

Hirst Family Biography

This pioneer family profile is being compiled from public records. Family members have not been contacted. Please forward any comments/corrections or additions to the society.

John Hirst (1827-1882)

1827-John Hirst was born in Yorkshire County, England.

-John Hirst married Harriet, a young lady from Barnsley, Yorkshire County in England. Both would be in their early 20's.

-John and Harriet journeyed to Australia.

1854-A daughter Mary was born in Australia.

1856-A son Thomas was born in Australia.

1858-A son William was born in the township of Newcastle in the county of New South Wales in Australia.

-The young family returned to their home country of England.

1861-A daughter Louisa was born in England.

-John and Harriet again set out, this time for the new Colony in the Americas.

1862-John and his family arrived in Nanaimo, British Columbia in November. It is said that he first worked a short while in the mines of the Vancouver Coal Company in Nanaimo. He then arranged to work as a storekeeper for the Hudson Bay Company. The Hudson Bay store closed shortly afterwards and Mssrs. Pratt and John bought the store and retained John Hirst as a clerk.

1863-A son John was born in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

1864-A son Albert V. is born on March 4th in Nanaimo.

1867-A son Joseph is born in Nanaimo.

1868-The business was not overly successful and the two owners offered John shares in the store to try to keep down the wages they were paying him. It is said that the store went into bankruptcy and because of the shares and wages still owed to John he was able to purchase the store outright. John was a shrewd business man and turned the store located on the corner of Commercial and Skinner streets into a success.

1870-A son George is born in Nanaimo on April 18th.

1871-A son Andrew is born in Nanaimo.

1873-A son James is born in Nanaimo. It is also believed that around this time John pre-empted about 300 acres of land along both sides of the Englishman's River to the north of Nanaimo. His intention was to raise cattle on the land. The cattle and all supplies were sent up by boat and

because there was no dock to receive them the cows had to swim ashore and the supplies were rafted in. Only a horse trail led to the area by land.

1875-John Hirst is elected to the first city council in Nanaimo in January as an Alderman. John would retain a seat on the Council Board until his death in 1882. Around this time John Hirst built a stone warehouse on the corner of Wharf and Front Streets in Nanaimo.

1876-A daughter Hellen is born in Nanaimo. This completes the family at 11 children, 3 girls and 8 boys. John is now about 49 years old and Harriet is about 44 years old.

1879-John Hirst was appointed a Pilot Commissioner when the Nanaimo Pilotage Authority was instituted in April and held that post until his death in 1882.

1880-In the early 1880's it is said that John built a dyke near the mouth of the Englishman's River to secure more grazing land for his cattle. It has been said that John Hirst leased part of this land to Theophilis Dupuy. Dupuy farmed and raised cattle on the land. When Dupuy was ready to give up the farm, John bought the cattle and then sold them to John Enos when the farm itself was sold to John Tippett. Tippett was known to have received title for the land in 1884.

1881-John and Harriet Hirst and their 11 children, are listed in the Census of Nanaimo. John, now aged 54 years, is listed as a Proprietor of a retail store. His two oldest sons, Thomas and William, now 25 and 23 years old, are listed as retail salesmen. The other boys in the family are all listed as farmers, presumably they are running the Gabriola Island and Englishman's River farms for their father. The family claims to belong to the Anglican Church. Joseph, George, Andrew and James, between the ages of 8 and 14 years are all listed as attending school.

1882-John Hirst died in Nanaimo on September 16th, at the age of 55 years. He had been seriously ill the past two or three weeks but was thought to be recovering when he suddenly died at 6:00 in the evening. The funeral took place on September 18th from the family home on Skinner Street and was described as the largest private funeral ever seen in Nanaimo. Rev. W. H. Clarke, the pastor of St. Paul's, conducted services and burial took place in the Old Pioneer Cemetery in Nanaimo. John died without leaving a will. It is known that at the time of his death he owned the Englishman's River farm, a Gabriola Island Farm, the Hirst Stone Warehouse, the Hirst Wharf and the Hardware Store. Because of the value of the estate left behind and the lack of a will it took 12 years before all matters of the estate were cleared up.

