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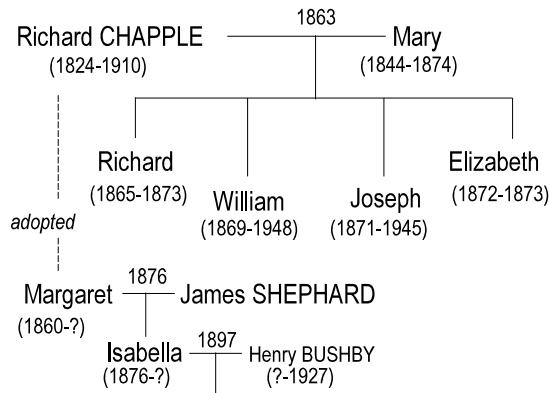
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# The Chapple family

by Gabriola Museum, History Committee



Richard Chapple (also spelled Chappel or Chapelle) was born in Cornwall, England in 1824 and came to Canada at the age of 24.<sup>1</sup> He worked for a time in the Nanaimo mines, but, like other Gabriola early settlers, he soon tired of that and became a farmer, pre-empting land on Gabriola in the early 1860s. His wife, Mary Kouskek (or Kanshek), also known as Mary Taylor, was a young Tongass (Tlingit) woman from Alaska, as were several other Gabriola pioneer wives. Presumably, the Chapples met in Nanaimo, possibly when Mary was on her way to or from Fort Victoria.

The Chapples had three sons and a daughter, but both Elizabeth and the eldest son, Richard, died when they were still young in 1873. The causes of death were whooping cough and tuberculosis respectively. The Chapple family also included an adopted daughter Margaret (née Sutton) who took the Chapple name at her baptism in 1862.

Mary Chapple's life came prematurely to an end on a bitterly cold Tuesday night,

November 24, 1874. Mary had just arrived in Nanaimo harbour aboard the steamer, *Maude*, when she discovered that she had left her pocket book behind. She turned back to look for it. By the time she had either found it or given up the search, the other passengers had gone. As Mary was leaving the now deserted deck, the unsecured gangplank fell into the water taking her with it. The accident was observed only by a "tall stranger", who, after alerting a crewmember on his way to the wharf, quickly disappeared from the scene. At the subsequent inquest, it was revealed that a "little boy", one of Mary's young sons, was found in the early hours of Wednesday morning sitting on a store doorstep awaiting his mother's return.<sup>2</sup>

We get glimpses of Richard's later life from contemporary newspaper accounts. He complained about his property taxes in December 1876, and they were adjusted. He built the wharf [Green Wharf] just north of False Narrows in September 1883. Three years later, he and William McGuffie repaired it (September 1886). He opened a market in Nanaimo, where he sold suckling pigs at Christmas in 1883, but closed it the following year (September 1884). He was appointed foreman of roads at the "lower" (south) end of the island in 1887. He was struck on the head by a runaway colt in 1889, but recovered from his "very severe wound". He planted twenty acres of oats in February 1892, and, in July 1893, he took to Nanaimo what the Free Press records as

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<sup>1</sup> June Lewis-Harrison, *People of Gabriola—A History of our Pioneers*, D.W. Friesen & Sons, Cloverdale, 1982, pp.150–151.

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<sup>2</sup> Nanaimo Free Press, October 31, 1874. This and other interesting stories are printed in Neil Aitken's book, *Island Time—Gabriola 1874–1879*.

“...a quantity of rose potatoes, the largest and finest brought to the city this season”.

We know that Richard was charitable—he donated to the widows and orphans of the Nanaimo mine disaster in May 1887 in which 148 men died. He was a very accomplished dancer—“...he astounds all the company with his dancing skills...” says a guest at the silver wedding anniversary of the Shaws in 1886. He was a good friend—he served as pallbearer at the funeral of Magnus Edgar in 1894. There is also reason to believe that he was a man of firm principles. In 1894, when seventy years old, he and Henry T. Petersen, disagreeing with the results of the election of school trustees, rowed to Victoria to discuss the matter with the superintendent of education. To what avail, unfortunately we do not know.

Both of Richard and Mary’s sons, William and Joseph, known by everyone on Gabriola as Bill and Jo, attended the North Gabriola School, where they did moderately well. The younger son, Jo, managed to get his name in the paper several times, but his elder brother Bill never did. Jo appeared before the magistrate in January 1883, along with two of his friends, charged with breaking into the house of William Hoggan and stealing a small quantity of apples. They got off with a warning. Three years later, when Jo was fifteen, his father posted a notice declining responsibility for his son’s debts.

In 1887, Jo was swimming with friends in Rocky [Descanso] Bay when one of his companions, Charles LeBoeuf, was drowned. Shortly after that, in September 1887, Jo assisted in rescuing three men thrown from a boat when halfway to Gabriola from Nanaimo. In 1894, he “...shot a monster panther [cougar] on his farm...it measured 8 ft. 7 in. and was quite...old”. He was later to record that he

could remember when barricading his home for protection from the wolves and cougars ...was a nightly task.<sup>3</sup>

Jo had left Gabriola by 1901, leaving his father Richard and brother Bill to run the farm. He lived on Saltspring for a time, but for him, Gabriola was always home, and by 1920, after his father’s death, he was back. Neither of the brothers ever married, but their sister, Margaret, married a James R. Shephard of Nanaimo in 1876, when she was sixteen.<sup>4</sup> A daughter, Isabella Silvia Gertrude Shephard, was born on Gabriola ten months later.<sup>5</sup>

Richard and the two sons were buried in the old Gabriola cemetery on South Road, but the whereabouts of Mary and the childrens’ graves is unknown. As good a guess as any is that they too are here on Gabriola.

*If you can help fill gaps in the story of the Chapples, have questions, or would like more information about this family, please contact the Gabriola Historical and Museum Society History Committee. ◇*

<sup>3</sup> Vancouver Sun, October 10, 1945. Cougars, *Felis concolor*, still visit the island occasionally.

<sup>4</sup> On the marriage record, James Shephard is from Texas, but on his daughter’s birth record, he is from New York City. Richard did not attend the wedding.

<sup>5</sup> Nothing is known of Margaret after the birth of Isabella, who, in 1881, is listed as being age four and living with Margaret McGill and her father and sister, John and Isabella Sabiston. Isabella Shephard married Henry John Bushby in Victoria in 1897, and a son, Henry John Jnr., was born in 1901. Henry John Snr. died in 1927, and Henry John Jnr. in 1938. An Isabella S.G. Shouldice from Victoria visited the vital statistics office in Nanaimo in 1946 to correct the date on Isabella Shephard’s birth record. It was a Mr. L. Shouldice at the same Victoria address that provided details for the death registration of William Chapple in 1948 saying he was his nephew-in-law.