

FOSTER, WALTER MILLIGAN

My father, Walter Milligan Foster, was born on November 11, 1871, in Bradford, Yorkshire, England. His parents had Woollen Mills in Bradford.

My father was married in England and had four children. He and two brothers came out to Mowbray in Manitoba in 1904. The three boys got some money from the Foster Estate and came to Canada. My father did a little mixed farming as he was busy building houses and barns and working. He had a trade as an organ maker and cabinet maker and did a lot of carpentry. Everyone had to go out to work if you had a homestead. They left and went to Morden for a time and then arrived in Victoria in 1907.

Father came to friends at the Willows and stayed with the Peters' who owned property at Gordon Head and were in the tomato business. The whole family moved there until they built their own house.

Their original house (Rattenbury subdivided this property - it was then Thistle Street but now it is Dalhousie) was built by him and we lived in the house for two or three years. We went to a little school called "Foul Bay School" which was a way, way, south on Foul Bay Road on the east side of Foul Bay Road, south of Oak Bay Avenue, and all the well known people that were permanent in Oak Bay at that time, went there: Bowker, Lampson, Diespecker and Miss Cathcard. Everyone went there. It was a two-roomed school with one teacher. The next school was where the Municipal Hall was built. It was there for a long while. We went there also. We lived opposite the Tod house in Oak Bay. LaPraque had it at that time and the Peters' place was right opposite. He was building his own house at that time. It seemed every time we moved they changed the name of the street - Thistle became Dalhousie. Father built a house at Hulton and Leighton (11637 Hulton) and Hulton became Redfern: Wellington Avenue became Hastings; Chandler became Roy Road.

We moved out to Saanich - Algonan Pease was going to raise turkeys at Portage Inlet and when we moved, there were all the incubators and things. A tin house had been built by Pease for grain and feed. It was made of tin to keep the rats out. My father built quite a few houses - two houses on Hulton Street and then we went to Strawberry Vale. The pulput and font

at St. Columbus Church were built by my father. The first minister, Percy James, although not ordained, really built the church up. I used to drive the minister back and forth. He lived on Wilkinson, north of Layritz property.

Our roots forever after that were in Saanich. My father built two houses on the corner of Wilkinson and Burnside roads, behind the Burnside Hotel (they are still there - 1981 - on the west side of Wilkinson Road and, in fact, two Saanich carpenters, Fife and Matheson, lived there. After that my father had a very interesting job.

Very few people know of the depression of 1913 and my father lost nearly everything he had in property. He sold the last lot to Henry Seaton Carr, a friend of the family in England, for \$50. This was a waterfront lot on Foul Bay. We used to picnic out there while they were clearing the lot. (Henry Seaton Carr went down on the Empress of Ireland in the St. Lawrence River - there was an article about this in one of the Readers Digests). Henry Carr was not knighted when we lived with us. He became St. Henry Seaton Carr later when he went back to England.

My father went out in those very hard depression times and did logging on the 17 Mile Post on the Malahat and he worked there until he got a job on the waterfront. It was when the breakwater was started. My father was on the diving crew. He was on the pumps. My father was deaf and I think because of his deafness, he handled the lines better for the divers. He worked there until the finish of the breakwater. After that he worked for Mr. Whittington of Lemon & Gonnason; also Dalziel Brothers which was a mill in the same area as Lemon Gonnason.

Somewhere in Saanich there is a wonderful Roll of Honour. My brother salvaged it when the Municipal Hall was moved. It was from the First World War.

Then my father went to Saanich Municipality and he was there until he retired. He really worked for the School Board which was through Saanich Municipality at that time, and he did everything. He delivered all the stationery to every school and whenever there was any maintenance he did it

If anything went wrong, plumbing etc., he went. The school farthest out for him was Prospect Lake.

My brother Maurice was in the PCMR. He and my brother Phil were in the First World War. We were all in the service. Three in the First World War and four in the Second World War.

When we lived on Portage Inlet there was nothing from Burnside south of Portage Inlet. In 1913 they put in the CNR railway.

