

The Keith Family

A Brief History

Prepared By
James M.F. Keith
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Prologue

Kennebecasis Island is a pleasant bit of land three miles long and two miles wide. It is on the mouth of the Kennebecasis River on three sides and the Saint John River on the other side.

It is one and a half miles from Millidgeville and the old farm is across from Summerville. Now there are forty four summer houses and no winter residents. There are only a few gardens in the back yards now and no large green fields as there were thirty years ago.

N.B. Museum
Saint John Library
N.B. Archives
Mrs. Lila Stevens
Vince Morrow

Registry Bureau of Hampton
" " Saint John
Gerald Keith
My Family
Many Old People

Information On The Keith Family
Prepared By James M.F. Keith

James Keith was granted lot # 1013 in the new city of Saint John. It was situated on the south side of Queen Square and the date was September 22, 1783. He had been a sergeant in the Queen's Rangers in the American Revolution. His regiment consisted of troops from Rhode Island and Connecticut.

He arrived here with his wife and two sons. he bought a 50 acre lot of land from Michael Butler granted on Kennebecasis Island in 1789. He must have been living up there earlier because a notice in the Royal Gazette of 1786 mentions the death of a 17 year old Keefe boy. He perished on the Milkish Creek side of the island in a March storm.

In those days if one fought in the revolution or lost property in the United States one was given land in Canada as compensation. Upon arrival one received a small lot in the city to live on until the government got one's land grant surveyed. If a person got a grant and did not stay on their property one could petition the government for that property.

On September 25, 1807 James petitioned the Honorable Gabriel G. Ludlow Esquire who was President of His Majesties Council and Commander in Chief of the Province of New Brunswick. He explained that he was living on the Island and that he and his family were the only inhabitants. He said that half of his land was cleared and that he had a need for more.

As there were vacant grants on the island he had started to work one of them. He had planted an acre and a half of turnips on land that had been granted to a man named Mabee who had returned to the States. The aforementioned Mr. Mabee's brother had told James he could not take off the turnips he had planted. James then petitioned for lots # 7, 8 and 9 which were good lots well sheltered and near the river.

James was either very shrewd or very lucky when he chose Kennebecasis Island. In those days there were no roads; only wilderness if you travelled it was by canoe, boat or by raft. Often one would build a raft of logs and upon arriving at Saint John sell the logs to buy supplies then paddle home. The old wharf James had built is now just a pile of rocks on the shore of the island.

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In the earlier days there were few markets further up river for agricultural products that were fresh as everything was either salted or dried. Being near Saint John meant that the Indians would not pester one like they did in more secluded places. In those days Saint John was a very busy place with shipbuilding, lime kilns, lumber mills and booming ship's chandler businesses.

He had been a Sergeant in the Engineering Regiment and it was said that he worked and cleared his farm all summer then worked as a mechanic in the city all winter while his family maintained the farm. He had at least 2 and possibly three sons and we know that one died in the storm.

Another son named Thomas was born in 1785. He had at least 8 children from 1806 - 1820 and their names are in a page torn from the family bible. My great great grandfather William Loyd was born May 3, 1817. Thomas lived on the Island but he must of been a lumberman at heart. He petitioned for land in Grand Bay in 1812, 1818 and 1822 receiving a total of 300 acres. Three years later he sold the whole works to Mr. Purdy of the Purdy Lumber and Lime Kill Company for \$ 300.

My great grandmother passed on the story that about then a log cabin was built where the house stands now. Apparently the family stayed in one end and a cow and a horse were kept in the other end. In the winter the heat from the animals helped the fireplace in keeping the cabin warm. They were the first family in the parish to have a horse. The horse earned its' keep because it could get across the ice so much quicker than an ox in the winter.

Because grass was so scarce the cow grazed about two miles away from the cabin. His wife had to tie the children outside the cabin (in case of fire) and walk that far every day twice to milk the cow when the her man was away. We believe that her name was Jane.

Another story was told of when they first came to the Island. Apparently the Indians would paddle up river and harass people that they ran into. They weren't hostile in that they would scalp or shoot you but if the men were away they would come into your home and try to take over. Jane saw a large canoe paddle into the cove and ran to put a big pail of water on the fire. She was home alone with two small children. They came to the door (some were drinking) and said they

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wanted a big meal. She told them there was barely enough for her and to get off the property. When they tried to get in she threw a big dipper of scalding water on them and they ran off yelling that she was a crazy women.

