

STORIES OF OUR PAST

Researching our family history has been a long and arduous task. The family name has been changed and altered due to circumstance and interpretation. It is taken many family members research to come up with what now comprises this, our story.

THE YURCZYSZYN FAMILY

Our family name has been ^{spelled} spelled many ways depending on what document it is contained in. On our grandparents' ships manifest it is spelled Jurczyszyn but on their naturalization record in Canada the name is spelled Yurczyszyn. According to Nancy Yurchesyn's research, the reason for the spelling change is Jurczyszyn is the Polish translation, cz=ch, sz=sh sound j=y. Yurchyshyn is the direct Ukrainian translation. This is the spelling on Uncle Alex's grave. According to my mother, their name was changed to Yurchesyn to make it easier for the English to pronounce and spell. My mom stated that they were made fun of because of all the z's and y's in their name. I do know that our grandfather's brother Paul changed his name to Yurchyk when he moved to the United States.

Adding to the confusion and difficulty with research is that their first names are also ^{spelled} spelled differently depending on what document you are viewing. Joseph is spelt Josef/ Josefus while Katarine is spelt Katarine. The name of the places have also changed depending on who occupied them: Lemberg, Lvov, Lviv. From here on, I will refer to them as Joseph Yurczyszyn and Katarine unless I am quoting an official document.

And thus begins our story on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Joseph and Katarine Yurczyszyn landed in Halifax, Canada on March 26, 1914 according to the ship's manifest. Their ship's name was called the Barbarossa. Their last name was spelled Jurczyszyn. Joseph was listed as being age 34 while Katarine was 28. I have to interject here to say that my mom, Ruby (Eva) Yurchesyn told me that her parents left the port of Danzig and were planning on going out to the Western Provinces to settle.

At that time Western Canada was just being settled. Government minister Clifford Sifton offered 160 acres of land free to anyone who would come and inhabit the area. He preferred Americans and people from European descent. He wanted hardy stock who could work in the fields and have lots of children.

In the Canadian Census of 1911 there are two people listed with the same last name who settled on the McKenzie in Saskatchewan. (SE6TP28 R10W2) entry no. 155. Their first names were Andrew, age 52, (born 1855) and Mary, age 59, (born 1848) respectively. They immigrated in 1907. They were listed as farmers who came to Canada from Galicia. They were Greek Catholic. Both of them could read and write. (I wonder if they were relatives of our grandfather Joseph. It could be an uncle or aunt as their ages would fit.)* More information about this to follow later on.

Not realizing how large Canada was, our grandparents agreed to hand deliver a letter to Mr. Fedora in Whitney Pier, Cape Breton before heading out west. Once they were in Sydney they were convinced by others that it was better to stay where they were. ^{There} There were lots of jobs and work was plentiful. Joseph took a job at the Wire Mill of the Steel Plant to earn some money. They lived in a rooming house in the Pier (I believe that if memory serves me correctly it was at Martin Zack's house). Shortly after arriving, Katarine came down with Typhoid Fever caused by contaminated water or food. She almost died.

Our grandfather, Joseph Yurczyszyn, was indeed an entrepreneur. When he had earned enough money at the Steel Plant, he decided to build a house which could accommodate two to four families. He rented out the extra space. He then bought a two family house which he renovated. He continued to do this until in 1923 he was commissioned by the Jewish community to build the Turkish Bath. The Turkish Bath was located

on Mount Pleasant Street in Whitney Pier. Joseph Yurczyszyn had seen Turkish Baths on his many trips to Germany and had brought the idea with him when they came to Canada. In the book "From the Pier Dear! Images of a Multicultural Community" published by the Whitney Pier Historical Society in 1993 on page 35 there is a picture of his "Turkish Bath" as well as an article entitled "Life after Work: the social ties" from which I quote the following:

A commercialized social gathering place was also an essential service to much of the community. It was the "Turkish" Baths, located on Mount Pleasant Street. Operated by an Ukrainian entrepreneur, it was a favorite relaxation of Jewish businessmen, but it was also a chance for the people of Whitney Pier, especially those without indoor plumbing, to get a weekly bath for a nickel.

My mom, Ruby Hasiuk, had told me that her father's financial downfall was caused by the building of the Turkish Baths. At first the "Turkish Baths" began as a small facility and as its popularity grew, my grandfather mortgaged his properties from the Bank to borrow money to make it larger and larger and finally put a second floor on the building. The beginning of his downfall financially in 1929 started with the slowing down of the economy. Unfortunately the Depression came. People couldn't pay their rent and therefore he could not pay the bank the payment he owed. All of his properties were taken from him.

