

Thomas Graham Morry and Clara Isabelle [Windsor] Morry

by Christopher J.A. Morry

My great-grandfather, Thomas Graham Morry, died at the home of his son, Albert Graham Morry, 1339 Stanley Avenue in Victoria, on July 24, 1935 and was buried in St. Luke's Churchyard on July 27th. He was buried alongside his second wife, Clara Isabelle [Windsor] Morry, who had died on January 2nd the previous year and was buried on January 4, 1934. Both of these people were Newfoundlanders and spent the greater part of their long lives in Newfoundland. So how did they wind up being buried at St. Luke's on the other side of the continent, in what was then a foreign country?



*Bert Morry beside the graves of his father, Thomas Graham Morry, and Clara Isabelle Windsor, 1935
Family photos in this article were submitted by Chris Morry.*

Thomas Graham Morry, the son of John Henry Morry and Elizabeth Sarah Winsor, was born on December 4, 1849 in Ferryland, a small outpost fishing community on the Southern Shore of Newfoundland, approximately 45 miles (75 km) south of St. John's. He was christened, by coincidence, at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Ferryland on February 9, 1850. So, if nothing else, there is a kind of symmetry to his life ending in the cemetery of St. Luke's in Victoria.

The Morry family were what would be called small-scale merchants in that community and had been for three generations prior to the birth of Thomas Graham. The only business in these outpost communities in these early days was the cod fishery, and virtually the only product of that industry was the manufacture of sun-dried light salt cod for the export trade. They were one of only a handful of English Anglican families remaining in that area of Newfoundland, all of them small-scale merchants like the Morrys, immersed in a sea of Irish Catholic families, who were brought there initially to work for the merchants catching fish and "making" the salt cod.

The Windsor family was the only merchant class family in the adjacent community of Aquaforte, 4 miles (7 km) further south along the coast. They arrived a generation after the Morrys. This was a large family, with many men involved in the fishery or as sea captains. Clara's family in particular included her parents, Peter Windsor and Anna Jennings Winsor (first cousins), and their thirteen children, though four of her siblings died at birth or in early childhood. Events of that kind were common in Newfoundland outposts and were not considered tragedies, but simply the will of God. This was, of course, one more incentive to have large families.

Newfoundland was not a particularly broadminded country in those early days and intermarriage between religions was unheard of. So it stood to reason that there would be many marriages between the Windsors and Morrys and the few other English Anglican merchant-class families in



*Thomas Graham Morry (right), ca 1872,
and his book about the journey to the west.*

nearby communities. There was no road to St. John's, and only rough paths connecting these isolated communities, travel by sea being the principal mode of getting around.

So it was that Thomas Graham and Clara Isabelle became childhood sweethearts and were expected to eventually wed. But something happened to prevent that obvious and anticipated outcome. Thomas Graham was struck by the spirit of adventure. Hearing that the government of the new country of Canada was looking for recruits to join the Provisional Battalion of Infantry of Active Militia to put down

the Riel and Red River Rebellions, he left his comfortable life in Newfoundland and headed for Montreal, where he joined up on September 12, 1872. Whether it was his intention at the outset or not we will never know, but he stayed in that militia group, based in Fort Garry (now Winnipeg, Manitoba) for over two years, resigning his commission on November 17, 1874. Even then, he did not return to Newfoundland but wasted much time fighting with what was even then an impenetrable bureaucracy in Ottawa attempting, unsuccessfully, to apply for the land grant on the prairies, to which he was entitled for his services.

Needless to say, Clara, whilst she may have been initially devastated by his departure, did not remain so for long and, just before his return to Newfoundland, she married his first cousin (who was also her first cousin), a sea captain, William Morry, on September 3, 1877 at St. Phillip's Anglican Church in Aquaforte. Their marriage was a brief one; William went down with his ship and all of his crew weeks later taking a cargo of copper ore from Betts Cove, Nfld. to Swansea, Wales.

