



In Search of a New Land

The Wills Families of Wolfe Island and Springbank

By Stace Wills

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Chapter 1: A Time For Reflection

It was spring, sometime around 1832¹. Young Thomas Wills, age 23, was standing on the deck of a ship overlooking the rough Atlantic seas, contemplating the life that was in front of him. Thomas had just married his wife, 20 year old Sophia Searle², at the St. Andrew Church in Plymouth a few months prior to their departure from England. Now, the couple was ready to start a new life in Upper Canada (present day Ontario).



Lower Hisley Farm outside of Lustleigh village in Devon country, England. Built around 1881. Original long house burned down in a fire. Currently owned by Patricia Roberts and Ann Jones.

Staring down into the choppy waters, Thomas winced for a moment as he reflected on the last five years that he and his family had endured. Near the picturesque village of Lustleigh, in the county of Devon, the Wills' ancient Lower Hisley house and farm was saddled with debt. Thomas' father, George, had recently passed away and Lower Hisley was sold to pay off the debts. Young Thomas did not have to be reminded about the historical significance of this transaction, for he was well aware that Lower Hisley had been farmed, leased and owned by his ancestors for two centuries. It was a VERY special place.

For one, he knew Lower Hisley was built on the site of one of the 12 original farms of Lustleigh known from Domesday times.³ Domesday was the great census ordered by William I of England in 1085 to find out who owned what so they could be taxed on it. Centuries later, in 1629-30, a farmer named George Wills bought a minority ownership stake (3/12) in three farms, jointly known as the Manor of Lustleigh: Lower Hisley, as well as nearby Higher Hisley and Rudge. In 1659 and again in 1681, George's son (another George b. 1623/8), increased the Wills shareholdings to two-thirds of the total value of the three farms.



Ash house, next to Lower Hisley house. Used to store ashes from kitchen fireplace, to reduce risk of thatched roof catching fire.

In 1691, at the age of 68, George passed away and willed the properties to son John (b. 1669) and his four other brothers. When John died young at the age of 45, his brother Richard took the lease on Lower Hisley. Richard, who was the first Wills to actually farm at Lower Hisley, eventually passed the lease to John's son, yet another George (b. 1706). This George, who was Thomas' great grandfather, was a

“gent”. Gent was short for “gentleman” also used as an adjective in Middle English for graceful and elegant. Thomas remembered the word inscribed on Gentleman George’s tombstone when he used to visit the Ilsington cemetery, not far from Lustleigh.

Gentleman George was only eight years old when his father died. At the age of 38, he received the lease to Lower Hisley in 1742, just nine years before his uncle Richard passed away. Gentleman George was a builder and added to his farm holdings by Lenda outright. He died in 1788 after living a full 82 years.

Upon his death, Gentleman George passed the farm onto his son Roger (b. 1748). Then subsequently, Roger passed 2/3 of Lower Hisley to his son named --you guessed it-- George (b. 1776; d. 1827). This George happened to be Thomas’ father. Seven months after George’s marriage to wife Susanna Cumming (b. 1782) in 1805, George bought the last 1/3rd ownership of the farm and 1/3rd of a half of nearby Trendlebere Down. He now owned Lower Hisley outright. Then, things took a turn for the worse.



Panorama view from upper window of Lower Hisley Farm, looking SE towards the sea.
Photo courtesy of Patricia Roberts and Ann Jones

George “The Borrower” had a knack for convincing people to lend him money and he mortgaged Lower Hisley on several occasions with at least three different debtors to raise money for various purchases. He would borrow from one person. Then, he would eventually pay the debt with an even greater loan from another lender.

Unfortunately, with each new lender, the debts mounted and with six sons and one daughter to raise, the stress eventually took its toll on poor George the Borrower. In 1827, he passed away at the age of 51.⁴ His widow, Susanna Cumming Wills and her two eldest sons, George Jr. and Thomas, were left to resolve the messy estate.



Aerial View of Lower Hisley Farm circa 2002. Photo courtesy of Patricia Roberts and Ann Jones

The net proceeds from the sale, after payment of the debts, were £1725. While older brother, George Jr., stayed on to farm the land, Thomas set his sights on a fresh start and new land for himself. Ships were leaving for Upper Canada from bustling English ports such as Plymouth, Southampton and Portsmouth. Thomas packed his belongings and headed for Plymouth⁵.

Thomas and his siblings each inherited £50 from their father’s will. With those funds, and perhaps with some of the extra money given by his mother from the sale of Lower Hisley, Thomas set out with a fresh start. He had just enough start up capital for travel and provision expenses, land purchase or lease costs, and settlement expenses to finance his new adventure in Upper Canada.



View from Lower Hisley fields, across Hisley Wood, towards Trendlebere Down. Photo courtesy of Patricia Roberts and Ann Jones.

Chapter 2: 1832-- Journey of a Lifetime

Boarding the ship to Quebec with his new bride, Thomas felt pangs of uncertainty and sadness. It was difficult for Thomas to leave behind his mother, George Jr., and his other siblings, after all they had been through recently. However, settlement was occurring fast in Upper Canada and Thomas was determined to fare better than his father at creating a lasting estate.



Thomas and Sophia sailed on an 19th Century ship to Canada that may have looked something like this.

The journey by sea lasted six excruciatingly long weeks. Ship passengers faced tremendous risks on these voyages; cholera and shipwrecks were common. However, Thomas and Sophia managed to avoid any disasters and their ship eventually landed in the town of Quebec in Lower Canada (present day Quebec City)⁶. Upon disembarking, they were accosted by a hoard of scrupulous middlemen offering settlement opportunities and other advice and services. Thomas and Sophia ignored them all and proceeded immediately to the Office of the Chief Agent for Emigrants, on Sault-au-Matelot St. in Lower Town, where they obtained all the information they needed, free of charge, for their eventual settlement in Upper Canada.

The Office advised them on a several settlement options ranging from the Eastern Townships near Montreal to York (present day Toronto) to Niagara and several points in between. However, Thomas chose to continue their journey to the town of Kingston, where an abundance of wild, uncleared land, much of it Crown-owned, was available for private purchase for a reasonable price⁷.

Prior to departure from Quebec, Thomas was able to sell some of the provisions left over from their journey like potatoes and oatmeal. He also purchased new provisions like baker's bread, butter, tea, sugar, and other necessities for the next leg of their journey. Spring had arrived and the couple discarded some of the heavier old clothes that they wore during the trip. Traveling light was paramount for their journey into Upper Canada and other necessities could be bought cheaper in Kingston, than in Quebec.

It was now late spring and the steamboat was departing down the mighty St. Lawrence River, headed for the next stops, Montreal, Prescott, and finally, Kingston. After nine long days of boat travel, Thomas and Sophia spotted a settlement in the distance to the right of the steamboat. To their left, they also noticed a small, heavily forested island, but thought nothing more of it at the time.

Upon landing in Kingston, Thomas and Sophia grabbed their suitcases, clearly marked by their initials for easy identification, and disembarked. Their first stop as they walked up the boardwalk and into town to the local government agent office. There, they learned that land was available for farming on the Island directly across from Kingston, the one that they noticed on the boat, and could now see from the port. The Island was called Wolfe Island, named in honour of the infamous British General, James Wolfe, who defeated the French in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in Quebec 40 years earlier in 1792.

Thomas studied the Island map and its terrain. The topography was far different from his previous surroundings in Devon County. The Island was heavily wooded, compared to Devon's lush green rolling hills and clear pastureland. Of course,



the Island was surrounded by water, whereas the Lower Hisley farm was located several miles from the ocean.

Thomas learned that Wolfe Island was actually the largest of the “Thousand Islands”, dividing converging waters of lakes and rivers into what are known as the American and Canadian channels. The Island faced Ontario to the North and New York State to the south. On the east was the mighty St. Lawrence River. On the west: the massive Lake Ontario. The lifeblood of the Island was a ferry, operated privately since 1802, that shipped passengers and goods to Kingston in Canada and to Cape Vincent, New York in the U.S.

The agent told Thomas that the earliest known inhabitants of the Island were Indian tribes who resided there from as early as the birth of Christ to after the first white settlers arrived in the 17th Century. It is believed that the small peninsula on the North side of the Island (today known as Brophy's Point), was used as a fishing village by a succession of Indian tribes, each leaving remnants of pottery, arrowheads and tools. The Island was originally called “Ganoukousnot”, an Indian word roughly translated as “long (island) standing up”. Long and narrow, Thomas observed. The map showed Wolfe Island was 20 miles long, but the width ranged from only one to seven miles.

Thomas and Sophia listened intently. The agent explained that the first white man to set foot on the Island was the infamous Canadian explorer, Samuel de Champlain in 1615. In 1675, France's King, Louis XIV, granted the land to LaSalle, who was manager of Fort Frontenac (present day Kingston). The French found it easier to call the Island “Grand Ile” or “large island”, rather than the complicated Indian name. The Island was

passed through various French hands until the beginning of the 19th century when the rights were sold to Captain David Alexander Grant and Patrick Langan.