In the early 1930 after losing everything, Joseph rented a small house and farm at MacLeod's Corner in Whitney Pier. There he began once again.

My mother, Ruby, walked through a blizzard from Whitney Pier to the City Hospital to apply for a job as a maid and cook's helper. The person who greeted her offered her the job immediately because she showed such determination in getting there in a snowstorm. Her wages as a maid went toward supporting the family and helping to pay the rent at MacLeod's Corner. (Source: Uncle Joe on tape) Her sister, Anna, also got a job at the City Hospital (according to Uncle Joe, Annie kept her wages).

One of my grandfather's enterprises was to bring Mustang horses from Western Canada. He would break them and then sell them for a profit. He hired men to look after the horses and to break them. One of my favorite stories is that told to me by my mom about her mother. Apparently one day the men were all trying to break a mustang but everyone was finding it impossible. It was a very spirited animal. My grandmother, Katarine, ~~drove~~ ^{rode} up on her horse and seeing the goings-on, immediately went up to the mustang, mounted it and stayed on the horse until she broke it. She was well respected for ~~his~~ ^{her} horsemanship.

Joseph and Katarine are listed in the Report of the Naturalization Branch of Canada on page 707 (Ref. 86881-45). Joseph listed his country as Poland and was naturalized on October 16, 1928. He listed his occupation as steelworker. The number listed in the last column is 57445 A. His wife, Katarine, (the way her name is spelt on that document) was also naturalized on the same date. Their home is listed as Sydney, N.S.

Joseph Yurczyszyn, (born Feb. 22, 1880, died January 16, 1945) was described as a kind man of Ukrainian descent. His sixty-five years of life spanned two continents (North America and Eastern Europe). He was intelligent, industrious and entrepreneurial. I was told by my mother that he was born in Lvov, Ukraine.

My favorite picture of my grandfather is of an older man with thick, white hair, and a moustache smiling and having a drink with my dad sitting in a farm field. I was told by my first cousin, Annie (Furdas) in Oct. 2005 that our grandfather, Joseph, was a very kind gentleman, one that made you feel very special. She remembered how her mother, Mary Furdas, kissed his hand out of respect each time that she saw her father. This was an "old world" custom I believe.

Joseph was known throughout Whitney Pier as a great storyteller. People gathered at his house each night to listen to his tales and fables. He held his audience in suspense as he stopped to roll a cigarette and light up his smoke. He knew the true art of telling a story. Each story he told had a moral. His favorite story according to my mom was "Smart Marrusha (Marie)".

Religion played a major role in the lives of Joseph and Katarine. He was a deeply religious man. My mother, Ruby, related to me how each Sunday he would read the Bible to her sister, Anna, and her while he sat them on his knee. His strong religious beliefs was perhaps one of his greatest legacies to his family. His children and their children continue his tradition of helping to support the Ukrainian church.

When the original Holy Ghost "Ruthenian" Greek Catholic Church burned down in 1933, he was one of the main parishioners who helped to rebuild the present church within one year. He did this by hauling wood and offering his labor. Joseph was considered to be a skilled carpenter having built many structures in Whitney Pier and in the Old Country.

I remember my mom telling me that when they looked at 220 George Street, she and my dad thought that it was too large for their purposes. The building was 50 feet wide by 120 feet long and three storeys. My grandfather said that was no problem; he would take off a storey for them and make it smaller. I do know that the beams in the basement that supported the first floor were put there by my grandfather, Joseph.

Recently I became aware of something that I did not know about my grandfather. I heard it from several family sources so I know it to be true. My grandfather bootlegged to earn money. To provide some background for this activity, I again quote from the book "From the Pier Dear!" page 76 an article entitled "The corner bootleggers".

There were no taverns in Ward VI. I asked the man who was to become mayor of Sydney one time why this was, and he said that Ward VI had voted no to drinking places several times. You would think that nobody in Ward VI drank. Well, it has been a standing joke for years. Everybody in Ward VI drank, they went to Ward V to do it. There were two or three taverns, and maybe two dozen bootlegger joints where you could get a drink at any hour of day or night.

The bootleggers were good people. Bootlegging was the same kind of enterprise as running a corner store to augment the wages of the man of the house. If you had six or seven kids to support, and earned only forty-five or sixty cents an hour at the plant, that wasn't very much money. There were school expenses and there was no medicare in those days.

