

## **A short history of the Keefe/Keith family on Kennebecasis Island**

James Keefe was born c1750. It's not known if he was born in North America, in what were then the American Colonies, or in Britain. However, he served in the British Army as a sergeant in the Queen's Rangers during the American Revolution. In May 1783, Keefe and his family were among the thousands of Loyalists who arrived in Saint John on board the "spring fleet" which had sailed from New York. An accounting, for administrative purposes, of the newly arrived Loyalists, described the Keefe family as consisting of one adult male, one adult female, one child over 10 years of age and one child under 10 years of age. The Keefe's had a third son, Thomas, who was born in Saint John c1785.

James Keefe received a grant of land in the South End of Saint John (known then as Parrrtown) but there is no record of him actually settling there. Rather, Keefe seems to have been drawn to Kennebecasis Island soon after his arrival in New Brunswick. In 1786, the Royal Gazette published a notice about a 17-year-old Keefe boy who died in a March storm on the Milkish Creek side of Kennebecasis Island. This may have been James' oldest son. In 1789, Keefe purchased 50 acres of land on the Island from Michael Butler who was granted lot 5 in 1785. The Keefe family seems to have been living on the Island by at least 1795 since in a petition for more land (lots 7, 8 and 9) dated September 25, 1807, Keefe stated that he had been living on the Island for 12 years, that he owned lot 5, that his was the only family living on the Island, that he had cleared some of the land and that he had planted more than an acre of turnips on land owned by Jeremiah Mabee (lot 9), and that he needed more land.

At that time, if a grantee did not develop their land in some way (live on it, rent it, clear it and grow crops, harvest the forest, etc.), someone else could petition the Crown for the land. This is what Keefe was doing with respect to lots 7, 8 and 9 which had been granted to others in 1785 (see above). Although there are no records in the land grant files to indicate that James Keefe's petition was looked on favourably, it seems that he was successful in acquiring ownership of lots 7 and 8 since the Keefe family began to sell these lots in the 1830s. Keefe was not successful in obtaining ownership of lot 9. This lot was sold by grantee, Jeremiah Mabee, to Jeremiah Drake in 1814. In 1829, Drake sold the lot to Thomas Johnston and the Johnston family owned this property well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

James Keefe's wife's name is not known nor are those of his two oldest sons. There is also no record of what happened to these members of the Keefe family other than a report that a 17-year-old Keefe boy (who may have been James' son) died on Kennebecasis Island in 1786. There is also no record of when James died although it was later than June 1833. Much more is known about James' youngest son, Thomas.

Thomas Keefe was born in Saint John c1785 and c1811, married Jane Hayter (born c1786). Thomas and Jane lived most of their lives on Kennebecasis Island and died there in the 1870s. They had at least 7 children including James (b. c1813), John Thomas (b. 1815), William Lloyd (b. 1817), Michael (b. c1820) and Joseph (b. c1822). Only John and William stayed on the Island

where they married, raised families, and farmed the land that belonged to their grandfather, James, and their father, Thomas. The other Keefe brothers moved to Maine in the 1830s and 1840s and never returned to live in New Brunswick.

John Thomas Keefe (b. May 12, 1815) married Letitia Kerr (b. c1826 in Cork Co., Ireland) on October 5, 1846 in Hampton, NB. Letitia had arrived in New Brunswick from Ireland in June 1839. John and Letitia lived on lot 8 on the Island where they farmed the land and raised 10 children (born between 1847 and 1869). John had purchased 40 acres of lot 8 from his father in 1840. John and Letitia's daughter, Adelaide (b. December 15, 1861; d. April 26, 1940), was married to James Morrow (see Morrow family history). Adelaide lived on the Island until the death of her husband in August 1930. Of John and Letitia's other children, only their youngest son, Albert (b. May 18, 1869), had not left the Island when the census was taken in 1891. John died of an apparent heart attack on July 21, 1898 while rowing to Bayswater with Albert to attend church. Letitia passed away at a relatively young age on April 26, 1872.

William Lloyd Keefe (b. May 3, 1817) married Elizabeth Ann Saunders (b. June 6, 1819) on May 13, 1839. William and Elizabeth lived on 10 acres of land on the southeast side of lot 8 where it borders lot 11. They had 12 children, born between 1840 and 1862. Three of their children (Joseph, b. December 25, 1848; James M., b. July 5, 1852; Caroline, b. April 19, 1860) later raised their own families on the Island. The other children either died young or married and left the Island. William died on May 21, 1901 while Elizabeth died on May 18, 1904. Both William and Elizabeth are buried in the Keefe/Keith family cemetery on the Island.

Joseph Keefe (b. December 25, 1848) was William and Elizabeth's fifth child and second son. Joseph was married to Martha Gamble (b. c1851) and they had four children, all of whom were born on the Island between 1869 and 1878. Joseph owned 40 acres of land on lot 11 that bordered on lots 7 and 8. This was land that William Keefe had purchased from William McColgan in March 1865. Joseph bought the land from his father in October 1871, a few years after his marriage to Martha Gamble. By 1881 when the Census was taken, Joseph and his family were no longer living on the Island.

James M. Keefe (b. July 5, 1852) was William and Elizabeth's seventh child and third son. James married Mary Estelle Beatty (b. January 16, 1862 in Saint John) on January 21, 1883. Mary Beatty was James' second wife as he is listed in the 1881 Census as a widower. There is no record of who James' first wife was, or when he married. Family lore says that Mary did not like the spelling of "Keefe" and therefore in the mid 1880s, "Keefe" was changed to "Keith". James and Mary raised four children on their Island farm - Elizabeth, b. November 14, 1883; Mabel, b. July 1, 1886; Louis, b. October 1, 1889; Leonard, b. November 4, 1894. James bought the Keith farm from his father in 1891. A few years later, in 1899, he purchased his brother Joseph's land. He also owned a small parcel of land on the north side of Keith's cove which he purchased from George Johnston in 1892. It was after James bought land on the cove, that the cove became known as "Keith's Cove". James died on September 16, 1912 while Mary died on February 10, 1943. Both James and Mary are buried in the Keefe/Keith family cemetery.

Caroline Keefe (b. April 19, 1860) was the eleventh child and sixth daughter of William and Elizabeth. Caroline was married to William Morrow and lived on the western end of Kennebecasis Island.

When the 1901 Census was taken, other than Caroline and Adelaide Keefe who were married to the Morrow brothers, the only Keefes/Keiths still living on the Island were William and Elizabeth, and their son James and his family.

After James' death in 1912, the Keith farm was worked by his wife Mary and their two sons. On February 23, 1922, Leonard married Edith Mae Forbes (b. c1902). Leonard then bought out his mother and brother and took over ownership of the Keith farm. Leonard and Edith had two children - James, b. November 27, 1924 and Audrey, b. July 30, 1927.

Leonard and his family were the last of the Keiths to live year-round on Kennebecasis Island. They moved to Saint John in 1944 after the death of James' mother the previous year. Leonard and Edith died in Saint John on January 13, 1970 and July 20, 1970, respectively.



**Note:** The Keith family farm house (pic taken 2013) - located at the corner of Kennebecasis Island Rd and Old Ferry Rd.