Captain Grant was married to royalty: Marie Charles Joseph Le Moyne de Longueuil, the Baroness de Longueuil. When Captain Grant died in 1806, his property fell to his son, the Honorable Charles William Grant, the fourth Baron de Longueuil. Charles and his Baroness wife were powerful landowners on the Island who lived in an old castle known as “The Ardoth House”, built in 1823 by Charles’ father. The agent believed that the castle had 25 rooms and, apparently, even a dungeon. Thomas knew of several castles in Devon, but didn’t expect to find one on this isolated Island.

At the same time that Ardoth House was built, the first serious settlement commenced on the Island, and land could be bought for \$5 to \$6 per acre, or leased for one shilling per acre per year. At this time, in 1823, only 15 families made up the entire population of the island. In fact, by 1826, the Island’s population was estimated at only 276 inhabitants. Thomas learned that many of the early Island settlers were United Empire Loyalists, former U.S. residents loyal to the Queen who fled to Canada to continue to live under the Commonwealth and British governance.

The boom period wouldn’t start until 1840, when land values started to rise and large numbers of Irish and Scottish were immigrating to the Island. The population would eventually peak around 1861 at 3,601 inhabitants. But for now, in the early 1830’s, settlement was slow to develop on the Island and there was still plenty of time for Thomas and Sophia to consider all of their options in Upper Canada.

Thomas and Sophia were intrigued with the history lesson given by the agent. Days later, Thomas decided to take the ferry to explore the opportunity further. A short ride later, the ferry docked on the shores of the small village of Marysville. Thomas walked from the dock, through the woods, and surveyed the land. It wasn’t going to be easy to settle this area.

The land needed to be cleared before sufficient crops could be planted and the clearing costs were not insignificant to a settler: about 50 to 70 shillings per acre. If Thomas were to clear half of a 100 acre lot, it would cost between 2500 to 3500 shillings (\$500-\$700). Moreover, labor to clear the timber and haul the logs to the waterfront was not easy to come by.

Thomas also considered the isolation of the Island. Purchasing supplies that could not be obtained on the island would require a ferry ride to Kingston. He also imagined what the Island weather would be like: cold, damp and harsh, particularly in the winter. He was used to cold, damp weather back in England, but the snow and wind on the Island would be a far greater test.

Despite the challenges ahead, the land was fertile and would yield well. Wildlife and game were abundant. Upper Canada’s laws and constitution were British, just like home. Taxes and local duties were very reasonable. Thomas knew he had found his new home

in Upper Canada. The question that still lingered was whether Wolfe Island was still the best place for him and Sophia to invest and settle.

For the remaining part of the decade, we're not exactly sure what became of Thomas and Sophia -- where they lived, what they did to survive. One thing for certain is that they decided that the time was right to start a family. In February 1834, their first son was born⁸: William Wills, named after Thomas' brother back home in England.

Two short years later, in 1836, their second son arrived: Thomas Cumming ("Thomas C.") Wills, named after his Grandmother Susanna's maiden name. Three years after Thomas C. was born, in 1839, the family welcomed baby George Searle, named in honor of Sophia's maiden name. So, just seven years after emigrating from England, Thomas and Sophia had built a young family of five. Now was the time to decide on where he would settle.

Land just happened to be for sale on Wolfe Island. So around 1839, the elder Thomas and wife Sophia bid on a 100 acre plot of land (Concession 8, Lot 1). The land was inland, but not too far from the water and ferry port⁹. Thomas' mother and older brother, still living in England, would be so proud of his new purchase!

What a decade it had been. First, Thomas had to endure the pain of his father death. Then, he had to sort out the heavily indebted Lower Hisley estate and sell the property that had been farmed by his family for generations. Next, he married his lovely wife. Together, they journeyed overseas to a strange new land with unlimited opportunity, while at the same time, fighting homesickness from leaving their family behind. Now, Thomas was ready to finally settle and create a new legacy of his own.

Chapter 3: A New Life on Wolfe Island

In 1840¹⁰. The first order of task for Thomas and Sophia was to build a one-story log home, eight logs high with a sloping roof. Holes in the walls would serve as windows in the summer. During the cold winters, when the icy wind from Lake Ontario would whip across the Island, the windows would be covered and a stone fireplace was used for both heating and as an oven. Bread was baked in a large pan placed among the coals. A cellar was dug underneath the house to house potatoes.

Thomas longed to eventually build a stone house with the grandeur of the one he lived in back in England at Lower Hisley. However, for now, that dream would have to wait. There were much more urgent tasks to accomplish.

Thomas was careful to stack the cleared timber and brush away from his log cabin and out building to prevent fire. Cleared timber from the land was hauled to the foot of the Island where it was often sent to Quebec for sale.



Upper Canada settlement in the early 1800's near Chatham, Ontario. The settlement and log cabin of Thomas and Sophia Wills may have looked something like this.



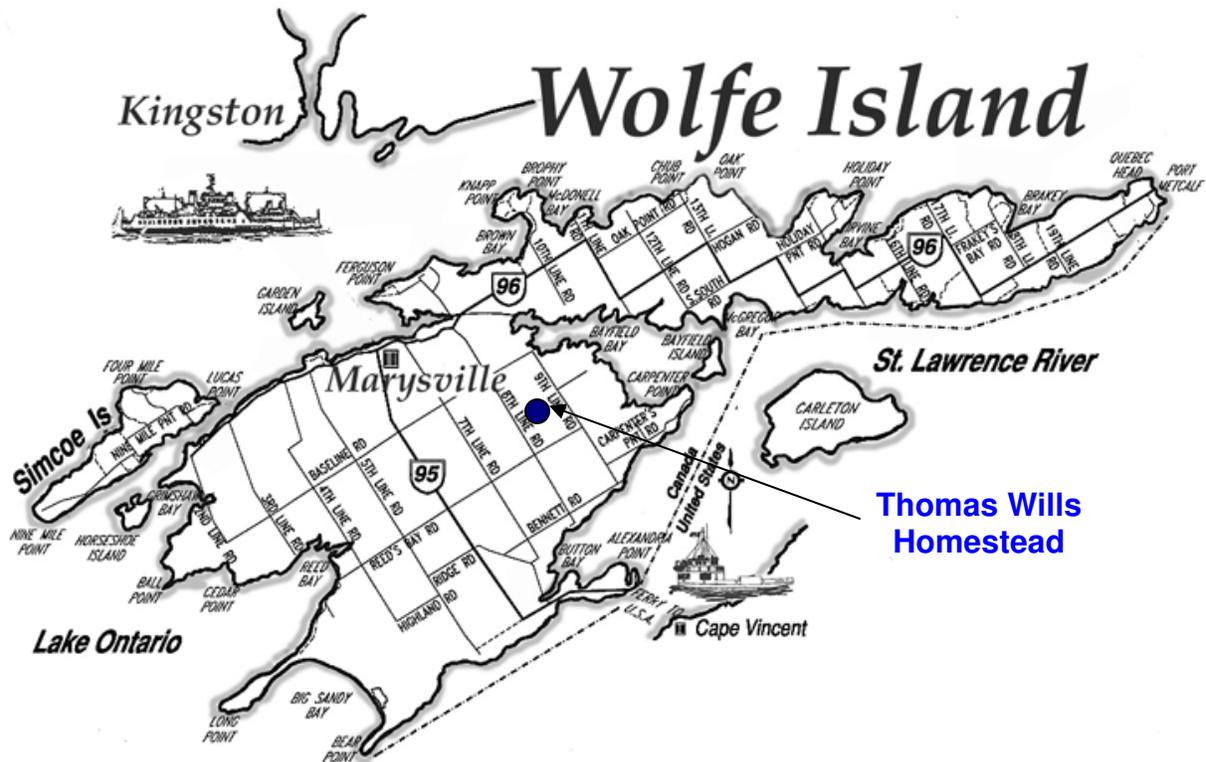
Photo believed to be Thomas Wills with two unknown ladies (c. 1860's)

In the first year, Thomas' primary objective after building the house was to clear enough land to plant a crop of potatoes and fodder (feed) for his cow. This would sustain himself and his wife over their first winter. Eventually, he would purchase a dairy cow to supply his family with milk and cheese.

Despite the small size of the Island, getting around was not easy. The few roads that did exist were rough and often muddy. Wagons would not come into use for at least another 10 years (around the early 1850's). Usually, Thomas, Sophia and the kids navigated the Island by horseback and used sleds drawn by oxen in both winter and summer. A common trip was to pickup supplies at the tiny village of Marysville, the focal point of the Island community. In town, Thomas and Sophia could also mail their letters back to their relatives in England at the "Hitchcock House", which served as the Island post office.

The Island school operated a short distance from the village. Built in 1833, the school was a log building with a dirt floor, wooden benches without backs, with a higher bench used for writing. Young William, Thomas C., and George Searle would eventually learn to read and write in this building.

