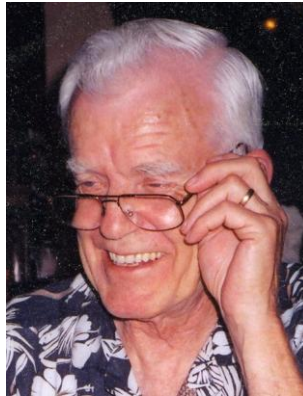


Tom (Thomas W.) Camfield: His Family's Journey To Port Townsend, Wash., 1570 - 1927



Tom, 2006

My individual journey to Port Townsend was a very short one. Born in Olympia, Wash., Feb. 1, 1929, I came here a couple of months later with my parents, when my father went to work at the local paper mill. His father had arrived in 1927 to help build the mill.

My Camfield ancestral family's journey was much more elaborate and is well documented back to the 1500s in England in my book *Family Camfield* (Ah Tom Publishing, Port Townsend, 1996). The book also covers many allied family lines not dealt with here. A copy of this 448-page book was left in the genealogical society's area at the JCHS research center in 1996.

Ignoring legendary ancestry going back to the de Camvilles of France prior to the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the solidly-documented Camfield migration winding up in Port Townsend begins with **Gregorie Camfield** (son of Richard), a stone mason in Harleston, Northamptonshire, England, born in 1570. **Matthew Camfield**, son of Gregorie and Joan, was born in 1604 and emigrated to New Haven, Connecticut, in the mid-1630s. He was one of the first settlers there and later was among the petitioners to England's King Charles II for the creation of Connecticut Colony. He was one of the patentees of the royal charter in 1662.

Matthew later was among the initial group moving into New Jersey when Indian hostilities abated there, and was one of the founders of New Haven. He is said to have been buried where the Newark City Hall later was built.

The following three generations in my line were **Samuel Camfield** (born 1645), **Samuel Camfield** (born 1678/9) and **Samuel Camfield** (born 1710). The third Samuel was an only child whose mother died shortly after childbirth. He was a founder of Kent, Connecticut, in 1738. He apparently was a man of considerable importance, as I have a chart of official seating assignments in the Kent church; Samuel had seat number one, located in a gallery above and to one side of the pulpit.

Having returned to Connecticut via New Jersey, the Camfields next drifted into Massachusetts. Samuel's son **Joseph Camfield**, born in 1743, enlisted there in 1776 (age 33) and served during the Revolution.

In 1796, Joseph's son **Ira Camfield** (born 1765) married Cynthia Bradford, a direct descendant of William Bradford, *Mayflower* passenger and first governor of Plymouth Colony. The Bradford descent is detailed in my book of Camfield history.

Both Joseph and his son Ira are recorded as having migrated to New York, where they worked as ship's carpenters in the 1790s.

In 1818, Ira, age 53, took his family – accompanied by Joseph, then 75 – to Townsend (also known as “Boston”), Norfolk County, Ontario, Canada. It is not known what line of work Ira pursued in Canada, but it is likely that – like most Camfields down through the years – he primarily worked the land. There is no mention of merchants, clerks, teachers, professional soldiers, etc. in the direct Camfield ancestry.

I am fortunate to have Ira Camfield's Bible, which passed down to me through five following Camfield generations. It traditionally went to the oldest son in each generation. My father had an older brother whose only child was a girl, which is why the Bible wound up with me, the oldest of my father's four sons (and also the only one who married).

Ira's son **Ziba Camfield**, born in 1799 in New York, was among family members accompanying his father to Canada. He was another farmer in the Camfield tradition, but history also records him as a Baptist minister. Ziba sired 14 known children by two wives (the second some 22 years his junior).

Including mine, six generations on my Camfield family tree are represented by a son who was the first-born child. **Bradford Camfield**, Ziba's son, was among them. The Camfield household must have been crowded indeed by the time he married in 1847 at age 23 and subsequently migrated to Michigan. It is not known just what year that migration was, but he had eight younger siblings by the time he was 20 years old in 1843.