In the 1820's there were 6 or 7 families who either lived there or owned land. In the early 1830's old James tried to sell his original farm but Jane hid the deed on him. He had to go up to Hampton and swear out an affidavit that he had purchased the land 44 years prior. It would appear that Jane and Thomas really liked this farm as it was well cleared. One disadvantage was that it was very open to the wind and that water had to be carried a quarter of a mile.

James was getting quite old as he had been in Canada over 50 years and had been in the army while in the States. (this would place him at 70 or more) He sold off pieces of land over the next few years until he died. It is supposed that he and his wife whose name we do not know are buried there.

In the early thirties (1930's) there were several wooden grave markers that my grandfather pulled out and piled up so he could replace them. Unfortunately some hunters used them to make a fire and they were destroyed.

Thomas got the farm and sold 100 acres in 1839 to William (my great grandfather) and his brother John. They divided the land and spent the rest of their lives fighting back and forth over it. Both Thomas and William were mechanics. They had worked building ships and we still have some tools that William used. One of the farms had a pit where all the sawing was done and we also still have the old saw that he used.

William married Elizabeth Ann Saunders in the fall of 1839. Her father is buried on the other side of the Island; his tomb says that he is of Loyalist descent. The back part of our house must have been built around this time. (old style square nails were used) They had 12 children over the next 25 years. The first three all died in 1854 of influenza. We know that some time after 1840 Thomas and Jane separated because she stayed on the farm with William.

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Thomas took off to Solon, Maine where one of his sons Michael had settled. He became a lumberman and a storekeeper and wrote many letters to his brother William from 1846 to 1865. He talked about some of the teams he had in the woods, his new house and the prices on cows and grain.

He had lost two children to influenza in 1850 and wrote a whole letter bemoaning the fate of his brother James. James had gone to California for the Gold Rush spending \$ 1350 for a one way ticket by way of boat around South America. He had been stuck off of Gloucester for over three weeks waiting for some wind to power the boat.

Travel by boat between Maine and New Brunswick was probably pretty well established because Thomas usually came back once or twice yearly. He instructed John that all the lumber was not to be cut and that his mother was to be given a barrel of flour yearly to support her.

In 1854 Thomas returned but he was not a wealthy man. At the time when he left he had been about 62 years old. Michael was a teacher and also preached; he wrote beautiful letters like old copy books. In the last few letters he writes of his son going to Michigan to work and saving \$ 1500 in one year. In his last letter we found (1875) he went out there to live and from there we lost track of him.

Thomas must of came back because in 1865 he sold the last of his land on the Island. He was 80 years old and that is where we lose track of him. He and Michael had bought large tracts of land and lumbered them out and made potash as well. This must have been virgin country at the time.

My great grandmother passed on a story of my great grandfather having to go to Fredericton to register some property. He rowed to Westfield and then caught a stage to Fredericton. After completing his business he got a job on a raft working its' way down river and got off at the point of the Island having only been gone one week.

By 1850 life must have been getting a little easier on the Island. There were steamboats on the river and a wharf had been built on the south side of the Island. It was still there (some timbers and rocks) when I was a boy. William had become a master builder and had built houses and barns

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all over the lower part of Kings County. He would start by cutting the lumber, then hew it, board it in, build a chimney then plaster it and make the trim. When he was away his boys would work at clearing the fields and building rock drains and fences. Everyone helped with haying in the summer.

The girls got married and with the exception of one all moved off of the Island. Eventually one son and a daughter moved to Boston.

My ~~great~~ grandfather was born July 5, 1852 and was the seventh child. Everyone said he was a born farmer; he was very happy go lucky and sang and danced and was a great fiddle player. He always kept a good horse as he played all of the weddings, parties and dances from Sussex to Grand Bay. He met a girl named Mary Estelle Beatty at a dance he was playing at in Hampton. She was born in Saint John in 1961 and her father was an engineer working aboard the first Boston boats.

They were married in Westfield by a methodist minister named Reverend William Dobson on January 21, 1883. They had two girls and two boys. They were Elizabeth, Mabel, Louis and Leonard who is my father. My grandmother did not like the spelling Keefe and this is when our name was changed to Keith. Mary Keith as I know her was very strong willed and a real Victorian. She had to have the best of everything and always be first. My grandfather apparently had great patience and was good natured.