Life as an Upper Canada settler in the 1840's was hard, but there was some time for pleasure. Barn-raising, ploughing and logging "bees" were common occurrences. Thomas and Sophia would gather together with their neighbors and other settlers help each other in whatever task required attention. By 1846, the Island's population had grown to 1289 residents, so there were plenty of neighbors to choose for "bee" invites.



Trinity Anglican Church,
Wolfe Island, Ontario, Canada.

In 1845, the beautiful new Trinity Anglican Church was built just west of Marysville on land granted by Captain Grant. The Church was built with limestone sourced from the quarry south of Marysville. Not only was the limestone used on the Island for building churches and public buildings (such as the town hall, built years later in 1859), the rock was also exported off Island, where it was used as construction material for the Welland Canal, the Rideau Canal, and the steeple of Kingston's St. Mary's Cathedral.

Trinity Anglican Church became the focal point of Wills family and community life. In later years, its cemetery

would also become the eventual resting place of Thomas, Sophia, as well as most of their children. The first Wills child laid to rest in the cemetery was a boy we know very little about. In 1846 (or perhaps 1836¹¹), Sophia gave birth to Samuel P.S. Wills. The “P” likely stood for Pethybridge (his grandmother’s maiden name) and the “S” for Searle. Thomas held tradition again by naming Samuel after one of his brothers. Sadly, just 11 months after birth, baby Samuel died from unknown causes.

Despite the grief of enduring the loss of baby Samuel, Thomas and Sophia were proud of their life and accomplishments. They purchased land, cleared enough to sustain themselves, and built a brand new log house to raise the family. After a decade of pioneering and settling, now was the time for Thomas Wills to grow and prosper.

Chapter 4: The 1850's-- Build and Prosper

By 1851, the Island population had doubled in just six years to 2,654 residents. By this time, Thomas Wills had grown a modest, but multi-faceted mixed farm.¹² He had cleared one half of his 100 total acres of wooded land (42 acres for crops and 8 acres for pasture). For crops, he grew hay (15 bundles or tons), wheat (40 bushels on 3 acres), oats (200 bushels on 10 acres), and back wheat (0.5 bushels on 3 acres). For food, he grew beans (1 bushel), peas (16 bushels on 2 acres), and potatoes (10 bushels on 0.5 acres).

Thomas also maintained a mix of livestock used for transportation, farming, food, and resale. He managed 1 ox for hauling, 6 cows for milking, 5 calves/heifers, 3 horses for transportation, 30 sheep, and 3 pigs. For storage or resale, the farm produced 1000 barrels of pork, 9 barrels of beef, 360 lbs of butter, and 60 lbs. of wool.

As new settlements like Thomas' grew and prospered, the island services and infrastructure improved as well. In 1851, a canal was built through the center of the island, not far from Thomas' homestead, thus eliminating the need for vessels to round the Island at the east or west ends. The canal would operate for approximately 42 years.

Still, pioneer life was not without its setbacks. Family tragedy presented itself again in 1851. William, at the young age of 17, died of a rare bacterial skin infection, called Erysipelas¹³, which was known in the middle ages as "St. Anthony's Fire". Now, only two of Thomas and Sophia's children remained. But happier times were to follow again soon.



Well preserved gravestone of William Wills, son of Thomas and Sophia Wills, in Trinity Anglican Cemetery, Wolfe Island, Ontario.



St. George's Anglican Church in Kingston. The church was destroyed by fire in 1899 and rebuilt.

By 1858, Thomas and Sophia witnessed the first marriage of one of their children. At age 22, young Thomas C. married Frances ("Fanny") Sluman, three years younger than her husband. Thomas was pleased with this choice. The Slumans settled on the Island in the early 1830's and had strong ties with the Wills family for decades. Fanny was the aunt of Mary Jane Walker Wills¹⁴, who would later marry George Searle. Rather than get married at the tiny Trinity Church on the Island, Thomas C. and Fanny chose a larger venue to host the guests for their wedding: St. George's Anglican Church in downtown Kingston. Thomas and Sophia were proud of their son and their new daughter-in-law.

One year after the wedding, in 1859, Thomas C. and Fanny had their first son, William Cumming Wills¹⁵. A few years

later they had a second child, this time a daughter: Clemina Sophia Wills (b. about 1861)¹⁶, who took the middle name of her grandmother. Thomas and Sophia had their first grandchildren and it certainly reduced the sting from having lost two of their own children years before.

Thomas C. was a clever young man who forged a slightly different path than his agrarian father and ancestors. He was a merchant and managed to acquire \$1400 in capital to invest in his own Dry Goods and Grocery Store, which included about \$1000 worth of inventory and a quarter acre.¹⁷ Business was booming on the island and Thomas C. built his family a one and one-half story frame home. Life could not have been better for the young family.



Photo believed to be Thomas Cumming Wills, taken not long before his death (c. 1860).

Meanwhile, the elder Thomas absorbed another heavy blow. He learned that his dear old mother Suzanna, still living in Lustleigh, had passed away at the age of 77. After leaving England 27 years prior, Thomas never got the chance to see her again. She was buried in the nearby village of Moretonhampstead, her home village.

Tragedy struck the Wills family again a few years later. Not long after Clemina's birth, and just four years after his wedding, things took a turn for the worse for Thomas C. He became gravely ill. In January 1862, just two months after Clemina was baptized, Thomas C. wrote his last will and testament. He died just eleven days later from unknown causes at the young age of only 25 years, leaving his poor wife Fanny with a newborn girl and a three year old boy to take care of. Thomas C. signed the will with an



Photo believed to be a young George Wills at age 21, taken around 1860.

“X” mark, which for many people of that era was a sign of illiteracy. More likely, he was just too sick to sign his name. The store and property was willed to Fanny, but there was no further record of what became of her after Thomas C.’s death.

Thomas and Sophia Wills were devastated after Thomas C.’s death. George Searle was their only child remaining. At 21, George dutifully worked as a laborer for Thomas’s farm. He was busy with work and in no hurry to marry. But Thomas and Sophia had a void in their life from the deaths of three children. Therefore, they decided to adopt young Charles Harvey (who was 15 at the time)¹⁸. Charles lived in the Wills log cabin along with another individual named John, a 65 year old shoemaker who, like Thomas, was also born in England.

By 1861, five individuals lived in the log cabin and space was tight, so it was time for Thomas to expand. He had always wanted to realize his dream of purchasing some limestone from the local quarry and build a grand stone house where he could enjoy his remaining days.



Gravestone of Thomas Cumming Wills, son of Thomas and Sophia, in Trinity Anglican Cemetery, Wolfe Island, ON.

Finally, at age 52, Thomas commenced his new home¹⁹, sparing no expense on limestone for his walls (about 1.5 feet thick), plenty of windows, and the finishing touches: the door and window trimmings. Above the doorway, he installed two finely carved heads which supported a flat mantle. The most impressive room was on the main floor, which contained beautiful wood trim baseboards and moldings, hardwood floors, and high ceilings. It was a grand house that reminded Thomas of his former house at Lower Hisley. He knew it would withstand the test of many winters on the Island and he was right. The stately house proudly stands to this day.



Detailed trim of stone house.



Fine wood carvings supporting frame above door.



Farm of Thomas and Sophia Wills.



Stone house on Wills farm - Wolf Island, 8th concession North of Base Line.

Chapter 5: 1871-- Twilight Years of Thomas and Sophia

By 1871, the Wills residence housed four individuals: Thomas (aged 62), Sophia (aged 59), George (now aged 29, but still not married), and a new addition to the family record: a 9 year old boy named Edwin. It's unknown how Edwin came to the family, but he was likely adopted, just like Charles Harvey was ten years earlier. It's also a mystery what became of Charles himself.

Thomas had some modest gains in his farm. He had added another 50 acres of land (Concession 9; Lot 3N) to bring his running total to 150 acres.²⁰ By this time, Thomas had cleared and improved upon all of his land. 50 acres were in pasture, 56 acres were seeded to wheat, 40 acres for hay, and 4 acres were allocated for a garden of apples and other fruit.

The farm yielded a good hay crop, as well as about 200 bushels of spring wheat, 70 bushels of barley, 200 bushels of oats, and 50 bushels of back wheat. With barley and wheat, Thomas' farm yielded an extra 280 bushels (more than double) what he reaped twenty years prior.

For livestock, he had 4 horses, 11 milking cows, 9 cattle, 19 sheep, some pigs, and 2 beehives. Compared to 20 years prior, he managed about half as many sheep, but twice as many milking cows and cattle.

In the previous year, the farm reported to have slaughtered 8 cattle, 15 sheep, and 8 pigs for resale. The dairy cows produced 400 lbs of butter, the bees generated 60 lbs. of honey, and the sheep yielded 100 lbs. of wool. Sophia, not only served as housewife, but she also helped generate 36 yards of homemade cloth.



(Left) Horse rake and (Right) reaper from the 1800's.