A CHURCH SIDELIGHT – While Ziba Camfield was a minister, he apparently was not pastor of the Townsend, Ontario, Baptist church. I found records of his performing marriages at his home. Also, when his own son Bradford married, the ceremony was performed in the Townsend church by a minister named O'Connell.

Then there's the fact that in 1837 Ziba's own brother Hiram and his wife were thrown out of this same church. Church records mention contentious and profane language by both of them – and an ongoing dispute with a “Sister Leonard,” including a public quarrel in church. It was determined that all three had “disgraced the cause” and it was voted to exclude them “for their continual family riots and neglect of duty.” A year later, Hiram was reported having difficulty joining the church in Blenheim.

I have Bradford Camfield's army “dog tag” from the Civil War (a rather elaborate item stamped with his name, the date, etc.). He enlisted in the Northern Army for a term of three years, at age 38, on Aug. 8, 1862, and was mustered at Lowell, Michigan. He was a member of the 26th Michigan, a famous skirmishing regiment that saw action in many of the war's most historic battles. Statistics for his regiment at war's end were: 68 killed in action, 40 died of wounds, 15 died in Confederate prisons, 135 died of disease, 150 discharged for disability (wounds, disease).

I was fascinated to discover by later research into my wife's ancestry that at the Battle of Winchester (Va.) her great grandfather Noble Bacchus Westall fought for the South and my great, great grandfather Bradford Camfield fought for the North. Fortunately, neither shot the other.

When Bradford Camfield headed off to war in 1862, his oldest child, **George Camfield**, was a week short of his 14th birthday. According to family legend, he headed off to follow his father – but his mother went after him and dragged him home. My great grandmother somehow survived for three years at home on the farm with seven children, the oldest 14 and the youngest 3, while Bradford was off to war.

George (1848-1931) and his wife Fannie had only two children, the older my grandfather **Ernest L. Camfield**, born in 1874. His brother Roy grew into a foppish sort who was a piano teacher and would-be composer who did not labor in the fields, a bachelor who lived with his parents. He actually published a few waltzes, but I think he paid for the privilege and they availed him nothing financially.

After marrying and beginning his family in Michigan, my grandfather Ernie was accompanied by his parents and brother when he then migrated first, in 1899, to the South Dakota Prairie (DeSmet area, of later "Little House on the Prairie" fame). He ranched and worked in a flour mill. Losing the ranch to drought, he (and the rest of the extended family) pushed on to Meeting Creek (formerly Edenville), Alberta, Canada, in 1903. Most of his and wife Mary Jane's 10 children were born there, including my father. Ernie raised oats and hogs, built a family home and the community schoolhouse, served a time as postmaster and later bought half interest in a hardware store.

The school teacher boarded in the Camfield home, which eventually became so crowded that my father, **Warner B. (Tom) Camfield**, born 1907, lived for a time with his neighboring grandparents.



Camfield home, Meeting Creek, 1907. Ernie (left) with horse and dog, wife Mary third from left, holding my father.

The Camfields pushed on to greener fields in Salem, Oregon, in 1916, Ernie and family still accompanied by his parents and his bachelor brother. Ernie worked as a carpenter, streetcar conductor and in a Longview paper mill before coming to Port Townsend in 1927 to help build the paper mill. By then a bit long in the tooth (55), he lied about his age and hired on with the first crew when operations began two years later. My father also came to work at the mill at that time. He built a family home here during the Great Depression and eventually retired at the mill as production programmer.

My own local history has included basically most of a lifetime employed at the *Port Townsend Leader* newspaper in all imaginable capacities from printer's devil to publisher pro-tem. I also wrote seven books,

including two large volumes of local history and five of family history. Another is in progress at this 2010 writing. My wife, Phyllis Jean (*nee* Westall) served as school district finance officer, was a founder of the PTHS Scholarship Foundation and local Habitat for Humanity chapter, in both of which she remains highly active in key roles. Between the two of us, we served 23 years on the City Council (I 10 and she 13).