1883-It was probably around this time that John's son Albert took up the homestead in Englishman's River and built a log house. Albert would be about 19 years old. Albert later married and it is said they lived for several years as the only white settlers in the area.

1893-Harriet's son Thomas Hirst died on November 22nd in Nanaimo at the age of 37 years.

1897-Harriet Hirst died in Nanaimo on March 30th, just after noon, at the age of 65 years. She died at her home on Commercial Street with her family members around her. She had been a confirmed invalid for a great many years and her recent life has been one of severe pain and affliction. Rev. Canon Good officiated at the funeral and Harriet was buried in plot 42 of range 7 in the Nanaimo City Cemetery, beside her son Thomas.

The Children of John Hirst

Mary Hirst- (1854-)

Mary was born in 1854 in Australia, the first child for John and Harriet Hirst. She moved with her family to England around 1860 and then to Nanaimo in 1862 where she arrived in November at the

age of 8 years. She lived with her parents at least to the age of 27 and possibly longer. She worked at her fathers store and kept the books. She died in 1908 at the age of 54 years when she fell into an open excavation in front of her home. Mary never married.

Thomas Hirst- (1856-)

Thomas was born in 1856 in Australia. He was the second child to John and Harriet Hirst. He moved with the family to England around 1860 and then on to Canada and Nanaimo in November of 1862. He would be 6 years old. By the time he was 25 years old he was working for his father in his store downtown. He was still single and living at home. He eventually married Mabel and would have 2 daughters, Josephine and Winnifred. Thomas, at the age of 37 years, was found dead on November 22nd, 1893 in the Wilson Hotel in Nanaimo. The doctor supposed the death was due to suffocation, resulted from the position in which he was lying and noted that Hirst appeared to have been intoxicated.

William Hirst- (1858-)

William was born in 1858 at Newcastle in the county of New South Wales in Australia, the third child for John and Harriet Hirst. William moved as a young boy with the family back to England around 1860 and then on to Canada and Nanaimo in 1862. They arrived in Nanaimo in November, William aged 4 years. At the age of 23 years he was still single and working for his father in the family store downtown. In February of 1883, at the age of 25, William married Ada Waterworth in Nanaimo. He had at least three sons, the first born at Widby Island in Washington State in the USA appears not to have lived very long. The two surviving sons were Gilbert and John William (Dyson). William died at the age of 47 years, on November 17th, 1904 in Nanaimo after an illness of several months of heart disease. William was a member of the Ancient Order of Foresters.

John Hirst (1863-1897)

1863-John Hirst was born around this time in Nanaimo, British Columbia. He is the 5th child of John and Harriet Hirst.

1881-John is listed in the Census as 18 years old and living at home with his parents in Nanaimo. He is listed as a farmer.

1884-On October 18th Tax Assessments were mailed out and John Hirst was taxed on 160 acres in Englishman's River, valued at \$160. The property was taxed \$.53 but a Wild Land Tax was added of \$8.00 because no improvements to the property had been done. John is listed as having Freehold title to the property. There is also 635 acres in Englishman's River valued at \$3,000 and taxed assessed for \$10.00 against the Hirst Brothers. This was the land left by their father when he died in 1882 and payable by his estate which was not yet settled. The land is still listed as farm land and supporting 200 head of cattle, 12 hogs and 4 horses. The animals were assessed at \$3,000 and taxed for the amount of \$6.00 was due.

1885-John, at the age of 22 married Ann Harris, 19 year old daughter of Morgan Harris from Pontypool, South Wales. The Harris' had immigrated to Canada in 1876 first settling on Newcastle Island and later in Nanaimo. John and Ann married in Nanaimo in February.

