

Chapter Ten: Family Business

The bells would have rung out at St John's Church, Victoria, on 22nd October 1892 when Will Sutton married (Helen) Annie Fox. Will was 33 years old, and still a lumberman at the time, and Annie was 40. We do not know how they met but one possibility is through the Blue Ribbon Temperance Club in Victoria, of which Will was a keen member for about a year in 1888. The Temperance meetings began with a prayer, followed by a talk and concluded with musical recitals or dances.



Helen Annie Fox ©Basil Fox

The Fox Family

Annie, like Will, was the eldest of six children; she was born in Regent Street, Sheffield on 8th January 1852, to George Fox, a spring knife cutler,ⁱ and Margaret Lofthouse.

George and Margaret clearly believed there was a better life for their family in Canada: whilst George had a trade, there would have been many spring knife cutlers in Sheffield at that point in the industrial revolution whereas someone with his skills would have been in greater demand amongst the pioneers in North America.

George first arrived in Canada on 27th December 1862, having left behind his pregnant wife who gave birth to their fifth daughter, Catherine Georgina; two years later, their second child, Margaret Alice, died of scarlet fever: what a lot for Margaret Fox to bear on her own, looking after the other four children, with the fear they may also catch the fever. No doubt as the eldest, extra responsibility would have fallen on the shoulders of Annie.

It was not until 1867 that Margaret, now 41, and her four daughters, (Helen) Annie, 15; (Isabella) Mary, 11; (Harriet) Amy, 8; and little Kate (Catherine Georgina), 5, set sail for Canada. George was waiting for them in Victoria where he had set up a cutlers shop at 78 Government Street. As suggested by Diana Pedersen in her blog “Everything but the fish” at Fox’s,ⁱⁱ George may have gone to one of the boom towns first to utilise his skills and save enough money to open up the shop.

Shortly after they were reunited, George and Margaret lost their second child, Isabella Mary: perhaps the long sea trip had been too much for her or she may have contracted something on the journey? The family lived over the shop for

a while before moving to Mason Street when along came George Thomas, known to the family as Tom, in 1868.

The Fox family could not have been prepared for the death of their father in 1873; he was only 47 years old. It would have been a huge blow: they must have been wondering whether they had made the right decision to emigrate but it is unlikely George would have been able to establish such a successful business in Sheffield, not to mention the poor living conditions and pollution there.ⁱⁱⁱ

Annie was already used to taking on responsibility in the family and, perhaps, relished the idea of taking control of the shop – she would have been acutely aware that its success was crucial to the families’ middle class lifestyle.^{iv}

Amy became a music teacher and Kate a school teacher - neither married. When Tom grew up he took over the family business. Here is a family photograph from 1896.



Fox Family © Basil Fox

Will is on the left, then Amy and her mother, Margaret; on the back row are Minnie Ellwood (cousin and wife of Tom Fox), aunty Em (no relation but a family friend) and Tom; and on the front row, Kate. Oh, and the pet parrot! Annie must have taken the photo.

Will's Parents Move to British Columbia

William and Sarah Sutton moved to British Columbia in 1893, staying at the Driard, the premier hotel in Victoria.^v By 1896 they had bought 135 Michigan Street,^{vi} a grand house which is still standing, as can be seen from the photograph below.



135 Michigan Street. © Victoria Heritage Foundation

William and Sarah had only lived in their new house a few months before William died; the *Daily Colonist* reported the event and suggested William had lived in British Columbia for twenty years which, of course, was incorrect. The report tells us William was well known in connection with his lumber business at Cowichan; that he had built the mill at Ucluelet and had large timber limits there. The pallbearers were his old partner, William Archibald

Robertson, W. Clark, G. A. Huff, MPP, A. Macleod, M. B. Hamlin, and D. Fraser. William left \$62,000^{vii} which is roughly worth just over one and a half million dollars today – substantially more than his father, Richard Sutton, left.

Sarah outlived William by nine years; she was 71 years old when she died, having been ill for some time. She hung herself in the cellar whilst members of her family were upstairs; what a strong woman but what a shock for the family.^{viii}

A Few Last Words on William Sutton

In trying to comprehend what kind of a person William Sutton was we face a major problem in that he left no records: we are dependent on what other people have to say about him, and most of that is not complimentary. We do have his actions which, as the saying goes, speak louder than words.

