

Context:

Gabriola family history

Citations:

Lynda Poulton & Barrie Humphrey, The LeBoeuf family, *SHALE* 1, pp.22–25, November 2000.

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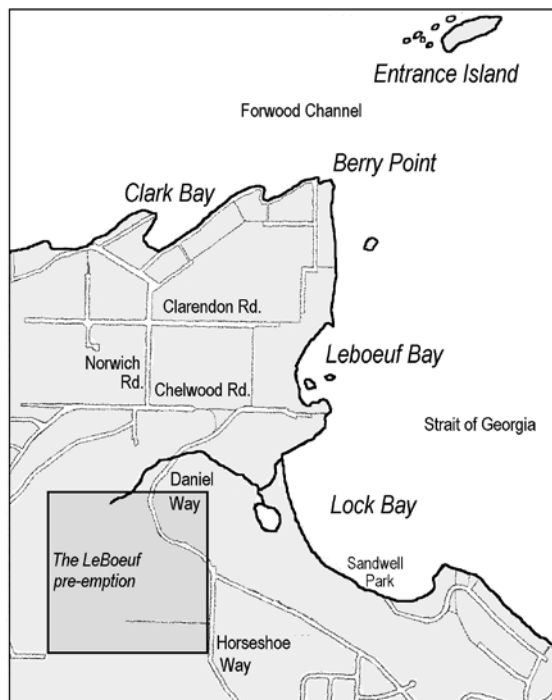
August 21, 2017.

The LeBoeuf family

by Lynda Poulton and Barrie Humphrey

The LeBoeufs were among the earliest pioneers on Gabriola Island. Although they may have been here as early as 1867, and stayed as late as 1900, the first record of their presence on Gabriola dates from 1874,¹ and the last, from 1898. They pre-empted 160 acres at the northeast end of Gabriola, facing Lock Bay.² A smaller bay to the north is still called Leboeuf Bay.

Theodore LeBoeuf was born on May 20, 1835, in Ste. Anne, Quebec. His wife,



Adapted from RDN GABRIOLA ISLAND Legal Base Map

Maria, was born around 1843 to the Tongass people of Cape Fox, at the southern tip of the Alaska Panhandle, about 70km NNW of Prince Rupert. The Tongass people are members of the cultural and linguistic grouping known as the Tlingit.

Time and unknown circumstances brought these two strangers from opposite sides of the continent together, and they were married on May 28, 1867, in Nanaimo, immediately following Maria's baptism.³ Canada at the time was weeks away from Confederation, and the economy of British Columbia, not yet a province, was in the doldrums following the heady days of the gold rush era.

The LeBoeufs were homestead farmers, growing vegetables, and raising cattle and poultry, both for their own use and for market. They were mentioned in a Nanaimo Free Press article,¹ which praised the industry of the Gabriolan settlers. Theodore was an accomplished carpenter, skilled with the broad axe, and built many barns on Gabriola and in Nanaimo. He is also remembered for constructing remarkable ditching systems, some of which are still in use today.⁴ Tim Brown still farms most of the LeBoeufs' former land holdings.

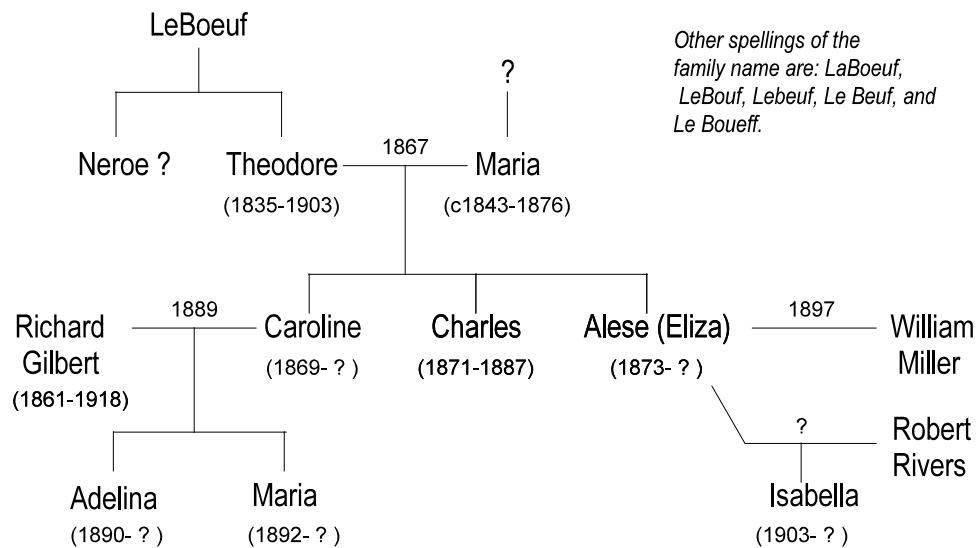
To his neighbours, Theodore was known as "the Frenchman". Maria worked in other settlers' homes, as a washerwoman.⁴ Maria and Theodore's first child, Caroline, was born on June 2, 1869. Two years later,