1886-The wagon road from Nanaimo to Englishman's River was completed and extended up to the Comox area. John Hirst saw an opportunity and was quick to build and open a hotel along the road in the Englishman's River area called the Sea View Hotel.

1887-A son Thomas H. was born on April 21st in Nanaimo.

1888-A daughter Harriet was born on September 20th in Englishman's River. It is around this time, while Nelson Parks was the Postmaster, that area just north of Englishman's River began to be known as Parksville.

1889-It is said that the population of Parksville was 38 people, enough to become an official settlement. The boundaries were set from Englishman's River to French Creek. On April 18th, John Hirst entered into a contract with James Craig. James Craig was to slash and pile five acres of alder bottom at Englishman's River for the price of \$20 per acre. Only the trees less than eight inches across were to be cut. The job was to be completed by the end of June, but it was later revised so that the job was to be completed by the end of July.

1890-A son John A. was born on February 25th in Englishman's River.

1894-The Sea View Hotel burned to the ground. John then purchased a lot in the business centre from Nelson Parks and began construction on a new Hotel.

1895-A son Morgan was born on February 1st in Nanaimo. The new Hotel opened named the Rod and Gun.

1896-A daughter was born to John and Ann on June 15th.

1897-On March 30th, John's mother, Harriet died after a long illness in Nanaimo. On October 8th, John Hirst died at Englishman's River, at the young age of 34 years. The Nanaimo Free Press Newspaper reported on October 8th that he died from a dose of carbolic acid. He left behind a 32 year old wife and 5 children.

1898-Ann continued to operate the Rod and Gun Hotel and support for her family. She also took on the job as Postmistress for the area.

1901-In the **North Nanaimo Census**, Ann Hirst is listed as a 35 year old widow living in Englishman's River with her 5 children. She describes herself as born in England and of the occupation Hotelkeeper.

-It appears that Ann had one more child, a daughter named Leah. This would complete her family at 6 children, 3 girls and 3 boys.

1910-The railway arrived in Parksville.

1919-Ann sold the Rod and Gun Hotel to the Cook family, but retained her postmistress position.

1945-Parksville achieved the status of village on June 19th.

1948-After 50 years Ann finally retired as postmistress at the age of 83 years old.

1950-Ann Hirst nee Harris died on August 23rd, at the age of 85 years in Parksville.

Albert Victor Hirst (1864-1934)

1864-Albert V. Hirst was born on March 4th to John and Harriet Hirst in Nanaimo. He was the 6th child, the fourth son.

1873-Around this time Albert's father, John, pre-empts 300 acres of riverside property at Englishman's River to the north of Nanaimo. His intention was to raise cattle there. The cattle and all supplies were sent up by boat and because there was no dock to receive them the cows had to swim ashore and the supplies were rafted in. Only a horse trail led to the area by land.

1881-Albert is listed in the Census as 16 years old and living at home with his parents in Nanaimo. He is listed as a farmer, probably working on his father's two farms at Englishman's River and Gabriola Island.

1882-In September Albert's father, John Hirst, died in Nanaimo at the age of 55 years and left no will.

-Around this time Albert went up to the Englishman's River farm and built a permanent residence on the property. Albert and later his wife were the only white settlers for several years in the area. In the first years there was still only a trail to the farm and most supplies were brought in by boat.

1884-On October 18th the Englishman's River tax assessments were mailed out and Albert received a bill of \$17.06. Their property is described as 320 acres freehold title. The property is valued at \$320 and taxed at \$1.06. An additional Wild Land Tax is levied for \$16.00 because no improvements have been made to the land. There is also 635 acres in Englishman's River valued at \$3,000 and taxed assessed for \$10.00 against the Hirst Brothers. This was the land left by their father when he died in 1882 and payable by his estate which was not yet settled. The land is still listed as farm land and supporting 200 head of cattle, 12 hogs and 4 horses. The animals were assessed at \$3,000 and taxed for the amount of \$6.00 was due.