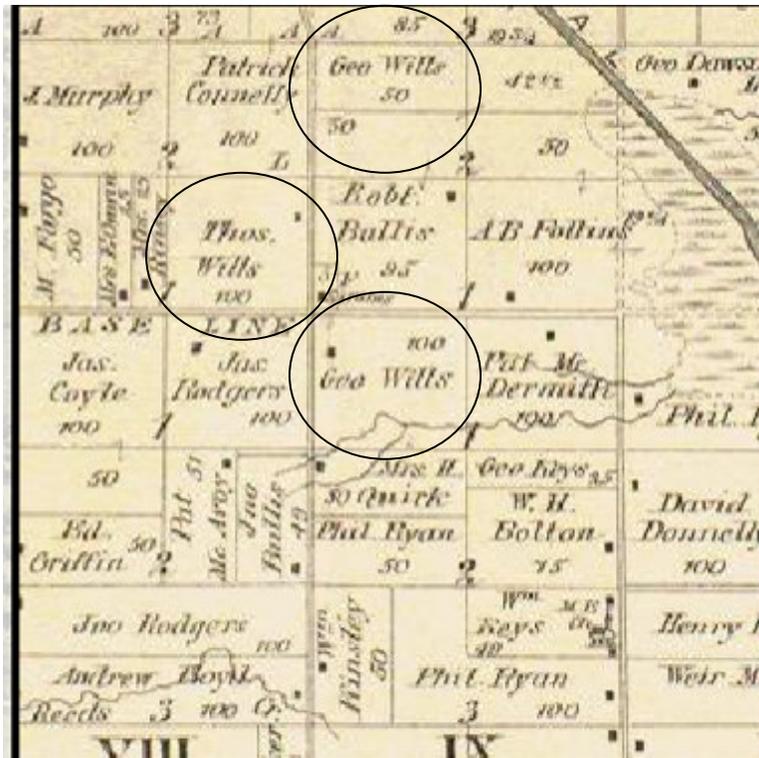
Thomas housed many of his animals in a barn and stable. For transportation, he owned a carriage for the summer, a sleigh for winter transport, and a wagon for hauling goods.

His farm equipment included a plough, cultivator, reaper (mower), a horse rake, and a fanning mill (a square or rectangular shaped box with a crank handle used to clean small grains prior to planting).

In November of 1872, Thomas, now in his 63rd year, was getting older and decided to write his last will and testament²¹. He reflected on his life achievements as he recounted the assets that he accumulated over the years: including the 150-acre farm, the house, furniture, and animals (he only claimed 2 cows and one horse in the will). These assets were willed to his wife, George, and two grandchildren at the time: William C. and Clemina (Thomas C's children).



Close up of Wills buildings from lane (near frame house). Board & batted construction built mid 1800's, 1878 - George Wills, S of Base Line.



Son George, however, was not waiting for the inheritance and was already starting to build an estate of his own. By 1878, George held title to 150 acres in two parcels on the Island. A 100 acre lot (concession IX lot 1S), which was located kitty-corner to Thomas' property, as well as the 50 acre lot (Concession IX, lot 3N) given to him by his father, which was located further north on the 8th baseline road toward to old canal.²²

George's career was not the only thing on his mind in 1878. At the age of 39, he finally found a bride: sixteen year old Jane Sluman Walker (b. 21 Nov. 1861), the niece of Thomas C's wife Fannie Sluman. George and Jane wed on March 19, 1878²³ in Kingston at the same St. George's Anglican Church where Thomas C. was married many years before. In the Marriage registry, George's age was listed as only "25", which was perhaps a ploy by the Wills and Walker families to cover up the 23 years of age difference between the couple.

George and Jane eventually built a wood frame house on their 100 acre property. The house contained about 600 square feet on each floor. There were four small bedrooms upstairs, with beautiful light stained woodwork typical of a house of this era. Downstairs was a kitchen and living room. Outside there were two ponds and an oak tree in the yard, which would give his future children plenty of opportunities to play.



Back of frame house. Wills (1878 map). George Wills, south of Base Line.

On June 25, 1879, George and Jane had their first daughter, Sophia Georgina Wills. Jane was only 17 at the time, while George was starting fatherhood at 40.

Unfortunately for old Thomas Wills, baby Sophia was the last granddaughter that he would enjoy. “Old Mr. Wills is got to be very feeble,” wrote George’s mother-in-law, Jane Sluman Walker, on January 19, 1879.²⁴



Photo believed to be Thomas Wills (c. 1873-1878)

But Thomas Wills could no longer fight his illness. The yeoman and pioneer died the following year in 1880 and he was laid to rest next to his sons William, Samuel, and Thomas C. in the Trinity Church Cemetery. The cause of death determined by the doctor was “general debility”, as the death record stated. He left behind him a modest estate valued at \$1,200, according one of the probate documents signed by son George.²⁵

Thomas achieved everything he had hoped. He created a lasting estate, enjoyed 48 years of marriage, and built a family that, despite the deaths, would endure to this day. Sophia was overcome with sadness. She shared so much adventure with her husband and overcame so many personal challenges. Now, she would devote her remaining years to enjoying her children and grandchildren.

Chapter 6: 1881-- George Takes Centre Stage

George continued farming, with the help of a new farmhand, young Andrew Spence, one of the many Scots that immigrated to the Island in the 1800's.²⁶ George's mother, Sophia, sold the stone house and moved into the wood frame house, which now housed five people, including one-year-old Sophia Georgina. There was room for more children. In January 1882, George and Jane gave birth to their first son, George Henry Wills, carrying on the Wills naming tradition. George Sr. was pleased. He had a son that he could mentor to become even a better farmer than his father.



Photo believed to be William Cumming Wills

George Searle's nephew, William Cumming, now in his early twenties, chose not to be a merchant like his father and instead became a boat builder. In September 1883, he married Annie Cattanach, aged 19 (b. Sept 11, 1865) at the Trinity Church on Wolfe Island.²⁷ William Cumming was also a landholder (he was listed as owner of one of the Marysville town lots at "f os 2"), if not a farmer as well, until at least 1888.²⁸ After that, he and Annie mysteriously vanished from record.



Photo believed to be Sophia Searle Wills (c. 1880-1888).

In October 1885, George and Jane gave birth to their third child, Ada Wills. Now, grandmother Sophia would be able to spend her last years enjoying three young grandchildren at the Wills farm.

In the summer of 1889, Sophia Searle Wills, an original pioneer to Wolfe Island and wife to Thomas Wills, passed away at the age of 77. The doctor listed her cause of death as "old age". She was buried in the Trinity Anglican Cemetery next to her husband, with the same tombstone marking their passing.

Sadly, George lost his mother, but on the positive side, he gained a new son around the same time, renewing the cycle of life. William (Bill) Thomas Wills arrived, the last child of George and Jane to be born on Wolfe Island.

Sophia passed at the time when the Island was changing. The boom times were over. The population decreased from its peak of 3600 in 1860 to only 2000 or so residents thirty years later.²⁹ The land had been mostly cleared and the logging industry was ending. In addition, residents like George Searle Wills were pursuing settlement opportunities out West in the Territories.

George Searle was a talented man. He could read and write and he was a well recognized farmer on the Island. At the Wolfe Island fare in 1887, George was awarded “17 prizes” for his livestock.³⁰



George Wills, 25 years old.

However, towards the end of the 1880's, George was feeling ill himself, and did not have the energy he once had to help Jane manage four children, aged 11, 9, 5, and 1. After battling sickness for about three or four years, the doctors finally told George leave the damp Island climate. It wasn't an easy decision. George's family had farmed on the Island for over 50 years.

In the summer of 1891, George and Jane held a big sale of livestock, implements, and their farm on the South Lot 2, Concession 7. They used the proceeds to move them and their four children west and purchase land west of Calgary in the Territories. The location: Spring Bank, which took its name from the many springs that fed the fertile valley between the Bow and Elbow Rivers. On May 10, 1892, George made what was likely his first

purchase: 640 acres (15-25-4-W5) from the Canadian Pacific Railway for \$3.00 per acre.³¹

No spring chicken, George was starting his new life at the age of 52, following in the footsteps of his pioneer father Thomas who charted his own ground 60 years prior when he emigrated from England to Wolfe Island.

By selling his land and moving West, George increased his landholdings from about 150 acres to at least 650 acres, and had money to spare to stock his new farm with livestock. The following summer he returned to Ontario to purchase cattle, sheep, and poultry to stock his place. George's son Kenneth wrote in later years about his dad:

He was 52 years old when he came West, and walked from East Calgary to the farm he bought; walked over the place and back to town the same day. He bought the CPR section, 2-25-3-5, for \$3.00 an acre, and homesteaded S.W. 10-25-3-5.³² He also filed on a homestead which is now 16th Ave. and 4th St. N.W. The land was poor so he didn't prove upon it.