¹ Nanaimo Free Press, May 9, 1874. Also BC Archives: GR 0766: Box 13, No. 1498: Certificate of Pre-emption May 18, 1874.

² Nanaimo Archives: Nanaimo/Alberni Assessment Rolls 1884-1885. Section 19, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$, and the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$; and section 22, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$.

³ BC Archives: Microfilm Reel 1A: Records of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Victoria BC, 1849-1934.

⁴ June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, pp.110, 151-152, Friesen & Sons BC; 1982.



on May 2, 1871, their only son, Charles, was born, and on August 1, 1873, a second daughter, Alese (also known as Elise, Eliza, or Elizabeth). All three children were baptised on December 6, 1874, in Nanaimo.³

Maria LeBœuf died on November 11, 1876, at only 35 years of age. She was buried in the cemetery of the new St. Peter's Church, on Fitzwilliam Street in Nanaimo,⁵ one of the first to be interred there. Theodore and Charles were the only occupants of the LeBœuf household at the time of the 1881 census.

In the early 1880s, Theodore was delinquent in paying his taxes on several occasions, although he managed to pay the \$3.75 owed by September of 1881 thereby avoiding having his farm auctioned off.⁶ In the 1884/85 assessment roll, the LeBœuf land was assessed at \$500.00. His income was also \$500.00. The taxes for this term were \$3.75 of which he had paid only \$2.66.⁷

⁵ St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church Records, Nanaimo, BC.

⁶ Nanaimo Free Press, August 20, 1881.

⁷ Nanaimo Archives: Nanaimo/Alberni Assessment Rolls 1884-1885.

Also in 1884, he advertised for sale in the Nanaimo Free Press on July 9, "a yoke of well-broken and handy work oxen, in excellent condition".

In July of 1884, there was an explosion at the Wellington Colliery, a few miles north of the centre of Nanaimo. Twenty-three mineworkers died, among them newly arrived immigrants who had spent their savings just getting to Vancouver Island. On May 3, 1887, there was an even more disastrous explosion at the Number One Mine of the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company in Nanaimo. In that explosion, 148 men died, among them three sons of Gabriola farmers (James Hoggan, 21; Thomas Martin, 22; and John McGuffie, 22).⁸ On each occasion, concerned Gabriola citizens raised money for the widows and children. Theodore contributed a dollar each time.⁹

⁸ Nanaimo Free Press, May 7, 1887. The VCML company had bought the old Hudson's Bay Company mines in 1861. On May 3, every year, the flag on the HBC's Bastion in Nanaimo is lowered to half-mast to remind people of the tragedy.

⁹ About a half-day's pay in the mines. Lynne Bowen, *Three Dollar Dreams*, p.251, Oolichan

On July 1, 1885, Theodore was elected to be Trustee of the Gabriola school, a position he held for three years.¹⁰ His son, Charles, would have been school age; however, no record of his schooling has been found.

In 1886, Theodore was mentioned in the Free Press for growing an amazingly large blood-red beet, which weighed 12 pounds (5.5 kg), with roots and stems removed, and a turnip beet, weighing 7 pounds (3.2 kg). The newspaper headline¹¹ read—

WHO CAN BE(E)AT THIS?

Eleven years after Maria's early death, tragedy once again struck the LeBœufs. On August 14, 1887, according to the Nanaimo Free Press, Charles, by now aged 15, was swimming with friends at Rocky Bay (now called Descanso Bay, the site of our present ferry landing), when he suddenly disappeared under water. Although his friends ran for help from neighbours, who tried to resuscitate him, they were too late. The cause of death was given as "cramping", a once common explanation for drowning.

Charles' funeral was held at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church, Nanaimo, on August 17, the Rev. Father Durand, the parish replacement priest, giving the service. The church records are incomplete, but it

Books BC, 1987. The donations were reported in the Nanaimo Free Press, August 13, 1884, and June 11, 1887.

¹⁰ Nanaimo Free Press, July 1, 1885.

