

CHRISTIAN RISELAY UE
and the Thompson family from Northern England
by Marion Thompson, UE

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In the north of England, in the former County of Westmorland, now Cumbria, is Appleby; the County Town used to send to London, England a representative of their County on a regular basis. Perhaps it is even yet the custom. There is a very old castle, still standing from the year 1092, when King William II, son of William the Conqueror, built the original castle. A "keep" was built onto it, later, around 1170. I toured it with my nephew, Bob Thompson, in August of 1981. We looked over the fields from the tower to view the ancestral farm of 290 acres, lying to the south, and named by one of our Thompson family, "Southfield".

In my searching in England's old record libraries which contained last Wills and Testaments, I found a Jonathan Thompson, born 6 April, 1731, of Alston, not far from Appleby-in-Westmorland, who married an Agnes Pattinson and lived on the Southfield farm, in 1771, and raised a family of about six children, of which my great-great-grandfather, Isaac, was the youngest. Isaac, born 12 December 1771, grew up on Southfield farm. In 1801, on 15 May, at St. Michael's Church in Appleby, Isaac was married to Frances Harrison, the oldest child of George Harrison, whose ancestors came from Whitfield Brow, Eden Grove. George Harrison won fame in Appleby, having won the office of Mayor of the town on six different occasions, between the years 1783 and 1820. In 1818/19 he also served as Deputy-Mayor. In his Last Will and Testament he left one hundred pounds to his son-in-law, Isaac Thompson, as well as one hundred pounds each to seven of Isaac's children, of whom my great-grandfather, Jonathan Thompson was one.

Isaac Thompson and wife Frances, nee Harrison, had eleven in all. Three of the eleven died in infancy. Their eldest child, George Wharton de Hilton Thompson was educated at Oxford University as well as at Cambridge. He became the Master of the Grammar School at Wisbech in the County of Norfolk for a period of nearly half a century, a well-respected and admired teacher. This oldest son, George and his wife, Marianne de Witt, paid tribute to George's father and mother, the latter having died 1 May, 1816, in her forty-fourth year of age. In St. Michael's Churchyard in Appleby George paid to have erected an obelisk, two sides of which tell a story, engraved very legibly, which I have photographed on my several trips to Appleby between the years 1981 and 1990. Not only does it tell of the demise of Frances, but of the children who died in infancy, and of Margaret, a daughter aged eighteen, who died of a cold caught in London. It also tells of Isaac leaving for Canada along with some servants and fellow parishioners to settle in Bertie Township [Welland County] where Isaac had bought a farm that he named "Southfield". The children who sailed to Canada with their father Isaac in 1829 or 1830, by steamship to Montreal, and thence sailed across Lake Ontario to Port Dalhousie, were Agnes, aged 25, Isaac Jr, aged 24, Jonathan, aged 20, Ann, aged 17 and Harrison, aged 16. From Port Dalhousie they subsequently settled in Bertie Township which grew to the present town of Fort Erie. Isaac purchased one hundred acres of land which became his "Southfield" farm in Canada.

After three years of life in Bertie, Jonathan married a United Empire Loyalist lady, Charlotte Ann Riselay, youngest child of Christian Riselay by whom I obtained my membership in the UELAC. Charlotte Ann, as a UEL, petitioned for two hundred acres of land in Bertie Township in January 1833, from Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Colborne, and on March 13, 1833, age 25, was married to my British great-grandfather, Jonathan. In 1835, the couple moved to a farm in Malahide Township, in Elgin County. Jonathan and Charlotte bought a farm situated north of the present-day town of Aylmer. But back in 1835 only the nucleus of a new village had been formed. In 1835 it was known by two different names: Hodgkinson's Corners, and Troy. A John Hodgkinson owned a general store on the north-east corner of the main intersection of the hamlet, where the old Talbot Road now Highway #3, and Gravel Road north, later Highway #73, crossed. Some of Aylmer's early pioneers who had come from Troy in New York State wished to establish the name Troy, so, at a meeting in 1835 the name Aylmer was chosen in honour of the Governor of Canada, Baron Matthew Whitworth-Aylmer. The name became official in 1837 when the government opened a Post Office in Hodgkinson's general store.

Jonathan and Charlotte were the parents of ten children, the seventh oldest of which was my grandfather. He was named William Edmund Thompson and his father, in his Last Will and Testament, bequeathed all of his Real and Personal Estate to my grandfather. Thus, the fifty-acre farm about a mile north of Aylmer, once owned by Jonathan, became the home of W.E.'s one and only child, Charles Boyd Thompson, my father, born March 3, 1894. Boyd Thompson married Marjorie Louise Dunlop on September 1, 1919. She was the daughter of a Baptist Church minister who had retired from his ministry in 1912, having had charge of the Springfield church north of Aylmer, the Dunboyne Church south of Aylmer, and one on Highway #3 at the eastern outskirts of Aylmer. His method of transportation to his Sunday services was by horse and buggy, although his home next to his church was in Springfield where his younger children attended elementary school.

My mother and father raised four children on the 50-acre farm north of Aylmer on #73 Highway, then a gravel road. Mother drove a horse and buggy to the Aylmer Public School where we received our elementary education. In the winter-time we had rides to Aylmer Public School in a "cutter", and once in town other youngsters might hitch rides on the sides of our vehicle as we sailed over the snow packed on the roads.

Growing up on a farm can be a very rewarding kind of life. Farmers in those years of the depression had few of the modern appliances of to-day, but we enjoyed a "rich" life nevertheless.