Before 1880 the children went to school over at Irvines. He was a farmer who also taught school in his home. In the 1880's a steamboat was put on the river joining Bayswater, Sommerville and the Island to Millidgeville. In the beginning they made 4 trips per day. Later the boat was expanded to a deck type with paddle wheels.

This put the people living on the island in a favorable position. The farms were brick clay and responded well to fertilizer and also grew good hay. My great grandfather had bought more land and the city of Saint John was full of horses. He developed it into a hay farm and they delivered two loads a day bringing home a load of manure each time to fertilize the farm. In the winter they hauled it across the ice on sleds.

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My father sold his last load of hay in 1957 when he retired from farming.

In 1889 William and Elizabeth sold the farm to James and Mary who doubled the size of the house and added a big woodshed. When this was done William and Elizabeth took the back parlor and a bedroom until they died in 1904 and 1912. William was 1901-1903 active right up until he died working around the farm and making furniture. We still have a bench that he built on the verandah.

James ran the farm up until 1812. He got sick and had pleurisy for over a year. My grandmother got the bishop to come over in a tugboat (the ferry was not on) to baptize them both before he died. James left the farm to his two sons and his wife Mary.

The two young men and their mother had a busy time. We have a waybill dating back to 1912 where my father had been in town with a team of horses hauling hay. Their mother decided that she would take on guests visiting from the United States to supplement their income. She had two families that came every summer until 1924. In the summer it would be very busy with five or six boarders and three or four men hired to help hay. There were also the two grandchildren and my grandmothers' relatives from the States. (Two sisters, Kate, Aunt Edie and Minnie). Uncle Lou moved to Saint John in the winter of 1918 and went to work on the CPR railway.

In 1922 my father Leonard married Edith Mae Forbes who had been born at Coral Street in Pennsylvania in 1902. Her father had married Minnie Beatty who was my grandmothers' sister. She had been out of work in Bridgeport and as Minnie's stepdaughter found a way to get herself into Canada. Her father was in his 80's and wanted to come to Canada to see Mary so mother was elected to bring him to Saint John. She found work at Manchesters with Aunt Mabel, met my father and married him February 23, 1922 in the parlour on Kennebecasis Island.

They started saving right away to buy out Uncle Lou and Mary so that they could own the farm. Lou married Margery Jenkins of Holderville in 1922 and worked the winters on the railway. In the summer he sold farm equipment made by Frost and Wood for Cecil Alexander.

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I arrived on the scene November 27, 1924 at the Evangeline Nursing Home. Mother was very sick and said I was as blue as the birds when I came out. When we came home Pop bought a heifer from Hammas the milk farmer and we all survived. My sister Audrey was born July 30, 1927. In 1929 my mother took me down to Pennsylvania to meet all of her people and to my great grandfathers' and great uncles' in Bridgeport.

We lived through the depression and I never knew the difference. My father always had a hired man and as many as four or five in the summer. We never really mechanized, we just sold loose hay in Saint John. In those days very few people wanted baled hay because it was so musty. When I was ten I started to help with the haying and can remember my mother baking 35 loaves of bread per week to feed everyone. She worked from 7.00 A.M. until 8.00 P.M. all summer picking berries and vegetables and cooking. My Aunt Mabel died in 1935 and Uncle Will stayed with us all winter.

In the winter we had a great time, we went to school in Bayswater which was two miles across the water. We either skated, went by horse drawn sleigh, snow shoed or had my mother as a teacher in really bad weather. My grandmother Mary fell on the ice in 1935 and broke her back. She was in a cast and in and out of the hospital until 1942 when she died on Kennebecasis Island. We buried her in the old graveyard up on the hill.

I went to school in Saint John in 1935 and was away all winter. Tommy Scot who had worked for Pop for 11 years went back to Scotland. Only Katie Morrison was on the Island with them for the winter.

At the start of the war the old families were all that was left. The Johnsons had died or were drowned.

The Hutchings had moved away.

The Morrows had died.

The old generation was gone and none of the younger people wanted to live on the Island.

My father and mother moved off in the winter of 1944. Mother was not very well and Pop decided it was a big risk with just the two of them there. In the fall they sold off some of the stock and gave the cow and the horse out for the winter.