But even then, and despite the fact that Thomas Graham had returned to Ferryland, they did not marry. It is only speculation on my part, but I suspect there was a little pique involved in this rift, since she may have felt he had abandoned her in search of adventure out west. Instead, Thomas Graham wound up marrying Catherine Frances White, much to the shock of his family and the entire community, for she was partly of Irish descent and was a Roman Catholic. My grandfather, Howard Leopold Morry, noted that they were married at Renews (a somewhat distant community) on June 1, 1880 because the R.C. priest at Ferryland refused to marry them. The groom would not consent to having all children of the marriage reared as Catholics. Grandfather said that he was reared an Anglican and only embraced Catholicism when about 21 to please his mother. Well, that was his story anyway. The truth was that all of the children were initially baptised in the Catholic Church and then later spirited away by two maiden aunts to be rechristened at St. Luke's without their mother's knowledge! This "belt and braces" approach to religion was very common in Newfoundland once mixed marriages began to occur.

Clara Isabelle eventually remarried on November 16, 1892 to a wealthy St. John's printer and newspaper publisher of Anglo-Irish descent, Richard Alexander McCoubrey. This was another short marriage, lasting until his death on May 6, 1898, but at least this marriage yielded one son, Alexander Rixon McCoubrey, born in St. John's on December 14, 1893. Another curious coincidence; their home address was 49 Victoria St. in St. John's, a presage of things to come!

Clara had a sister, Anna Jennings Windsor, who had married another Morry, William George, also a first cousin of Thomas Graham. They had moved to the Victoria area in 1901, where he found work as a manager at the Inverness Cannery on the Skeena River and commuted back and forth. A brother, Jacob Augustus (Gus) Windsor, had moved there at the same time as Anna and had a farm on Cedar Hill Rd. Clara had another sister Sarah Payne Windsor, whose husband, Capt. William George Bradshaw, died young of pneumonia. In 1907 Sarah, with her large family, moved to the Saanich area because she had visited family there the previous year and had fallen in love with the place. Clara also moved there with her son, Alexander, in 1907. Sarah's brother in law, Albert Bradshaw, came with Sarah and her family to Victoria and helped Gus build the home on Palo Alto Street where they all lived in the same house on the farm, at least until 1911, according to the census.

Meanwhile, Thomas Graham was widowed in 1927. With his son, my grandfather, now running the family business, he must have felt the wanderlust again, or possibly those memories of early romance came back to him. He had another son, Albert Graham Morry (Bert), who had moved to BC to work in the salmon canneries and on the fishing boats. Many Newfoundlanders did this from the late 1800s onward, due to declines in the cod fishery, an ominous forecast of worse things to come in that industry. Eventually he got into house construction instead and built many of the fine old homes still standing in the Oak Bay area today. So Thomas Graham went out to stay with him in the milder climes of BC.

And there he and Clara met one another once again. The Newfoundland community on Vancouver Island was by then quite large but, Newfoundlanders being Newfoundlanders, they all socialised and knew one another. Moreover, as already discussed, in many cases they were all related to one another, at least remotely.

On June 24, 1930 they were married. I believe, but I am not sure, that the marriage took place at St. Luke's. It is certain that this was the parish church they attended. They lived in the home built for her on Palo Alto Street in the Cedar Hill area, not far from St. Luke's. At the time of their marriage, Thomas Graham was 80 and Clara Isabelle 78. She died less than four years later and he followed her the following year.



*Clara Isabelle [Windsor] and
Thomas Graham Morry, ca 1932*



It only remains to say that they were far from the only members of their immediate families to be buried at St. Luke's or at the Ross Bay cemetery. In fact, there are at least twenty relatives at St. Luke's (Morrys, Windsors, Bradshaws, and their relations by marriage) and another two dozen at Ross Bay, with a scattered few elsewhere on the southern end of Vancouver Island.

*Clara and Thomas's headstone in
St. Luke's Cemetery
Photo credit: Barb Prescott*

Source: St. Luke's Prescription, Fall 2017