Looking out over the land he had just purchased, George knew he had his work cut out for him. The brush needed to be cleared and the land required fencing and cultivation. A sturdy home would need to be built to withstand the terribly cold, snowy winters. He'd need new farm buildings to house the livestock and equipment.

But George was a visionary and could see opportunity beyond the tremendous challenges that were ahead. He walked to the highpoint of the home section, not far from where the homestead would eventually be relocated by his sons, Kenneth and Roy, years later. To

the north, he saw the Cochrane Hills, which stood watch over the lush Bow River valley. To the east, the small, but bustling town of Calgary was just over the hill. From the south to northwest, he saw the majestic foothills where the Stoney Indians roamed and hunted. And beyond the foothills in the horizon was the most spectacular sight of all - the Rocky Mountains—a view so grand, he could not believe his good fortune. Now, the work would commence.



Roy and Lily Wills

George and Jane built a one-story frame house. He later added stone over top of the wood exterior, which reminded him of his parents' original home on the Island. Two years after arriving, George and Jane had their third girl and fifth child, Lilly Gertrude, in April, 1893.

In 1895, Sophia, George's eldest child, had married Richard Copithorne. She was only 16 years old at the time. Richard was one of the original pioneers of the area, arriving in Jumping Pound in 1886. The couple built a log house with a sod roof. The roof was protected by boards laid on top of the sod to allow proper water drainage.



Mary Jane Wills

Over the years, Sophia and her husband would produce five boys and two girls. The third son was named George William, a decision obviously influenced by Sophia based on the Wills' ancestral tradition. Sophia developed into quite the horsewoman,³³ and loved to ride over the ranch with Richard, often participating on the coyote hunts with him. She always used a side saddle.

The following year, in 1896, Roy Cecil was born and then finally, Kenneth Walker on July 20, 1899. George and Jane were parents for the seventh time. George was 60 years old when Kenneth arrived.

By 1901, George entrusted 19-year-old George Jr. to help him work the farm. Ada helped Jane at home to manage five-year-old Roy and baby Kenneth. Bill and Lilly went to school.³⁴

Ten years after leaving the Island, George had built a prosperous farm, due much in part to the strong work ethic he gained in Ontario. "Father was a great man to work," recalls Kenneth. "He took great pride in being the first one up and away, to the bush or town in the morning, and laughed as he met his neighbors going as he was coming home. "Early to bed, early to rise" was his motto." Kenneth noted his father's fence building capabilities to illustrate his point. "He cut rails in the bush which was about fifteen miles away and fenced a section and a quarter with a rail fence."

The winter and spring was much dryer and colder compared to the Island climate. However, the summers were warm, and autumn was just about perfect. In fact, George adapted so well to the prairie climate that he would live for 25 years from the day he left the Island.

Ironically, it was Jane whose health was suffering, perhaps brought about (at least in part) from homesickness. Around 1902-3, she took Kenneth back to Wolfe Island for a visit. She returned to the Territories, but eventually, her health deteriorated and she died a year later at the young age of only 42 years old.

Jane was buried in Calgary at the Union Cemetery near downtown. George Searle was now on his own, with no parents or wife to share his thoughts and seek advice.

With Jane's death, the maternal roles of the Wills household would have to be assumed by George's daughter, Ada, who was about 18 years old at the time.

Chapter 7: 1905--George Searle's Final Years

In 1905, the Wills family became new residents of the Province of Alberta, a change from the original "Territories" designation. Around the same time, the Wills household was changing as well.

Ada (now 20) and Bill (now 16) were the elder children in the household. Young Lilly (12), Roy (9) and Kenneth (6) were all in school. 24 year old George Jr., however, married a young lady named Leda Thompson and left home. They had their first son, Albert Searle Wills.



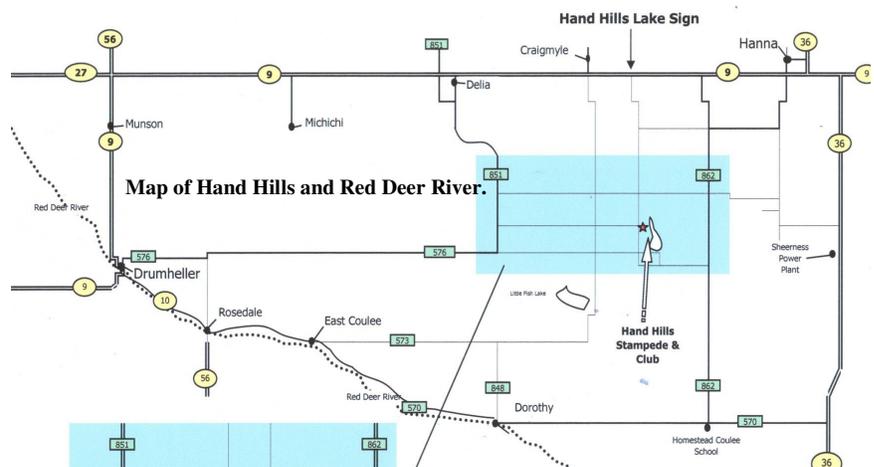
The Wills Family of Springbank:
Top Left to Right: Bill, George Jr., Ada
Bottom Left to Right: Sophia, Roy, Lilly, Kenneth, and George Searle (c. 1906)

George Jr. was ambitious like his father. He wanted to acquire more land to raise the stock they had. George Searle accommodated his eldest son and new daughter-in-law, by selling a section of land he owned in Brushy Ridge (near Springbank) to provide George with capital for a new land purchase in Eastern Alberta -- the Hand Hills, located approximately 130 km northeast of Calgary near the town of Drumheller.

Unfortunately, this business venture turned out a disaster for George Jr. Kenneth writes:

George took a herd of cattle and 500 horses to the Hand Hills. It was the terrible winter of 1906-07. When spring came there were very few cattle to bring home.

They had either starved or frozen to death. The horses seemed better able to look after themselves for most of them came back. This was a real blow to my father.



Tragedy struck the Wills family again around 1907. Just four years after the death of his mother, George Jr., aged 25, drowned in the Red Deer River. Poor George Searle-- he lost his first born. Kenneth explained the circumstances:

Bill, 16 and Roy, 12, had been sent with a team and wagon to the Hand Hills. The Red Deer River was in flood and George was anxious to warn them not to cross. His horse refused to go into the water, but he insisted. The horse was swept off his feet, and George with it. The horse swam out about a mile downstream. George's body was found three months later on an island 150 miles down the river. When George's body was found, I was sent to tell my sister in Jumping Pound. I was eight years old and rode my horse there and back in less than two hours, about eighteen miles. I was too excited to stop for dinner.



The Red Deer River near Drumheller, Alberta. George Wills Jr. drowned in this river in the early 1900's.

Despite two devastating deaths in the family, life went on for the resilient Wills clan. One Springbank pioneer recalled an interesting story about Bill in 1907. At the time, lynx were in abundance in the Springbank area. "...Bill Wills had an unusual experience. While walking with his dog through some trees near his home the dog got in a fight with a lynx. As he happened to have a hammer with him they were able to kill it but not before both dog and boy were clawed up a bit. Bill had a long scar on his chest as a permanent reminder of the adventure. Listening to the cry of a lynx is an eerie experience as it can resemble the crying of a baby or lost child and has fooled more than one person."³⁵

Kenneth lived a true pioneer life as a kid, a much different life from what children lead today.

We rode everywhere as kids. It was nothing to ride to Goddards Lake for the cows in the summer time. There were no fences to keep them near home. We rode bucking horses and steers for fun and swung a rope at everything. (A different life to the planned sports of today). We liked to watch the Indians go through our place. The old Morley Trail was there for many years. The Indians, always stopped for tea, bread and grease, then rode on through Goddard's Ranch taking the easiest way through the long grass.

Kenneth enjoyed spending time with his older brother Roy.

Roy and I were fair shots with the 22 rifle and shotgun. There was lots of wild game – especially ducks and prairie chicken. We got our share of them. It was a treat from the salt pork and cured meat we ate most of the time.

In 1911, George Searle had entered his 72nd year and was enjoying his remaining days at the old stone house, still working as hard as ever. He managed 30 horses, 7 milking cows, 53 beef cattle, no sheep and 5 pigs.³⁶ It was a modest farm, but a far cry from the herd of hundreds of cattle and horses that were lost in the Hand Hills four years prior.

Meanwhile, George watched two more of his children marry and leave the home. His second eldest son, Bill, married Jean Rowan and moved to Vancouver, B.C., where Bill worked as an electrician. They had two kids: Roy (named after Bill's brother) and Hazel. Ada married Jimmie Nicoll and lived in the community of Jumping Pound, a short distance from Springbank. Only Lilly (now 18), Roy (now 15) and Kenneth (now 12) remained to help George with the farm.

In 1916, George Searle Wills had reached the end of his prosperous and adventurous life as a true Canadian pioneer. He died at the age of 78, around the same age as his father Thomas. He was buried alongside his dear wife, Jane, at the Union Cemetery in Calgary. Sadly, the legacy of George and Jane could not be preserved with a tombstone, one as proud as George's father Thomas' stone in the Trinity cemetery on Wolfe Island. George Sr. was an inspiration to his children and Roy and Kenneth were determined to carry on the pioneer legacy that their grandfather Thomas, and father George, had left in their hands.

