

MJ-70

McWilliams Family fonds. - [graphic material, textual record]. - [190?-197?]. - 649 photographs. - 2 textual items.

Box V-74

Biographical history

The McWilliams family history in the Moose Jaw area consists of several generations beginning with Thomas Edwin McWilliams (Tom). He was born in Kingston, Ontario in 1840. He married Martha Jane Dunseith and had six children - Eliza Jane, Margaret Ann, Mary Victoria, Samuel Henry, George Edwin and William John. He spent from 1879 to 1882 in Fort Garry, returned to Ontario and then headed west to the Moose Jaw area in 1883. His family followed in 1884. He rented several properties in the Pasqua/Drinkwater area including a railway section house and E½ 10-16-25 W2. He worked away from the farm at various jobs including as a freighter of supplies for the military during the Riel rebellion.

In July 1886, Thomas discovered the hills south of Drinkwater contained deposits of a clay suitable for ceramics and brick. By 1887, he had registered a homestead claim for the property containing the deposits. He and his family moved to Moose Jaw and lived there for several years. Martha leased the Queen's Hotel and operated it as a boarding house for a number of years.

By 1889, Thomas was in danger of forfeiting his homestead claim as he had not abided by the rules requiring habitation and agricultural development. He and his son, Sam, moved to the property - Thomas living there for six months of the year and working elsewhere the rest and Sam staying there year round while the rest of the family stayed in Moose Jaw. They cared for cattle on the property to help fulfill the agricultural requirements. There are several different sources providing conflicting timelines re: the early development of the clay deposits. One states that after trying unsuccessfully to interest investors or raise capital to start manufacturing, Thomas sold the property to a group of businessmen in August or September, 1899. They then started what is known as the Claybank Brick Plant.

Another source suggests that McWilliams hauled clay from his property to Moose Jaw for sale to various manufacturers in Moose Jaw until he partnered with the Moose Jaw Fire Brick and Pottery Co. from 1904 until they reorganized into Saskatchewan Clay Products and bought out his shares in 1912.

Thomas was also a founding member of the Moose Jaw Orange Lodge and was recognized as being one of the longest serving members of the lodge in the Canadian west. He died on River Street in Moose Jaw at age 78.

Samuel Henry McWilliams (Sam) was the son of Thomas E. McWilliams. He was born in Muskoka, Ontario ca. 1874 and moved with his family to the Assiniboia territory in 1884. At the age of 15, Sam worked as a water hauler for the people of Moose Jaw. All the water

used in the construction of Victoria School was hauled to the site by Sam. He attended the school the following year.

In the Fall of 1889, Sam moved to Claybank, Saskatchewan to help fulfill the residency requirements for his father's homestead claim.

In June, 1892, when he turned 18, he filed for his own homestead on NE 1/4 24-15-25 W2. He purchased SE 1/4 31-14-24 W2 in 1904.

He married Bessie Ann Coventry of Coventry, Saskatchewan and had five children - Leslie Earl and William Henry who later rented the family farm from their father when he retired to Moose Jaw, Harry Hector who worked for the CPR, and daughters Fern Louise (who married an Englishman in the RAF and moved away) and Olive Jane.

Sam was active in the community and was an original member of the Moose Jaw Agricultural Society and was also a member of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers and the Moose Jaw Museum Committee.

He retired to Moose Jaw in 1939. He died November 13, 1962, age 88.

Leslie Earl McWilliams (Les) had one son, James Leslie (Jim). William Henry McWilliams (Bill) had three sons - David, Ronald and Murray and one daughter, Sandra.

A number of family members were involved in the St. Andrews Society and Scottish pipe and drum bands.

Scope and content

This fonds consists of 650 photographic images, primarily black and white negatives, that date from ca. 1900 to ca. 1970. They were the records of Leslie Earl McWilliams before being donated by his son, James. Subject matter is primarily agricultural activities, family members, Moose Jaw buildings, and the family farm. A number of the images related to Scottish pipe and drum bands. The fonds also includes images of Claybank Brick Plant and associated clay deposits and a variety of travel photos including British Columbia, northern Saskatchewan and Churchill, Manitoba.

Conservation note

This fonds was re-boxed and foldered in 2004.

Note of immediate source of acquisition

Accession number 70.BA donated to the archives by Jim McWilliams on July 10, 1984.

Physical Condition

Two 8x10 photographs are badly curled and will likely have to be relaxed and flattened before proper storage. Some of the early negatives are discoloured/rippled. They should be

tested for a nitrate base.

Associated materials

MJPL Archives vertical files

- Family Trees - McWilliams

- Manuscripts - McWilliams, Sam

- Biography - McWilliams, S. & Thos. E.

Finding aids

See file list.

File List

001 - Poem re: "superior" Englishmen and business card with "There'll Always be an England" on reverse. [194-?]