¹¹ Nanaimo Free Press, September 18, 1886. Giant fruits and vegetables were a favourite theme of the newspaper, possibly because it encouraged farmers to bring samples to the office. There were reports of "monster cherries" from William Flewett on De Courcy (June 1889), "giant stalks of rhubarb" from James McLay on Gabriola (June 1889), and "mammoth apples" from David Roberts on Mudge (October 1888).

can be assumed that, according to custom, Charles was buried beside his mother, whose unmarked grave we have managed to locate.

Some time in 1889, Caroline LeBœuf, the eldest daughter, married Richard Gilbert at St. Peter's Church. Theodore was present as witness.⁵ Their first child, Adelina (Adeline), was born on Gabriola, on February 20, 1890, and baptised on April 27, at St. Peter's. Theodore was the sponsor.⁵

The 1891 census lists the occupants of the LeBœuf household as Theodore, a 55-year old farmer; his daughter, 17-year old Alese; 22-year old Caroline Gilbert; her husband Richard, a 27 year old miner; and year-old Adelina Gilbert. Caroline Gilbert was expecting their second child.

On May 25, 1892, on Gabriola, a second daughter, Maria, was born to Caroline and Richard. She was baptised at St. Peter's on June 11, 1892. The sponsors were Theodore and Mary Enos.⁵

Alese (Eliza) LeBœuf, the younger daughter of Theodore and Maria, was married in Victoria on September 2, 1897, to William Miller, a 38-year-old German-born longshoreman from Tacoma.¹² However, either the marriage did not last, or William died, because a daughter—Isabella—was born to Alese and Robert Rivers on March 30, 1903, in Nanaimo. Isabella was baptised at St. Peter's Church and Adelina LeBœuf, cousin to Isabella, was the sponsor.¹³

¹² British Columbia Vital Statistics: Reg. No. 1897-09-008152; BCA No. B11368; GSU No. 1983525.

¹³ St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church Records, Nanaimo, BC. Adeline could only have been 13-years or so old, but sponsorship at that young age was not unusual.

On February 20, 1894, the Nanaimo Free Press reported that Theodore was dangerously ill at his Gabriola home. He was, according to the report, attended by friends who sought medical help from Nanaimo; however, no information about the nature of his illness is given. Although he was still registered as a farmer on Gabriola on the 1898 voters' list for the Nanaimo area, he must have left the island sometime prior to the 1901 census. He died of "apoplexy" on November 23, 1903, in New Westminster, aged 68 years.¹⁴

Richard Gilbert died on November 6, 1918, in Coquitlam at the age of 57 years, one of the many victims of the terrible influenza pandemic of that year.¹⁵ We have so far been unable to trace Caroline, Alese, and their daughters beyond Gabriola. None of the family members were registered in the voters' list of 1898 other than Theodore, but then, it must be remembered, women did not get the vote in Canada until 1918.

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

¹⁴ British Columbia Vital Statistics Reg. No.1903-09-081169; BCA No.B13088; GSU No. 1927116. "Apoplexy" would nowadays be called a stroke.

¹⁵ British Columbia Vital Statistics Reg. No.1918-09-098401; BCA No.B13091; GSU No.1927119.

Early settlers

A good source of information on the early settlers of Gabriola and surrounding islands is the museum's web site. Go to the home page www.island.net/~gm_chin and click Archives–Families.

The names of families that we know were here by or before 1881 are listed below. Spelling in those days was not as consistent as it is now, partly of course because many more people were illiterate. Some in the list may have been absentee landowners rather than settlers. The list is always changing as more research is done and more information comes in. Sources of information in compiling the list were the Nanaimo Free Press newspaper and the 1881 census. See also June Harrison's book, page 279, where there is an 1888 voters list.

Brady	Jones
Burrell	Kemp
Caulfield	LeBoeuf
Chapple (Chappel)	Lewis
Degnen (Degnan)	Manly (Manley)
Dick	Martin
Dombrain	McFarlane
Easson	McGuffie
Easthom	McLay (McClay)
Edgar	Mounce
Fletcher	Norris
Flewett (Flewitt) ¹	Penberthy (Pemberthy, Pemburthy)
Foster	Provier
Goss	Roberts ²
Gray	Roe
Hall	Seneker ³
Heath	Silva
Hoggan	Stubbings (Stubbins)
Hunter	Wake ⁴
Jamieson	
Jefferies	

1. on De Courcy
2. on Mudge
3. a teacher only here for a short while
4. Captain Wake lived on Valdes, but he rowed across every day, just as the McDowells and others on Mudge do today.