

Context:

Gabriola genealogy

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# The Martin family of Gabriola

by Dr. Donald D. Martin

On April 15, 1874, Jonathan Martin and his son, William Martin, made application to pre-empt land on Gabriola Island. A Certificate of Pre-emption was issued to each for 160 acres on July 17, 1874.<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Martin was born in Orpington, Kent, UK, in August 26, 1831, to William Martin and Mary (Atkinson) Martin. We have been able to trace his family back two generations from the records of the parish Church of All Saints, Orpington Kent. Jonathan had seven siblings. A brother, Aaron, who appears in the Kent census of 1841 and 1851 may have also been a pre-emptor on Gabriola as he was a landowner on the 1884/85 assessment rolls for Gabriola. We have not yet confirmed a family connection; however, a birth year of 1839 fits with his age in the Kent census of 1851 and with the BC census of 1881. We have been unable to learn if Aaron married or when and where he died.

Jonathan came to British Columbia as a labourer for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). He would have been 18 years of age when he signed on for five years of service with the company. He was a passenger on the first voyage of the *Norman Morison*, which left Gravesend October 18, 1849, and arrived in Esquimalt March 24, 1850. The *Norman Morison* was made in Burma of teak for the East India Company in 1846 and purchased by the HBC in 1848 for 7750

British pounds. The ship was 119 feet in length with an 18-foot draught of 529–564 tons displacement. Among the fifty-five employees of the HBC on this voyage were Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken<sup>2</sup> and two brothers, also from Orpington, William and Henry Sampson.

The Archives of the HBC indicate that Jonathan Martin was with the company at Fort Rupert, which was near the present Port Hardy from 1850–1856, by which time he would have completed his obligation to the HBC. We know that the miners and labourers sent to Fort Rupert in 1850 to mine for coal were moved to Nanaimo in about 1852 when better coal sources were found. It may be that Jonathan followed other labourers, as it appears a son, William, was born in Nanaimo, October 13, 1855. We have found records of Jonathan purchasing candy, whiskey, gunpowder, and shot in the HBC store in Nanaimo in 1858. We have a copy of an application to the Surveyor General for a pre-emption of land at Comiakien in the Cowichan District, October 3, 1866.

Thus far, we have no certificate of pre-emption for this application or knowledge of Jonathan living in the Cowichan area. We do have records to place him on Saltspring Island in 1868 when he was a signatory on a

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<sup>1</sup> William claimed the NW ¼ and Jonathan the NE ¼ of Section 2 (Garland Rd. east to the United Church north of South Rd.). In the 1884/5 Assessment Rolls, Martins also owned the SW ¼ of Section 1 (west side of Degnen Bay) and the SW ¼ of Section 4 (east side of Degnen Bay). See also pp.24–27 for the making of the Indian reserve.

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<sup>2</sup> John Sebastian Helmcken became the HBC surgeon for Vancouver Island, and for the next 70 years was one of Victoria's leading citizens. The details of events during the voyage may be found in *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken* edited by Dorothy Blakey Smith and published in 1975.

petition from the residents of Saltspring requesting additional services from the Colonial Government. Jonathan served as an “interpreter of Chinook” at the trial of “Tom” accused murderer of William Robinson of Saltspring Island. The trial took place in Victoria, so we can place Jonathan there in June 1869.

Jonathan pre-empted land at Beaver Point at the southern end of Saltspring Island, October 17, 1871. We do not know how long he lived on Saltspring, but it seems to be his place of residence prior to living on Gabriola. Jonathan’s Gabriola farm was on what is now South Road, and his son William’s was adjacent. John Kemp was an immediate neighbour. The Martin farm produced outstanding vegetables, which were marketed in Nanaimo.

Once settled on Gabriola, he stayed for the remainder of his life. He served on the school board and was elected foreman for road construction. William worked in the mines at Wellington. Jonathan sired 13 children by First Nations women. William’s mother was an unnamed First Nations woman on his marriage certificate. We have other marriage certificates and baptismal records at St. Paul’s church in Nanaimo to provide information on the mothers of the children.

Jonathan married Helen/Ellen of Cowichan at St. Paul’s church in Nanaimo June 12, 1883. She was Helen on the church marriage certificate, but Ellen in Jonathan’s will and on her death certificate. She was Hellin on the gravestone of Thomas Martin, who died May 3, 1887, in a mine explosion and was buried in the Gabriola cemetery.

The children of Jonathan were as follows:

William (1855–1930), Mary Isabella (1863–1893), Thomas (1865–1887), John (1867–1944), Joseph (1868–1891),

Sarah Jane (1874–1900), Henry (1876–1952), Moses (1878–1916), James (1880–1957), Robert (1883–1973), Samuel (1886–1934), Angus (1888–1964), and Nellie (1890–1916).

William married Margaret McColl Dec. 23, 1875, and sired seven children. He lived for many years in Seattle returning to Gabriola briefly prior to his death in Seattle, January 17, 1930. It seems likely this history of William led June Lewis-Harrison in *The People of Gabriola* published in 1982 to describe Jonathan as a widower from Seattle. From our research, we find no records of his living in Seattle, but it would appear he moved to Gabriola from Saltspring Island.

In his will, dated November 14, 1895, Jonathan designated his son William and wife Ellen executors and trustees. When the will was probated May 3, 1907, he had real estate valued at \$2100 and a personal estate of \$550 resulting in no estate tax. Jonathan died January 16, 1907, and was buried in the Gabriola cemetery. When William died, he presumably was buried in the Seattle area.

The assessment rolls for Gabriola 1884/85 include the names of Aaron, John, Jonathan, and Thomas Martin.

The Martin farm, across from the No. 2 Firehall, was owned and occupied by Lucille Martin, widow of James Martin, son of Samuel, and grandson of Jonathan, until 2001 when it was sold.

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*The author is the grandson of Jonathan Martin and now lives in California. ♦*