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In the late forties my father bought forty more acres and sold nine to the Litneys after building their house. This left the farm at 125 acres. My father farmed until 1956 when the market for loose hay was pretty well gone. After that he stopped cutting it, put in a big garden, cut some wood and worked in the city.

In 1948 my mother bought a house at 153 Millidge Avenue and they wintered there until January 13, 1970 when my father had a heart attack and died. Uncle Lou had died January 10, 1970. My mother never recovered and died July 20, 1970. They are probably the last generation of Keiths that will ever make a living farming on the Island.

The farm is cut in half now between Audrey and Jimmy and is growing up like it was when old Jim first petitioned it in 1805.

James M.F. Keith
Born November 27, 1924

To The Honorable Gabriel J. Ludlow Esq.
President of His Majesty's Council and Com-
mander in Chief of the Province of New-
Brunswick &c. &c. &c. —

The Petition of James Keefe of Kennabek-
is Island in Kings County.

Humblly sheweth,

That the Petitioner is the Owner of Lot
N^o. 5 (containing 50 Acres,) on the said Island,
upon which he has lived with his Family
upwards of twelve Years, and of which
he has about one half under Cultivation.

That Lot N^o. 9 on the said Island was,
as the Petitioner has been informed, granted
to one Maybee, who has made no Im-
provement whatever upon the Lot; and the
Petitioner is informed that the said Maybee
has removed from the Province to the
United States. —

That about two Months ago, the
Petitioner made a verbal Application
to Your Honor, and represented that the
said Lot N^o. 9 was lying vacant, and the
said Maybee absent from the Country —
and received encouragement from Your
Honor, that the said Lot should be granted
to the Petitioner; and he thereupon
began to clear the same, and has cut
down about an Acre and a half, and
has a small crop of Turnips growing
thereon. That a Brother of the said
Maybee now threatens the Petitioner with
a Prosecution for trespassing upon the
said Lot, and has forbidden him to take
the said Crop off the same. —

That the Petitioner is the only Inhab-
itant of the said Island — That 50 Acres

he finds too small a quantity for his family; more especially as his lot is not very good. That he purchased the said Lot - and has never received a Grant from Government, of any Lands in this Province.

That Lots Nos 7 and 8 are wholly unimproved - and have, like No 9, very little ground fit for cultivation upon them; but lying in the neighbourhood of your Petitioner's Lot, they would be of some value to him. That the said Lots contain fifty acres each. -

The Petitioner therefore humbly prays the said Lots, if granted, may be escheated; and the whole three granted to the Petitioner -
And he will ever pray. &c

St John
25th Sept. 1807.

His
James + Keefe
clerk

Witness

Wm Moore

Mary Keith grandmother
Mrs Keith mother.

Other Relations

Archives & redaction

Museum

Registry at Hampton & St John.

Library

- Jim Keith

Part? John's family?

Catherine Elisabeth ¹⁷ born February
 Catherine Elisabeth was born February
 February the 22 1806
 Rachel Lloyd was born August the 31 1807
 Abigail Buslon was born March the 23 1809
 Sarah Ann was born May the 17 18013
 William Lloyd was born July the 18015
 John Thomas was born May the 12 18017
 Elisabeth Ann was born June the 18019
 Hannah Smith was born April the 22 18011
 Margaret Ann. Born 1825

William's Family
 Cathern E born February the 28 1810
 Amelia born September the 18 1812
 John J born September the 22 1814
 Charlot J born November the 22 1816
 Joseph H born December the 25 1818
 Caroline E born January the 19 1851
 James E born July the 18 1852
 Sarah E born May the 18 1854
 Adeline born March 12 1856
 Robert W born March 20 1858
 Caroline F born April 19 1860
 Florence E born May the 1862

2849
 2850
 2851
 2852

years old and was a native of
 England, but had resided in Chatham for
 many years. She leaves a family of eight,
 four sons and four daughters.
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 William Keith.
 Kennebecasis Island, Kings county,
 Nov. 22 - William Keith, the oldest resi-
 dent of Kennebecasis Island, passed
 away yesterday after an illness of two
 weeks. He was born on the island May
 3rd, 1817. Besides a wife he leaves three
 sons - Joseph and Robert, of North End,
 and James, at home, and five daughters -
 Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Woods and Mrs.
 Craig, all of Boston; Mrs. David White,
 of North End, and Mrs. William J. Mor-