the South Africa War Medal, but he also received a gold watch, which was presented to him personally by Edward VII for heroism. Cousin John still has that watch. The report tells us that as a scout he was wounded with a bullet in his ankle while returning to his regiment to report a Boer position, thereby enabling another British victory. There are several references in his First War medical reports to diseases which he contracted while in South Africa: enteric (typhoid) fever, which when untreated can cause inflammation of heart muscles and which may lead to heart problems in the long term (documented in several First War medical reports), and rheumatism, also cited in Grampa's Oct. 1915 discharge.

We also know that he left for Vancouver in 1902, to go to the Klondike Gold Rush, but he was stopped short of his goal by being Shanghaied (forced on-board labour) out of Tacoma and returned to Dublin some time later that year. Several years ago, cousin Helen had an article in the Victoria Times Colonist on the occasion of her painting of the ship "County of Caithness" on which Grampa was Shanghaied. Approximately 100 years after Grampa's birth, Steve Stackhouse wrote a school report about his great grandfather in the Boer War and the Gold Rush trip, based on the memory of his grandfather Phil. It has been another excellent source of information. Best of all, however, is a recounting of the Shanghai experience by Grampa himself, typed out by Auntie Marjorie.



Shanghaied! J. A. West

I had been wounded while serving with the cavalry in the South African Boer War and invalided home to England. After somewhat recovering, I decided to come here to Vancouver and join in the Klondike Gold Rush. When I arrived, I heard that it was easier to get a passage from Tacoma, so I went there. While waiting to get a passage north, I went into a saloon and had a schooner of beer, not being familiar at that time - as I am now - with the method used by some to get a crew to sail on the windjammers bound for European ports.

I came to, being vaguely aware of lying in the bunk of some ship, which ship was the County of Caithness, a four masted barque of the Scottish Family Line, owned by the Craig Bros. of Grenoch, Scotland. She had a cargo of grain and was at that time bound for Dublin, Ireland, under the command of Captain A. Buchan. I was aware of being vigorously shaken, and of someone in a broad Scottish accent telling me to shake a leg and go and lend a hand with the "upper tganls". This was all foreign to me, not having the slightest idea what the upper tganls was, but I soon found out! I was paid off in Dublin after a voyage of 156 days round the horn and across the Atlantic on a diet of more or less salt junk and hard tack. We received an occasional tot of rum after those all too frequent stiff blows which sometimes lasted for several days. Such storms necessitated all hands going aloft and climbing out on the yard arm to take in and make fast the sails, before they were blown to ribbons. With the roll of the ship, the end of the yard-arm one minute would be almost in the water, the next minute it would be away up in the air. Whoever wrote the song "Oh for a life on the ocean wave, out on the rolling deep" should have his head examined!

A few days before I got home, my father received a letter from someone in Spain saying that I was being held as prisoner, and if my father would send him some money, he would bribe his keeper to release him. He would then come over to England and go with my father to where he had some money buried and they would share it 50-50. My father was a bit of a skeptic on those occasions, but he had not heard from me for several months, which was unusual as I wrote home quite frequently, so he wondered if I had written the letter, but for some unknown reason did not want my identity to be known. A few days later he was talking to a neighbour, who gave him a letter to read which he had received from someone in Spain. It was an exact copy of the one my father had received. The money was buried in a different place. Of course, this convinced them that the whole thing was a hoax. I arrived home a few days later and joined them in enjoying "the fatted calf."

Although I am well past the 92nd milestone, those little experiences are just as fresh in my memory as if they only happened yesterday. I often think of the schooner of beer and the hours spent climbing in the rigging and on the yard-arm, handling the skysls, the royals, the flying jib, the tganls, and all the other sails used on the windjammers. I think of the starboard watch, the 2 hour trick at the wheel, the watch on the forsl, the dog watch, not forgetting the salt junk and the hard tack.