1886-A wagon road from Nanaimo to Englishman's River is completed. That same year Albert's brother John, built and opened a Hotel in the Englishman's River area called the Sea View Hotel.

1887-Around this time 23 year old Albert V. Hirst married 23 year old Jane.

1888-A daughter Elizabeth A. Hirst was born on September 21st in B.C.. It is around this time, while Nelson Parks was the Postmaster, that area just north of Englishman's River began to be known as Parksville.

1889-The population of the area reaches 38 people, enough to be an official settlement. The boundaries were set from Englishman's River to French Creek.

1891-Albert and Jane are listed in the **North Nanaimo Census** in Englishman's River area. They have one daughter, Bessie. They are state that two of Albert's younger brothers, Joseph 24 years old, and Andrew 20 years old, live with them. All three men are listed as farmers. Sometime over the next few months, the dyke that had been built along the mouth of the Englishman's River burst and Albert and his young family were stranded for three days in the flood. The ordeal must have been frightening for the young family for they abandoned the farm and went to California. Jane had come to Nanaimo with her parents from California so it is presumed she still had some ties there.

1892-A daughter H. M. Hirst was born on May 9th in California, USA.

-The family returned from California after a few years and built a new home on the same property on higher ground. The river was never again diked.

1897-A son Albert Clarence Hirst was born on August 8th at Englishman's River.

1901-Albert and Jane are listed in the **North Nanaimo Census** for Englishman's River. Albert is listed as a farmer and the family belongs to the Church of England. They are listed with 3 children, two daughters and a son.

1910-The railway reaches Parksville.

1934-Albert V. Hirst died around this time at the age of 70 years.

1945-Parskville officially becomes a village on June 19th.

1948-Jane Hirst died at the age of 84 years on November 26th in Parksville, B.C. at the home of one of her daughters.

Joseph Hirst (1867-?)

1867-Joseph Hirst was born in Nanaimo. He is the 7th child to John and Harriet Hirst.

1881-Joseph is listed in the census as 14 years old and living with his parents in Nanaimo. He is listed as going to school as well as helping to farm on his father's farms at Englishman's River and Gabriola Island.

1891-Joseph is listed in the **North Nanaimo Census** as living with his older brother Albert, and his wife and young daughter in Englishman's River. He is 24 years old and a farmer.

1894-In February, Joseph marries at the age of 27 years to Alice Plummer, 18 years old in Parksville.

1895-On January 27th a daughter is born to Joseph and Alice.

1896-A daughter is born on January 24th.

1898-A son is born on June 4th.

1900-A son is born on December 1st.

1901-Joseph and Alice are listed in the **North Nanaimo Census** in the Englishman's River district. Joseph is 34 years old and a farmer, Alice is 25 years old. The family includes 4 children and belong to the Church of England.

George Hirst (1870-1941)

George Hirst was born on 18 April 18, 1870, the 8th child of John and Harriet. He was married on July 1, 1890 to Elizabeth Wellwood who was born in Lancaster, Liverpool, England in 1868. They had a daughter, Ada, born April 21, 1891 and a son Edwin Blythe, born April 2, 1906. George died on May 31, 1941 in Victoria. Elizabeth died on May 14, 1947. Ada had one daughter and Edwin had 2 sons and 1 daughter.

Andrew Hirst (1871-1903)

Andrew was born in 1871 in Nanaimo, the 9th child to John and Harriet Hirst. At the age of 10, Andrew is listed as going to school and helping his father on the farms. At the age of 20, Andrew is living with his older brother Albert and his family at the Englishman's River farm. He was known to have been postmaster in Englishman's River for a time. Andrew married and 2 months later he died at the age of 32 years in Englishman's River of pneumonia.

Albert Clarence Hirst

Albert was said to have been a vet of both World War I and World War II

Gilbert Hirst (1881-1935)

Died at the age of 54 years old, August 16th, 1935. Attempted to kill his wife, died by suicide in his store in Nanaimo.