

Introduction

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggerman, Thief:

We've had all these professions in our family history (except to my knowledge a Tinker and a Thief). Like most people, if we go back far enough, we can make the claim that we are descended from royalty, but in our family, there is no such oral tradition. Since most genealogical records before the medieval period are of royalty, most families can find royalty somewhere in their distant past. Like most people from southern England, our West ancestors seem to have been a mixture of farmers, tradesmen, merchants and at least one preacher.

The information which fuels this book is of two kinds: data - census and birth/death records etc.; and family oral tradition. At times the two sources are at variance with each other. For example, although we have strong, multiple-source family stories regarding life at Venn Mill, 19th century mill records have no references to a West family at Venn Mill or Blewbury Mill, probably because our ancestors were tenant millers and not owners. However, there are several census entries which show the family in residence at Venn Mill House.

Emigration of families from Britain was common during the 19th century and early 20th century, and the West family of Venn Mill was no exception. In this book, I follow the family's "transitions" from the soon becoming obsolete flour mills in Oxfordshire (then Berkshire) to an ill-fated homestead in Alberta (via [the Corsican](#) - left photo), and then, due to Grampa's war injuries, a move to Vancouver, where we have grown and prospered over the past 100 years. Although our story is not unusual, there are many exciting (and some horrifying) chapters contained in it. Central to these stories are Grampa John and Gramma Emma. Grampa's exploits range from heroism in the Boer War, to being Shanghaied on the way to the Yukon Gold Rush; and from breaking ground for a homestead in Alberta to being injured by chlorine gas in France during the first war. Gramma arrived in Alberta with Grampa, a one year old boy (Jack), and a baby girl (my mom Elsie) in arms, then homesteaded while giving birth to two more children. She then settled with the family in Edmonton, giving birth to yet another two children while Grampa was in the war. In 1915, the great Edmonton flood forced the entire family out of their house, and when Grampa returned in 1918, while carrying their last child, she had to move everyone (now 8 children plus injured husband) to Vancouver.

Chapter 8 tells about each family, although the "tree" only goes through the third generation (the fourth being an ever changing work in progress). Some family members continued Grampa's work as carpenter, mechanic and contractor, and others have pursued a whole new range of 20th century professions including teachers, office workers, entrepreneurs and financiers, among a host of others. This is our story.

The following abbreviations will be used throughout the book:

Grampa = My grandfather, John A. West
Gramma = My grandmother, Emma (Long) West
WWW = My great grandfather William Westell West
Sarah = My great grandmother Sarah (Aldworth) West
Kuzzins = My generation of West cousins
(Ann's expression was originally "Kissin' Kuzzins")

Underlined words usually pertain to an adjacent photo or graphic.

