

From The Downhomer

My King, Pelley and Tilley Families by Ray Leaman

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The first King in Trinity Bay is believed to be William who is found in the 1675 census for Trinity. Between 1750 and 1800 there were no Kings found in the records of the Church of England for Trinity, so it is possible to conclude that the Kings may have raised their families far enough from Trinity so that they did not take their children there for baptisms. It was a John King from Old Bonaventure and Mary Brown from Bonaventure married 23rd November 1804, who started the first King family in the Trinity area.

In Trinity Bay itself, Kings were found in the Old Perlican / Hearts Content area from the late 1600s. Several families of names found in that area moved to Hant's Harbour when it was just settled about 1780. 'Old Henry' was most likely one of them. Old Henry King, as the Hant's Harbour natives referred to him, was born in 1774 and died in Hant's Harbour 23rd of March 1862. His children were Joshua King, born in 1794 and died in Hant's Harbour 28th of August 1868, Mary King, born 1796, who married Thomas Pelley, (the son of Timothy from Poole, Dorset), and Philip King, born 1799, who, with his wife Mary, had five children all shown in Hant's Harbour Methodist Church records - Susannah (1821), Noah (1824), Joseph (1826), Dinah (1828), and John (1831).

The first son of Old Henry, Joshua King, born in 1794 and his wife (whose name is unknown) had children named Mary, Thomas, George, William and a Phillip born in 1815. Phillip married Leah Tilley in the Methodist Church on the 27th of October 1836 and they went to Pilley's Island, Notre Dame Bay. I believe that he went there to work on an early mine development. There were no drills to get core samples and the mine's prospects had to be determined by tunneling. Their stay lasted seven years at Pilley's Island where three children were born: Joshua, Mary, and Phillip in 1843. Then they returned to Hant's Harbour where three more daughters were born: Catherine in 1844, Rhoda in 1847, and Leah in 1850.

This Phillip King born at Pilley's Island was my great-grandfather. In 1871, he married Janet Pelley, daughter of Job Pelley the ship builder and they moved to Trinity and had five children, Alexander Pelley (1872), Nina Elizabeth (1874), Eva Lilly (1878), Lily Alice Maud (1882), and Rollice Reginald Daniel (1884). Phillip King was a shipwright. This was a very prosperous trade in the days of the wooden sailing ships, but with the arrival of steamships there was a decline. By 1891 they were living on Alexander Street. in St. John's where two more children, Maud Blanche and Herbert Claude Bramwell, were born. Some time after that, my great grandfather found work in a Brooklyn USA shipyard. He was a foreman when he died there in 1902, and was buried in the Greenwood Cemetery. His son Rollice had followed his father to the US where he married a Mary Townshend. Philip's son, Alexander Pelley King, was my grandfather. He apprenticed to Charles Schlater and after he qualified in this trade, he kept a

watchmaking jewellery concern on the south side of Water Street, east of Springdale Street in St. John's.

My great-grandmother, Janet Pelley King eventually lived with her daughter and husband at 'Aeroland', a fine old house (that was built on what is now part of the parking lot of Barrett's Funeral Home on Hamilton Avenue, St. John's) until she died in 1934. Her Pelley roots probably go back to Poole.

According to a book on the Pelley baronetcy published in England, the Pelley's date from a Thomas in Poole, Dorset, 1586. All agree that Alexander Pelley who settled in Hant's Harbour was the husband of a woman named Catherine who came there from Island Cove. One of their nine children born in Hant's Harbour was Job Pelley, born December 7, 1817.

In 1850, Job Pelley would marry Elizabeth Tilley, who was born at Old Perlican on June 30, 1830. Elizabeth Tilley's grandfather had been a John Tilley who had moved from Trinity to Old Perlican where he married a Miss Churchill who had come out from England. In turn, their son also named John Tilley and his wife Elizabeth (Burse) Tilley became parents of Elizabeth, the wife of Job Pelley.

Within a few years, Job and Elizabeth would move to Robinson's Bight on the south side of Random Island, where he became a shipbuilder. Job's brother John also moved there and started a sawmill, as there were good timber stands in the area. The book, Random Island Pioneers by Wilfred Martin tells a sad story when, after a sawmill accident, John Pelley was brought across the bay in a sailboat by several men. They held him down while the doctor amputated his arm.

The following entry was found in the diary of the Rev. Henry Petley. He wrote on August 22, 1859, "I got up in Hickman's Harbour and set sail for Robinson's Bight to visit Job Pelley and his brother John." He mentioned that John's house and a sawmill located near Job's wharf which was built in deep water. It was cleared of brush and well-groomed. Rev. Petley then visited John Tilley, Elizabeth Pelley's father, at Shoal Harbour and described him as a "kindly old Wesleyan."

Ten years later, Elizabeth Pelley's mother (Elizabeth Bursey Tilley) passed away and the Royal Gazette stated: "Elizabeth, the wife of John Tilley, died in Shoal Harbour 29th of July, 1869 at eighty years of age." This John Tilley, Elizabeth's father, had become well known in his time and was called Scholar John Tilley. In his history of the Random Region of Trinity Bay, Leslie Dean states; "Mr. John Tilley, known as Scholar John taught himself to read at the age of 26. ...subsequently learned to read Latin, and in addition to fishing and farming, was a sawmill operator, fox farmer, cooper, blacksmith, Justice of the Peace, poet, and postal waymaster." Among other things, he "operated a small cannery at Tilley's Point... and had his product displayed at the 1862 International Fisheries Exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark, and won a bronze medal. The product inscription read as follows: "Warranted to keep free from taint and to retain its purity and nutritious quality in any climate for many years."