Chapter 8: 1916-- Roy and Kenneth Carry On

20-year old Roy was hit particularly hard, first by the death of his mother and now, his father. It was 1916 and World War I was in full swing. Canada was looking for young recruits and young Roy did not want to be left out. So, on March 14, 1916, he traveled to Calgary and signed up at the office of the **137th Battalion** of the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force. Now, Roy would have a chance to apply the rifle skills that he learned as a child playing with brother Ken, but in a far more dangerous setting.

After some basic training at home, Roy would eventually sail to England a few months later in August 1916. Ironically, he would likely have been the first of his family to visit his ancestral home country since his grandfather Thomas left England in 1832. Roy's battalion would eventually be absorbed into the 21st Reserve Battalion on January 10, 1917.³⁷ Kenneth recalls about his brother:

He served four years – three of them in France. He was gassed and wounded twice. Roy liked to tell of his experiences overseas, one of which was when they were gassed. He and his unit were led out of the trenches holding onto each others coat tails, but they soon recovered their sight.



Soldiers in the WWI battle of Ypres, Belgium. Perhaps Roy may have fought in this battle, given that we know he spent time in the country.

a/

ORIGINAL

No. 808992

ATTESTATION PAPER.

Folio.

CANADIAN OVER-SEAS EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

QUESTIONS TO BE PUT BEFORE ATTESTATION.

(ANSWERS.)

1. What is your surname? *Wills*

1a. What are your Christian names? *Roy*

1b. What is your present address? *Springbank Alta Canada*

2. In what Town, Township or Parish, and in what Country were you born? *Springbank Alta Canada*

3. What is the name of your next-of-kin? *Wm. G. Wills*

4. What is the address of your next-of-kin? *P.O. Springbank Alta Canada*

4a. What is the relationship of your next-of-kin? *Wife*

5. What is the date of your birth? *September 22 - 1896*

6. What is your Trade or Calling? *Farmer*

7. Are you married? *No*

8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated and inoculated? *Yes*

9. Do you now belong to the Active Militia? *No*

10. Have you ever served in any Military Force? *No*
If so, state particulars of former Service.

11. Do you understand the nature and terms of your engagement? *Yes*

12. Are you willing to be attested to serve in the }
CANADIAN OVER-SEAS EXPEDITIONARY FORCE? } *Yes*

DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION.

I, *Roy Wills*, do solemnly declare that the above are answers made by me to the above questions and that they are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements by me now made, and I hereby engage and agree to serve in the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force, and to be attached to any arm of the service therein, for the term of one year, or during the war now existing between Great Britain and Germany should that war last longer than one year, and for six months after the termination of that war provided His Majesty should so long require my services, or until legally discharged.

Date *March 14* 1916. *Roy Wills* (Signature of Recruit)
H. P. Davidson (Signature of Witness)

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION.

I, *Roy Wills*, do make Oath, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will as in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of all the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

Date *March 14* 1916. *Roy Wills* (Signature of Recruit)
H. P. Davidson (Signature of Witness)

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE.

The Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.
The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me, at *Calgary* this *14* day of *March* 1916
H. J. Robie (Signature of Justice)

M. F. W. 23.
200 M-11-15.
H. Q. 1772-39-511.



World War I postcard, either brought back from Europe by Roy, or sent to him after the war.

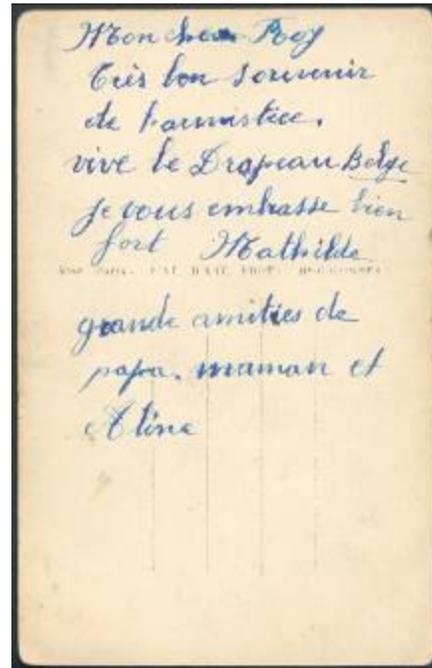
Meanwhile back home, haying season and the fall harvest begged attention, so Bill Wills and his wife Jean returned to Springbank to help out. They would stay for another eight years.

Despite participating in some of the wars most critical battles in France and Belgium, Roy used his good instinct and survived. Two years later, towards the end of 1918, the Great War had finally ended and Roy returned home to farm again. As a souvenir, he kept a humorous postcard (blank on the back) showing a cartoon of a young child from either Belgium or France, with wooden shoes, urinating on the helmet of a German officer, with demolished buildings eerily smoldering in the background. The title of the card reads “Graine de Poilu”, which translated literally means “future survivor of a fight with the Germans”.

Upon return to Alberta, Roy also received a postcard from a ladyfriend (or perhaps a love interest) named Mathilde, whom he had met while serving in Belgium. On the back of the postcard is the following writing (English translation in brackets):

Mon chere, Roy. (My dear, Roy)
Très bon souvenir de l'armistice. (A pleasant reminder of the ending of the war)
Vive le drapeau Belge. (Long live the Belgium Flag!)
Je vous embrasse bien fort. (A warm embrace)
Mathilde

Grande amities de papa, maman, et Aline (Best wishes from father, mother and Aline)



Postcard to Roy from possible love interest named Mathilde in Belgium. Did Roy learn some French during his journey?

With the war over, Bill, Lilly, Roy and Ken worked hard to carry on the family farm. However, young Ken and Roy still found some spare time to do some playing. Ken was an excellent athlete and cowboy, having participated in the Jumping Pound Stampede from 1922-23.³⁸ Roy was a good boxer, perhaps a skill he picked up in the army. He even instructed some of the local boys how to box.³⁹

In the early 1920's, the Wills household would change dramatically again. Lilly moved to Vancouver where she met and married a gentleman named Jack Leyton. Around the same time, Bill and Jean left the farm as well—presumably back to Vancouver.

In autumn 1922, tragedy struck the Wills family yet again. Sophia, George and Jane's first child, fell ill and passed away the following March at the age of 43. Sophia was buried in the Springbank United Church cemetery. 14 years later, in 1936, her husband Richard would pass away at the age of 75 and join his beloved wife in the same resting place.

That left young Ken (aged 23) and Roy (aged 26) to manage the Springbank farm. The boys had a lot of responsibility. Their parents had died, as did their eldest sister and brother. Their living brother and two sisters moved away and remarried. Roy and Ken would have to figure things out themselves.

In the early twenties, farming was still extremely labour intensive. "We farmed with horses," Ken recalls, "broke the land with a two bottom plow, cut the grain with a binder, stoked it, and threshed with the threshing machine."

Somehow, with all the work to be done, Ken found time to find a love interest and raise a family. On



Richard and Sophia Copithorne (nee Wills).
Photo taken on their wedding day in 1895.



This house was built by George Wills, 1890. It was first a frame house and later covered with stone. Essex car - 1930.

December 26, Boxing Day, 1925, Ken married 22-year-old Eva Henning (b. 1903).

One year later, their first son Harvie was born. Then, a few years later, daughter Monna followed. The old stone house of 40 years was starting to get a bit too small to raise a family, not to mention provide for brother Roy.

While Ken and Eva's family was developing well, the 1920's were not without hardship for the Wills family. Eva was faced with many health issues during her



House built by Kenneth Wills c. 1932.

twenties and courageously overcame a life threatening bout with polio, which kept her bed-ridden for some years. She also lost a baby at birth (now buried in the Springbank cemetery). The Great Depression had also arrived, but that did not deter Ken Wills.

In 1932, Ken decided to build a big new farm house for his wife and two young children, complete with plumbing and electricity. He also built some new farm buildings, a huge barn for livestock and hay storage, and well as fenced corrals. Storage sheds, trees, and a small home for the hired hand eventually followed.

Brother Roy continued farming with Ken and also moved into their new home, sleeping in tiny bedroom on the second floor next to the bathroom with the claw tub. Ken's daughter Monna recalled that her mother didn't always get along with Roy, and that he "tipped the bottle" for a while. Perhaps it was part of Roy's way of coping with the terrible carnage he witnessed overseas during his service in the armed forces.

In 1938, after six years, Roy felt it was time to move out and forge his own path. He built a house on 80 acres of Wills land just east of the new Wills farmhouse. Seven years later, he finally found a woman to spend the married to spend the rest of his life with. Her name was Francis Ferguson, and she brought with her two children from her former marriage. Roy was around 48 years old by the time he married, but now he had a family of his own.

