

Leaving Venn

Venn Mill to Vancouver,
the West Family in the 20th century

Bruce E. More

With love and gratitude to my dear Connie, who joined me in most of the travels, searches and discoveries over 25 years of research and has been my most able (and ferocious) editor.



Family Photo - title page
West family gathering at Beach Grove BC Canada in 1958

With 12 in our grandfather's family, Great Uncle Percy only remembered one occasion in which they were all together at Venn Mill. Therefore, it is no surprise that I wasn't able to find a photo of the entire Vancouver West family together. This was the largest group photo to date and arguably the first all-family picnic.

Upper row – left to right: Dianne, Bruce, Bill, Rich, Barry, Art, Darryl, Greg (Charles), Grampa, Grampa Clarke, Rosemarie, Jack Stackhouse, Marilyn, Phil

Lower row – left to right: Evelyn, Linda, Ruthie, Edna, Marj, Kathy, Cally, Joy (Loraleigh), Elsie, Fred, Buttons, Harold

Not present: Donna, Barrie, Betty Turnbull, Jack, Margaret, Johnny, Ann & Billy (Kelowna), Ruth, Wes, Arlene, Helen & Terry (Gibsons), Ken, Irene (Toronto)

Many more family photos from 1900 onward can be seen on the West family website:
brucemore.ca/west

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Dedicated to Mary Irish

Mary was probably known to more of the extended West family in both England and Canada than any other family member. She “chose” this position, not just because she was a loving, caring person, but because her family circumstances were such that she was the most logical one to fill this role. With the exception of Frederick's Dennis, she was the only grandchild of her generation in William and Sarah's family who remained in England. There was only her father (Grampa's older brother) Percy, 4 childless Aunties (Emma, Elsie, Molly [Mary] and Ruth), and childless Uncle Will. In addition to staying in close touch with most of the England Wests from Oxfordshire to Sussex during her lifetime, she visited B.C. on several occasions, meeting most of her Vancouver cousins in the process. The photo above with Tanya is the best I have of Mary and shows her joy with her Vancouver family.

During the First War, Mary lived near her grandparents in Heathfield, then she moved to Birmingham, where she spent most of her life in the Northfield area. Having completed her teacher training, she received her BA in 1925. During the Second War she taught groups of children evacuated from London during the Blitz. In 1944, she married Arthur Irish, who had a son named Lloyd from a previous marriage.

I met her initially in 1969. From the first day of our meeting, she was driving me down to Venn Mill, Grove, Wantage, and Blewbury to show me the “landmarks”. Her fascination with West family history was intense and infectious. During my subsequent England visits with her in 1981, 1993, and 1997, she added more and more to my store of knowledge. I was also happy to be able to be with her close to her death in 2003.

Even after her death, Mary's influence in keeping the family together is present. She willed family memorabilia to many of the cousins, which has been one of many reasons we stay in touch with each other.

She was the primary source and influence on my family research and was the essence of all that I have come to know and love about the Wests.