I knew, like every other kid, that the first house on the corner was the place where the men came to buy liquor. The man who lived in the corner house, most often could be found two doors away at another bootlegger's house. My impression was that everybody wanted to go somewhere else to drink.

There were many fine families in Whitney Pier who sold a little drop here and there, not to harm anybody. When the laws closed in, most of them stopped, and turned to other means. They might take in boarders or have a bigger vegetable garden to take in the extra money.

After quoting this article I can now state that Joseph would buy liquor and sell it. This was the time of Prohibition in the States. Someone gave the Police a tip that my grandfather was selling liquor and they went to the farm. Only Mike was home when the RCMP arrived. The RCMP searched the place and found the liquor. My grandfather was jailed for two months and during that time Mike ran the farm. My cousin, Annie told me that she and her mother, Mary, visited our grandfather in jail.

The family had to move three times after that before moving to South Bar. In 1941 my family built the barn which served the farm. In 1942 they built the farm house.

My grandfather died of a stroke. He fell ¹down stairs and punctured his lungs while having the stroke. He would not go to the hospital but died at home. My sister, Catherine, remembered that at his wake at the farm in South Bar, my mother's hand shook as they entered the room where the body was. This, I attribute, to the fact that my mother confessed to me her fear of the dead until later in life.

LIFE IN THE UKRAINE:

(This information was obtained from conversations with my aunt Mary (Furdas) as well as from the grandchild of Paul Yurczyszyn (John's son).

John Yurczyszyn is our first identified relative. His wife's name was Mary. I would guess that their birthdates would be 1860-65 judging that their children were born around 1880 and later.

John and Mary had four sons: Michael, Joseph (our grandfather born on Feb. 22, 1880); Paul (born in 1881) and Harry. It is interesting how their lives impacted ours both through their religious beliefs and their devotion to family.

Michael was a singer of great renown in his village. His life and the tragedy that surrounded it influenced the family for years to come. That will be discussed later. *Joseph* (our grandfather) had many talents as will be evidenced in our family history. He died on Jan. 16th, 1945. *Paul* moved to the U.S.A. and lived in Cleveland, Ohio until he died on Dec. 29th, 1945. *Harry* is a mystery; nothing is known about his life. I wonder if he died young.

Joseph married Katarine Koziel in his early twenties while living in the Ukraine. They had three children while living there: Stan, Mary, and Alexander. It was my Aunt Mary who mentioned Stan to me. Mary told me that Stan died as a very young child and that he had asked for a crucifix at the time of his death. My uncle Mike reported that Stan was my grandparent's first child. (I would imagine that Stan is buried in the Old Country).

As I mentioned before they arrived in Canada On March 26, 1914. They had left their two children, Mary and Alexander, in their grandmother's care. It was their intention I am told to send for their children once they had gotten settled in Canada. Unfortunately war broke out in September 1914.

On June 28, 1914, a Serbian student, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated the heir to the Habsburg throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife in the streets of the provincial capital of Bosnia, Sarajevo. Determined to end the Serbian agitations that unsettled their south Slav subjects, and convinced that the Serbian government had had foreknowledge of Princip's plot, the Austrian government consulted the Germans and received the famous "blank check": a promise that Germany would support any Austrian action against the Serbs. On July 23, Austria sent Serbia a 48-hour ultimatum, designed to be unacceptable. The Serbs accepted most of its terms, but declined to let Austrian civil or military officials participate in the investigation of Princip's plot. To the world it seemed as though Austria was bullying the Serbs; probably, however, Serbia already had a promise of help from Russia if war should come. Serbian rejection of part of the ultimatum brought an Austrian declaration of war on July 28, 1914. (taken from the book "Civillization in the West" written by Brinton, Christopher, and Wolfe, published by Prentice Hall).

Because of the World War in Europe breaking out, it was some years before Joseph and Katarine could arrange to have their children brought to Canada. The elderly grandmother died and the two children went to live with two other sets of relatives before finally coming to Canada. (My mother, Ruby, told me that it was a very strange feeling to be introduced to your teenage sister for the first time when you were eight years old).

Before coming to Canada, Joseph made a trip to Germany each year to work. He brought back many new innovative ideas to his village of Zavydovychi in the Province of Gurdick. They were incorporated into village life. He seemed to be able to figure out how things worked and he could duplicate them.