I used to work at the Miller farm and one of the daughters married A.E. Longland. I used to milk cows and do haying. Arthur Longland took over the farm later.

Our family consisted of:

Kenneth

Phillip - who worked for Bill Bryant at Saanich Garage

Alan (myself)

Margery - never married - she lives in Victoria

Gertrude - first one born in Manitoba

Eric

Maurice - he worked for Saanich for many years

Lionel - he lives in Colwood

Ruthie - died when she was ten from thyroid

My father worked for the School Board in Saanich Municipality. The School Board was under the jurisdiction of the Council at that time, so my father had two bosses really. He never got a pension though. He retired before they came into being, so he worked as a cabinet maker in Moore Whittington when he was 70 years old. My wife and I came over here in 1944 and he was in hospital and he worked right up until six months before going into the hospital.

We had two acres of land with the house on Hastings Street - just half a block up from Burnside. We had a house where the family lived and up the hill was my father's workshop. It was a little house and when Lionel came back from the war he moved into it and lived there. When Hitler

first came to power, my father wrote him a long letter commending him for doing away with Unions (my father hated Unions), and he got an answer from Hitler regarding his letter. This was in about 1932. He also wrote to Mussolini, but Mussolini did not write back personally, an aide wrote the letter. This stuff was kept in the old woodshed between the little house and the big house. When my brother Phil was going through everything later, he didn't have time to read through everything and those letters were never kept. My father wrote to many people about Unions - to editors and others interested in the Union movement.

I can never remember us having any real holidays. We used to go down to Cordova Bay Beach or Brentwood Beach and have family picnics and my father enjoyed going to the beach. He never went off the Island after he came here. My mother, of course, travelled, but he never did. My father loved to drive horses and go to look at houses and often we would see a house on a drive and the next thing we would find ourselves living in it. During the First World War they lived in Garden City. My father never owned a car until he worked for Saanich. None of the neighbours had cars either.

Miss Oldfield and my mother were very interested in starting a Health Centre and finally got the Saanich Health Centre started on Carey Road. She was also in at the start of the Women's Institute on the corner of Roy Road and Wilkinson, and was always active in the Church.

The last of the Fosters from overseas came over here in 1956 to see us and also distribute the remains of the Estate.

When I was quite young, I was a caddie at Oak Bay Golf Course. This was before the First World War. It was quite an event when there was a tournament at Colwood and someone asked you to caddie for them. The Victoria Club members took their caddies from their home club and this often meant staying overnight. We went out in cars and this also was special as there weren't many cars around then.

I was active in the Boy Scouts in Seattle. It was a professional association. I started out in the "North Central" district in Wenatchee. I was working for the American Legion really. I was on the Executive. The Legion sent me to Columbia University to take the appropriate courses.

I enjoyed the work and used to spend all the summers in the camps.

My father didn't think this was much of a job (he really didn't understand my position with the Scouts) and so to appease him, on one of my trips home, I stopped at the old Fairmont Barracks on Heather Street and made out an application to join the R.C.M.P. There were less than 3,000 men in the R.C.M.P. in those days (there are about 22,000 now). I never heard much for about a year and then in 1932 they took over a lot of the Provinces - except B.C., Ontario and Quebec. I almost missed the opportunity at that because I spent three days at the border trying to get back into Canada. Because I knew who to get in touch with, they finally let me through.

I wrote an article about the R.C.M.P. called "The Finest Job in the Force" and the R.C.M.P. published it. It was about my time up north. The Alberta Government wanted two men assigned to big game in the Athabaska area because the "Packers" used to go in with dogs and horses and kill the big game for meat for the construction crews. Also poachers would go in and kill the elk and moose for trophies - some just to get the teeth for the members of the Elk Lodge. I believe that they have stopped that now, probably use plastic. The north was a paradise in those days, up until the start of the Second World War. I was in the north for six years.

From an interview with Mr. Alan Foster,
538 Lands End Road on Sunday, August 23,
1981 by Jo-Anne Morrison.