Meanwhile, World War II was in full swing and yet another Wills sibling would pass away. Ada, who raised Ken and Roy after their mother's death, died in 1942 at the young age of 56. She was buried in the Springbank United Church cemetery next to her husband Jimmy, who died many years later in 1969 at the age of 88.

By 1945, the war had ended and the baby boom began. On May 23, 1945, Ken (who was almost 46 years old) and Eva (now 42) gave birth to a new son, Kenneth Glenn. This turn of events came rather unexpectedly.

In 1948, Ken's brother-in-law Jimmy Nicoll was still mourning the death of his wife. With the war over, he decided to journey overseas to Europe on a vacation. Jimmy was perhaps the first Wills relative to visit Lustleigh since the family left in 1830. He sent two postcards to Ken and his son Harvie. One of the cards showed a picture of the Lustleigh church on the front with the name "Lustleigh" as the caption.

On the backs of the postcards, dated 3/7/48, the first one was addressed to Harvie and read:

“This is where your great grandfather came from. Very hilly country all round. Jimmy.”

The second postcard was addressed to Ken. It read:

“This is the village where your forefathers lived & came from. A most beautiful spot. Very hilly and church yard walls covered with roses in full bloom. Love to all. Jimmy.”

Years would pass for Ken’s remaining brothers and sisters, and their families. **Leda Wills**, the widow whose husband George Jr. drowned in the Red Deer River, would remarry to a gentleman named Alec Duncan. Together, they farmed in the Tofield, Alberta area for some years before moving to Alliance, just south of Killam, Alberta. She died years later in 1953.

George and Leda’s son, **Albert Searle Wills**, died on May 15, 1988 at 79 years old. His wife, **Fern**, and sons Donald and Dale, were major catalysts to help connect the Wills of Wolfe Island with their ancestral family in England. Fern died in November of 1997 at 88 years old.

Bill Wills would go on to work for a mining company called Premier Mines in B.C., where he lived the rest of his days with wife Jean. **Lilly** and Jack moved to California, where they lived until their deaths.

Roy Wills eventually sold his share of the farm and retired to live in Calgary, Red Deer, and the last few years in Edmonton. He died February 18, 1975 in his 80th year. That left Ken as the last surviving child of George Searle.



Postcard sent from Lustleigh by Uncle Jimmy Nichol to Harvie.



Roy Wills and Essex vehicle 1932

Chapter 9: It was, and still is, a good life

Ken's grandchildren, myself included, called him "Papa".

In the early 1970's, Papa and his son Glenn, farmed about 800 to 1000 acres of land. The blue square baler was one of their trusted and important machines. It was relatively small compared to the combine and swather, but far more dangerous due to the many moving parts -- chains, pulleys, and sharp metal edges -- all fully exposed. One day, Papa caught his arm in one of those chains while doing a repair. Glenn had to free Papa's arm from the baler, and take him to the hospital for treatment. He almost lost his arm entirely. Papa's arm would heal, but his bad hip would progressively worsen from years of heavy labour and tractor riding.

Now in their seventies, Papa and Eva had moved out of the old farmhouse and passed it onto Glenn and his young family. Using a cane, Papa passed by the farmhouse every morning on his morning walk from his trailer to the big gray barn with the green shingled roof that he and Roy had built over forty years prior.

To this day, the barn is perhaps one of the best preserved of its kind in Alberta. Harvie recalled when, as a young man, he used to host barn dances in the loft. A fiddle band would play and young people would come from all over Springbank and nearby Jumping Pound and Cochrane to dance. Papa reluctantly permitted these events and supervised accordingly, but he was always terrified of a potential fire in the loft.

Months would pass, but Papa continued his daily journey to the barn, to check on the livestock or to ensure the water had not frozen or the pump had not stopped. His farm duties had long since been taken over by son Glenn and the hired hands. Still, he continued the hard-working tradition of his father, George Searle, and felt the need to be as productive as he could. As he slowly hobbled by the farmhouse in the morning, I'd play games with him, tapping on the window to get his attention, and then ducking so he couldn't see me. Papa was often gruff (at least on the outside), and wasn't overly amused at my five-year-old antics.

It wasn't long before Papa discarded his cane and started using a four-legged walker for his morning ritual tour to the barn. Then, soon after, his hip prevented him from walking altogether and he was confined to the couch for the last years of his life.

A sad day for Papa came when he had to euthanize a litter of newborn kittens because they had somehow lost their mother immediately after birth. The "kitties" resided in a small box on the porch of Papa's trailer. Papa shouldered the responsibility to end their suffering, since they couldn't survive without their mother's milk. Papa was really hurt by the experience. He always showed a great fondness for his pets, including his two prized border collies (one golden and one black & white).

Papa always smoked a pipe, and an overwhelming tobacco smell always lingered in his double-wide trailer. To this day, the odor still faintly lingers there.

Papa spent the remainder of his years on his black couch, enjoying his many grandchildren and other visitors. The couch looked like leather, but was actually made of a plastic-type material. It was punctuated with several large burn marks from the ashes escaping from his pipe. It's a wonder that he never set the trailer on fire!

“Gram” was an unusual reference for a grandma and the origin of the name is unclear. Gram was the kindest lady and was well-liked by everyone. She was always entertaining visitors on the farm and hosting tea parties for relatives and friends. Like Papa, Gram had a bad hip or back that impeded her walking ability. She also had bad eyesight and could only read with the help of glasses and a large magnifying glass. She loved reading *Readers Digest* magazines and always had several lying around the trailer.

Gram really loved her little grandchildren and fed them well. Meat, potatoes, and a vegetable were the standard meal, with chocolate pudding for desert. No matter how ill she was feeling, Gram always found some strength to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for my brother and I when we came over for a snack.

One of the games she used to play with me as a child was *hide-and-go-seek*. To compensate for her lack of mobility, she commanded the game from her armchair in the living room. I would go hide in the closet, or under the bed, and Gram would guess where I was hiding. “Are you under the bed?” she would ask. “Noooo”, I would say, just loud enough so she could hear me, but not loud enough to give away my whereabouts. “Are you hiding in the closet?” “Noooo”, I would respond. The game would go on like this until she eventually guessed where I was. Then, I would resurface back to her living room where she was sitting and encouraged her to play the game once more.

Sometimes, when I was running out of original places to hide, I would play a trick on her. She'd try to guess where I was hiding. When she guessed correctly, I'd try to confuse her by still responding “noooo”. Eventually, after several guesses, she had to give up. No doubt, it didn't take her long to catch onto my little charade, but she always played along anyway.

The summer before Papa's death was celebrated by a party for his 80th birthday in the summer of 1979. It must have been a proud moment for him to be surrounded by his wife, three children, and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. In the same year, he also celebrated his 54th wedding anniversary with his wife Eva. They had survived through the times of the Great Depression, two world wars, tough agricultural times, and other changes brought by the expanding metropolis of nearby Calgary.

A family picture was taken to commemorate this special 80th birthday event. Everything that Papa and Gram had created was represented in this picture: the large family and the homestead with the massive front yard. Nearby were their farmland and the local church just down the road.

Cancer took Papa's life in 1981 and he was buried in the cemetery of the Springbank United Church beside Eva, who died one year later from cancer in 1982. Dad took me to the hospital to see her on her final day. Monna was at her bedside. Gram had shrunk to a fraction of the size of her normal plumb frame and I hardly recognized her. It was a sad day to watch someone suffer so greatly in the last remaining days of her life.

In the twilight of his life and a few years prior to his death, Kenneth retrospectively recounted the years that had passed before him in a memoir he wrote for the Chaps and Chinooks book, a history of pioneers in the Springbank area:

I still live on the old farm. Eva Henning and I were married. We celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary on December 26, 1973. We have had the usual good years and bad – hail, frost, too wet, too dry, getting into debt, crawling out; but the good years have far outnumbered the poor ones. We had the satisfaction of building a new house in 1932 and new farm buildings.

Farming ways have changed since 1923. Now everything is done with tractors, swathers, combines and balers. I wouldn't have missed the old ways, but do enjoy the new.

It has been, and still is, a good life.



Kenneth and Eva Wills' 50th Wedding Anniversary
(December 1975)

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- 1871 Census:
 - Microfilm at Calgary Downtown Public Library: 1871-C-9998-C-9999. Pg. 39, number 2-5;
- 1881 Census:
 - Microfilm at Calgary Downtown Public Library: 1881-C-13235; Pg. 9; District No. 115 Frontenac; S. District Wolfe Island
- 1891 Census:
 - Microfilm at Calgary Downtown Public Library: 1891-T-6336; April 6, 1891; District No. 64 Frontenac; S. District Wolf Island.
- 1901 Canadian Census Form, Alberta, District No. 202; S. District No. 14, Polling sub-division No. 60 in Springbank (Online via ancestry.ca)
- 1906 Canadian Census Form June 28, 1906. Calgary, Alberta (Sub-district 10) (Online via ancestry.ca).

