

AHEAD OF THE FAMINE

A History of the Charles Little Family
of County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, and
Essex County, Ontario, Canada
1600-1905

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In memory of my grandmother,
Grace Elizabeth (Little, Quick) Ure (1888-1965),
who did her part to propagate
the Little and Stewart names in Essex County

Cover photograph
Ruins of Donacavey old church, Fintona.

Also by the Author:

BEHIND THE RESERVE:
The Quick Family of Colchester, Essex County, Ontario, Canada
1601-1820 (2002, 2015, 2016)

YEOMEN, TRADESMEN AND LABOURERS:
A Skinner Family of the Kent-Surrey Weald (2015)

NOTES ON THE SKINNERS OF REIGATE, 1332-1584 (2015)

CAMPBELLS FROM LOCHTAYSIDE
Immigrants to
Essex and Halton Counties, Ontario, and Quebec, Canada
1833, 1849

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Acknowledgments

Writing a history of an Irish immigrant family of 19th century Canada is beset with difficulties. Many Irish records were destroyed in a fire at the National Archives in Dublin in 1922. To partially compensate for this loss substitute sources are actively being sought by antiquarians, historians, and others for indexing and presentation to the genealogical public. Notable in this endeavour are the online publications of John Macaffee and John Grenham and the latter's book *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*. I wish to thank Sue Fader of the University of Windsor Archives for kindly allowing me access to the original registers of St John's Church of England, Sandwich. The assistance of archivist Desmond McCabe of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast (PRONI) was invaluable in pointing out to me the records that revealed the existence of Stewart Little. Thanks to Jane Oakley-Sweet for her tip to the source of the 1768 lease. Finally, thanks to Iola Whiteside, one of the earliest researchers to follow the family to Ireland, for her work locating the microfilm with the records of the family in the registers of the Church of Ireland, Fintona.

Notes to the Reader

This book is a history, a genealogy and a collection of transcripts. There is some speculation, as speculation is the glue that often holds a theory together. But speculation, when it is used, is clearly identified so as to enable it to be treated with circumspection. Statements of importance are provided with citations to enable the supporting document(s) to be found in the holding archive, examined and evaluated.

There are three chapters. The first is an aid to assist the reader in locating his or her place in the family tree. A family finder is offered to help the reader navigate the two sub-branches and track the many people with the same names. Chapter 2 deals with the history of the family in Scotland and Ireland, Chapter 3 with the history of the family in Canada up to about 1905.

Irish pioneers of 19th-century Canada found life in the new world different from the old in many ways. Topping everything was the sense of freedom and equality. For those born into a society controlled by hereditary landowners, the possibility of owning the land they worked was intoxicating. Clearing a place from a forest to build a house and grow food were existential issues for most. The administration of civil and criminal laws were in the hands of officials chosen by popular vote. No one religion was held in higher regard than others.

These last notes take the form of apologies. The writing of this history began as a continuous story. It was soon found that because of the existence of two families, the number of individuals was large. So many had the same name it was difficult to avoid confusion. The continuous narrative approach was therefore abandoned in favour of a series of profiles of those individuals whose stories are supported by historical documents. Profiling leads to a story for Charles Little (1771-1850) and others in Chapter 2 (Ireland) and Chapter 3 (Canada). Some attempt has been made to avoid repetition.

The second apology is for the 1905 closing date. For practical reasons all works of genealogy must be brought to an end at some point. The history up to 1905 should survive the test of time. As to the history since then members of the extended family who do not see themselves herein should at least be able to identify their grandparents.

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	<u>George II 1727-60</u>	
Birth of Stewart Little I in Cullenbrone townland, Errigal Keerogue	ca 1756	
	<u>George III 1760-1820</u>	
Birth of Charles and Stewart Little II in Cullenbrone townland, Errigal Keerogue	ca. 1771	
	1775-81	War of American Independence
	1791	Constitutional Act, formation of Upper Canada
	1796	Flax Grower's List of Ireland
Birth of Alexander and other Littles probably in Errigal Keerogue	1811-20	
Charles and Stewart III move from Errigal Keerogue to Donacavey parish	ca. 1826	
	<u>William IV 1830-37</u>	
Birth of Stewart III in Donacavey and burial in Errigal Keerogue	ca. 1834	
Lindsay and David, sons of David Little, sail for Philadelphia	1834	
	<u>Victoria 1837-1901</u>	
George and kin sail for Quebec	1837	Rebellion in Upper Canada
Marriage of George A. and Eliza Little in Donacavey		
George sees Amherstburg and Sandwich as a private in the militia	1838	
	1840	Act of Union forming Upper and Lower Canada, formation of Canada West
Baptism of Elizabeth, dau of Lindsay and Catherine in St. John's Church	1843	
	1845-1851	The Great Famine
George remits money to George A. in Ireland, George A. and siblings emigrate to Canada	1846	
George and Alexander petition for land patents	1850	Municipal Act divides Western District into Essex, Kent and Lambton Counties.
	1853	Death of Thomas Talbot
	1854	Great Western Railway established. First telegraph message received in Windsor
Death of Archibald in Sandwich	1856	
	1858	Decimal coinage introduced in Canada. Sandwich is incorporated as a village
Death of George A. in Sandwich East	1861	Creation of Sandwich East township
	1861-65	American Civil War
	1867	Confederation of Canada, formation of the Province of Ontario
Death of Lindsay in Maidstone	1887	
Death of Sarah Jane (Fair, Little) Fox	1893	
Death of Robert Little in Windsor	1900	
	<u>Edward VII 1901-1910</u>	
Death of George Little	1901	
Death of Sarah (Hurst) Little widow of Robert Little	1901	
Charles Little Sr. submits history to CBRE	1905	Publication of the CBRE
Death of Charles Little Sr.	1905	