For the first 17 years in Kincardine he was building up his business and involved in local politics, becoming the ‘leader of the council’ for a number of years. Ensuring a part of Kincardine was named after himself - ‘Williamsburgh’ - shows he was aware of his own importance and influence but Williamsburgh has since been largely forgotten.

He was clearly not content with being sheriff and wanted to use what he, along with many others, saw as opportunities for making money from the natural resources of Vancouver Island. It is bizarre to think he held the responsible post of sheriff in Ontario yet ran a timber business on the other side of Canada. William was certainly ambitious and a capitalist. Perhaps he was also arrogant and used people to achieve his aims?

Looking at William's father's life, despite gossip and from the few records that exist, it would seem Richard Sutton was a man who cared about his family. With help from the Sill family he rose from nothing to become a yeoman farmer and property owner and was involved in politics, supporting the conservatives, as well as the church, taking on roles in the community (poor law guardian) and working with other yeoman farmers to protect their rights.

Reading between the lines it looks like his son, William Sutton, was a domineering father who liked to have his own way, even to the extent of not listening to others (W.A. Robertson) who might have been more knowledgeable. He does not appear to have been religious or involved with the church, nor does he appear to have given anything back to the community. His actions seem to have been more about financial reward.

William Sutton's place in history might have been different were it not for him being sacked: the words Robertson applies to him in the *History of the County of Bruce*, i.e. "**enterprising**" and "**energetic**" and having a "**prominent position in the settlement ... during the forty-three years of his residence in the county....**" are diminished when juxtaposed by how Robertson describes the new sheriff and gaoler appointed after William had been sacked: "**Nothing but the highest commendation can be uttered of these two appointees, who proved capable and well qualified for their respective posts.**" That implies a lot.

It was tradition to name the first grand-children after their grand-parents - all of William's siblings back in England, who had children, followed this tradition and named their first children Richard and Ellen. William and Sarah, however, named their first child William John after William

himself and Sarah's father; their second child is named Sarah Ellen after Sarah (whose mother was also a Sarah) and William's mother Ellen. Their fourth child is named James Edward. Whilst their fifth child is baptised Richard Keyworth – this might imply he was named after Sarah's brother rather than William's father.

What does this mean? Is it because William is in Canada and feels he does not need to carry on the tradition? Even if there had been earlier children who had died and had been named Richard, the tradition was that a later child would then also be called Richard. Does this say something about how William felt about his father? Could it be William did not like his father or was ashamed of him and perhaps his siblings? Or could we be wrong about Richard Sutton? Perhaps he was a “*base*” character and his son, William, was a chip off the old block?

ⁱ A spring knife cutler specialises in knives that involve spring steel, such as penknives, pocket knives and folding knives. Those who were experienced made everything by hand: springs, blades, and linings, as well as all the forging, grinding and polishing.

ⁱⁱ <https://anglersparadise.wordpress.com/2017/01/06/everything-but-the-fish-at-foxs/>

ⁱⁱⁱ In 1903 Will, Annie and Fannie visited England; Annie kept a diary and commented on Sheffield: “*Left Sheffield at 9.15 from the Victoria station, taking a cab there. Fog everywhere mixed with smoke, making a detestable atmosphere (but no worse than Manchester and other towns we went through).*”

^{iv} An advertisement in *The Colonist*, 14th January 1880, shows Margaret and Helen Annie Fox as the proprietors of the business.

^v The Driard Hotel was built in 1892 and was, for many years, the premier hotel in Victoria. The original façade is now part of the Eaton Centre Mall.

^{vi} 135 Michigan Street is now number 334 and is a heritage house. It is included on the Victoria Heritage Foundation website and also in *This Old House: Victoria's Heritage Neighbourhoods*, Volume 2, James Bay, 2005. There are photographs of various stages during redevelopment at Hallmark Heritage Society Archives available on line. The house was built in the 1890's for James and Jessie Stamford and cost \$6,000 to build and has recently been refurbished.

^{vii} William left just over \$62,000 out of which his debts were paid and his wife and children inherited cash worth in total \$27,000 with the remaining \$33,000 being put into a trust fund, the interest of which was for his wife, Sarah and on her death it was to be divided between their six children with the girls getting slightly more than the boys.

^{viii} She appears to have left Will, Fannie, Sarah and Lousia various amounts of land and in lieu of land \$600 to James who was living in America. It seems likely Richard Keyworth was not left any land as he had been given the house in Walkerton. The rest of her money was to be divided equally between her six children, her household goods being left to her daughter, Fannie.