B. Probate and Will:

Wills, Thomas

GS1, Reel 1230, Court Records, Frontenac Surrogate Court, Estate File 812

- Will written November 5, 1872; Death: June 30, 1880;
- Left house and farm to Sophia and \$150 each to William C. and Clemina the age of 21.

Wills, Thomas C.

GS1, Reel 1225, Court Records, Frontenac Surrogate Court, Estate File 118

- Probate documents: February 7, 1862
- Will written: January 16, 1862
- Died: Jan 27, 1862
- Left lot, store, and “other premises adjacent” to son William, when he becomes of age, making ample provisions for his sister and allowing wife Fanny one third of the property. Fanny allowed the interest on any bank deposits until the children come of age.

C. Letters:

Chris Morrell: Letters from Jane Sluman

1. January 19, 1869: Jane (Sluman) Walker to children Lewis and Lizzy: “old Mr. Wills is got to be very feeble”
2. October 19, 1887: “We had a very nice fare on the Island last week. George Wills took 17 prizes.” “Edward is with George he is quite well there”
3. December 27, 1891: “George and Jane has moved away from the Island. Geo has had very bad health for 3 or 4 years...he was sick nearly all Summer as soon as he got better the doctors told him that he had better get away from the watter or he would not live...they said the watter was killing him so he had a big sale and sold off all his stock & implements and the Furgeson Point farm and now George & his family are living up in Calgary NWT... They like the place well...he

has bought 6 hundred & 50 acres of land up there...Geo is coming don next Summer to bye up a car load of cattle & sheep & poultry to stock his place.”

D. Cemetery Information:

Trinity Anglican Cemetery Burials. Wolfe Island, Ontario.

- 110. Samuel P.S. Wills (died Sept. 8, 18_7. Aged 11 months
- 111. Sophia Wills (died Aug. 14, 1889)
- 112. Thomas Wills (died June 30th, 1880). Aged 73 years
- 113. Thomas Cumming Wills (Died Jan. 27, 1862)
- 114. William Wills (died Mar. 11, 1851). Aged 17 years & 1 month

E. Marriages and Baptisms:

- 1832 Thomas Wills married Sophia Searle.
 - Plymouth St. Andrew 358/6/35 MF108 (from Mike Wills)
- Thomas Cumming Wills and Fanny Sluman on Jun 10, 1858 in St. George’s Anglican Church, Kingston, ON. County Marriage Registers of Ontario, Canada, 1858-1869, Volume 16, Frontenac County and Kingston City.
- January 19, 1911: Jimmy Nicoll married Ada Wills. Chaps and Chinooks pg. 419.
- William Cumming Wills m. Annie Cattanach. Marriage: Anglican Church of Wolfe Island, Wolfe Island, ON, Book 3W3, p. 151.
- Sophia Clemina Wills
 - Baptism: Anglican Church records, Wolfe Island ON Canada, 3W1, page 37, Line 7

F. Books and Other Resources

1. Out of the Past...Wolfe Island Sketches by K. Jean Richardson
2. Wolfe Island Family Connections by Russ Waller, Kingston, ON, September 1988.
3. Wolfe Island E.E. Horsey, March 1941.
4. History of Wolfe Island, Edited by Mrs. James Hawkins, 1967.
5. Book of Ilsington, Dartmoor Press, Dick Wills
6. The Canadian County Atlas Digital Project:
 - Rare Books and Special Collections Division
 - McGill University Libraries
 - 3459 McTavish
 - Montreal, PQ
H3A 1Y1
 - Ph: 398-1208; Fax: 398-5143
 - <http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/CountyAtlas>
7. Roy Wills: WWI Attestation Paper No. 808992, Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force; March 14, 1916
8. Chaps and Chinook, pg. 293-295 Wills family; pg. 265 Sophia Copithorne

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- ¹ It is unknown exactly what year Thomas and Sophia left England for Canada. It was no earlier than the date of their wedding February 29, 1832, and no later than the birth of their first son, William Wills who, according to the 1851 census was born in Upper Canada in February 1834.
- ² Ontario census data and gravestone records show conflicting birth years for Thomas and Sophia. Thomas was born sometime between 1807 and 1809, while Sophia was born sometime between 1811 and 1813.
- ³ Lower Hisley history courtesy of Patricia Roberts and Ann Jones, Lustleigh, England.
- ⁴ Ancestry.com One World Tree: <http://trees.ancestry.com/owt/person.aspx?pid=32976823>
- ⁵ Thomas and Sophia may have left from any of England's Southern ports. No record of departure has been found.
- ⁶ The landing point for Thomas and Sophia is not exactly known. It could also have been Saint John, New Brunswick. New York City was a common landing point for immigrants headed to Upper Canada via a combination of boat and stagecoach.
- ⁷ It is unknown whether Thomas and Sophia proceeded directly to Kingston, or settled somewhere else for a time period prior to heading to Kingston.
- ⁸ 1851 Census
- ⁹ It is unknown for sure whether Thomas immediately settled on Wolfe Island after arriving in Kingston. It is also unknown exactly what year he purchased the 100 acre plot on Concession VIII, Lot 1. Until at least the late 1830's, two other individuals are believed to Thomas Brooks, 1839, no. 1, 8th Con. (W. half) Thomas Bannister, 1838, no. 1, 8th Con. (E. half): Source: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~theislands/immigration/earlysetWolfe.html>
- ¹⁰ 1851 census lists the log home as being built in 1840.
- ¹¹ Samuel P.S. Wills was born in either 1836 (and therefore may have been a twin to Thomas Cumming), or in 1846. Baby Samuel died at the age of 11 months from unknown causes. The death date on his tombstone in the Trinity Cemetery is illegible. It reads 18__7.
- ¹² 1851 Census
- ¹³ 1851 Census
- ¹⁴ Christine Morr of Rochester, New York, a descendant of the family of my great grandmother, Jane Walker Wills. I have found no other reference to the "Mary" in her name, so it could have been a simple mistake.
- ¹⁵ 1861 Census
- ¹⁶ Clemina was baptized on 14 Nov. 1861 at the Anglican Church, Wolfe Island, Frontenac, Ontario Canada. Anglican Church records, Wolfe Island, Ontario, Canada; 3W1, page 37 line 7.
- ¹⁷ Thomas Cumming Wills, Last Will and Testament
- ¹⁸ 1861 Census
- ¹⁹ House is believed to have been commenced construction sometime in the 1860's.
- ²⁰ 1871 Census
- ²¹ Archives of Ontario, Probate Information (1878-81), Frontenac County, GS1, Reel 1230, Court Records, Frontenac Surrogate Court, Estate File 812 (Wills, Thomas C.)
- ²² Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Counties (Ontario Map Ref #31 and #30)
Illustrated historical atlas of the counties of Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, Ontario.
Toronto: J.H. Meacham & Co., 1878. McGill University, Rare Books Division, elf G1148.F7J3 1878.
- ²³ Church registry records. Stace Wills collection.
- ²⁴ Kathleen Fordyce Halbert, through Chris Morr.
- ²⁵ Probate documents. Stace Wills collection.
- ²⁶ 1881 Census. Andrew might be a brother to Thomas Spence, who also apparently worked for George and married Gertie Sluman, Mary Jane's sister.
- ²⁷ Title: Marriage: Anglican Church of Wolfe Island, Wolfe Island, Ontario Book 3W3, p. 151 Media: Church Record. Annie is the daughter of Daniel Cattanach (b. 14 Dec 1838 in Ontario) and Hannah Mary Henderson (b. 20 Dec. 1845 in Ontario)
- ²⁸ Wolfe Island Farmers and Business Directory, 1888;
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~theislands/directories/wolfedir.html>
The Union Publishing Co. of Ingersoll Farmers' and Business Directory for the Counties of Frontenac, Hastings, Addington, Lennox and Prince Edward, 1888, Volume III, pages 53 to 57. contained on:

B70, Series C, Reel 20 WOLFE ISLAND TOWNSHIP. (The address given after each name is the post office address.) ABBREVIATIONS.-f. freeholder; t. tenant; o.p Oak Point; o.s. Old Survey,

²⁹ 2737 – 1831, 1911-1912. Cosgrove book, 1846 Smiths Gazetteer.

³⁰ Chris Morrell letters of Jane (Sluman) Walker.

³¹ Inconsistent with Ken's recollection of the land location of the first CPR purchase.

³² CPR Database (Glenbow Archives CPR Database (Volume 109, contract number 5561) describes the land purchased on May 10, 1892 by George Wills as NE/NW/SE/SW – 15 – 25- 4- W5. 640 acres total at a price of \$3.00 per acre. The CPR came in 1882.

³³ Glenbow Archives File Number NA-3420-13

³⁴ 1901 Census

³⁵ Chaps and Chinooks, Pg. 15

³⁶ 1911 Census

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/137th_Battalion%2C_CEF

³⁸ Chaps and Chinooks, Pg. 160.

³⁹ Chaps and Chinooks Pg. 520