Timeline for the Family

Abbreviations Used

AO	Archives of Ontario, Toronto
CBRE	Commemorative Biographical Record of Essex County
C.of.I	Church of Ireland (Episcopal)
NAI	National Archives of Ireland, Dublin
OGS	Ontario Genealogical Society
OLRI	Ontario Land Records Index
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast
PANB	Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
RG	Record Group
SJAC	St. John's Anglican Church (Sandwich)
UCLP	Upper Canada Land Petition

Introduction

Two families of farmers with the very English surname of “Little” left their homes in Ireland in the 1830s and 1840s to make new lives for themselves in Canada. The first to come was Charles Little and his family to take up land in present-day Maidstone and Sandwich South townships in Essex County, Ontario.¹ The second was headed by his son-in-law George A. Little.²

In 1905 Charles’ grandson, Charles, wrote a history of his branch of the family for the “Commemorative Biographical Record of Essex County”.³ Charles’ story is corrected and expanded here with details of the family’s origins in Scotland and Ireland, their arrival at Quebec and their encouragement of the second family to follow. Both families, and especially the second, missed the worst of the great Irish famine of 1845-49.

The family for the most part were followers of the Methodist faith. Irish Methodists had mostly, though not entirely, cut their ties with the Episcopal Church of Ireland, the Irish equivalent of the Church of England. The family, in the early years in Canada, continued to maintain some association with St. John’s Church of England in Sandwich, now a part of the city of Windsor. This was partly out of inclination and partly of necessity: its cemetery was the only place available at the time for Protestant burials on the Canadian side of the Detroit River. Charles’ son, Lindsay, had a child baptized at St. John’s in February 1843. Charles’ daughter was buried there in 1845 followed by his wife in 1852.

The families were of an ancient line of tenant-farmers whose ancestors came originally from Scotland. In the early 17th century during the period of the Plantation, the families moved to Ireland for a better life, and from there moved for similar reasons to Canada. They no doubt found the winters in Canada cold and dry making acclimatization difficult. However, the soil was rich for the growing of their staple foodstuff, the potato. Charles’ son George, the most active member of the group, sent word to George A. in Ireland of the opportunities to be had in Canada, going so far as to send him a sum of money in 1846 via the Canada Company to “bring a family to Canada”. George A. with wife and siblings arrived in Sandwich in the latter part of that year. We can see in mind’s eye the families celebrating their reunion and the Christmas of 1846 Irish-fashion in George’s log cabin in Sandwich South.⁴

Two sets of parents are identified here: Charles and Jane and Stewart and Ann. The latter lived and died in Ireland. Their names are known with the greatest good fortune from the remembrance of their daughter, Rebecca, at the registration ceremony at her wedding in Sandwich in 1860. This underscores the luck that can befall the genealogist. Had Rebecca not replied to that question (and the record found) the families might not have been traceable and this book not written.

It would seem that, with the exception of the writer of the 1905 article, no member of either family was inclined to celebrate their coming to Canada in a story for general consumption. There was, evidently, no time for such diversions after a day’s work was done felling trees, cultivating land and tending livestock. This period, when a whole generation survived on the labour of their own hands, is largely forgotten by the residents of “the Sun Parlour of Canada” today. It is fitting that the pioneer farmers among them left many descendants. They can be found today across Canada and the United States. This book identifies their birthplaces in Ireland and enables those interested to trace them to the land that gave them nurture.

1 To avoid confusion the township in which the homestead is located is referred to by its modern name, Sandwich South, unless its name at the time is important to the story. Townships were renamed more than once over the years.

2 Excluded from this study is the loyalist family of Littles who came to Amherstburg from Ireland prior to the War of 1812 and who populated the north shore of Lake Erie. Much work on this family was done by L. Lytle in his book *Three Lytle Brothers from Maghera, North Ireland, with Notes and Legal Records Added by Leonard Lytle and The Descendants of John Little, Loyalist of Detroit, 1747-1817* (Private Publication, Detroit, 1962). Archives of Ontario, MS105.

3 *Commemorative Biographical Record of the County of Essex Ontario* (J. H. Beers & Co., Toronto, 1905). This book is referred to herein as CBRE.

4 It may be useful to the reader to point out in advance the caution on page 7 about avoiding confusion between the two Georges: George and George A. Little.

**Early Families of Essex County
Connected to the Little Family by Marriage**
(to the third generation):

Ake
Bain
Banwell
Dixon
Doan
Ellis
Fair
Farough
Hodges
Hurst
Langshaw
Morris
Neal
Robinson
Smith
Ure (2)