

## **HUDLIN, James D. (re Charles Alexander)**

The following information was compiled by Dar Churcher after having conducted an interview with James D. Hudlin, great grandson of **CHARLES ALEXANDER**, on Wednesday, February 17, 1993

- 1821 Charles Alexander was born in 1821. Together with his wife and children he eventually left his native Illinois and headed for California by means of oxen via Kansas City and the Platte River. Three other families travelled with them. After working in the gold fields, Charles decided to leave the prejudice he had discovered toward Blacks in California and take up Sir James Douglas' invitation to colonize Vancouver Island.
- 1857 There would have been only a handful of Black families living on the Island during Charles' day. One of them would have been the Barnswells who came in 1857 and lived on Johnson Street between Chambers and Cook. Black families on Saltspring included the Harrisons, Woods and the Wimms.
- 1858 Charles Alexander's family journeyed to the Island on the 'Oregon' in 1858.
- 1859 Charles and wife, Nancy Kyler, had a family of twelve children. The first child to have been born in Canada was Thomas. This occurred in 1859 in their home on North Park Street between Blanshard and Quadra.
- 1861 In 1861 the Alexanders moved to Saanich. They lived in a house "down in the woods" where Danica Nurseries is situated on the east side of the Pat Bay Highway. Charles, a lay preacher, was a key figure in the building of Shady Creek Church. Unfortunately, information regarding the early days of the church were destroyed in a fire. The new church was erected across the road from the original church and has provided services for the community ever since. Charles was also a carpenter and according to Mr. Hudlin, would have earned a living chiefly through barter and trade.
- 1899 In 1899 Charles moved to Rocabella Gardens on Quadra, north of McKenzie, in the Lakehill area.
- 1913 Charles Alexander was a well-respected and well-known individual who had served diligently in the church and helped many people during his lifetime. Small wonder that when he died (in 1913) his funeral was a grand affair. Both Charles and Nancy are buried in the Shady Creek Church Cemetery. Mr. Hudlin's great uncle William, Uncle Norman and several other Alexander family members are buried there.

Thomas Alexander, first Canadian child of Charles and Nancy, married Corinthia Pierre and had seven children. Thomas was in the trucking business and besides hauling wood and coal, moved furniture and pianos.

One son, Chester, became involved in the coal business and was yard foreman for King and Coal.

Another child, Mildred, married Joseph Hudlin. Joseph came from St. Louis, Missouri, and after having visited Victoria three times, decided to stay.

1922 Mr. James Hudlin is a son of Joseph and Mildred and he was born in 1922 in their home at the corner of Yates and Cook. James attended Central School and Victoria high School. He didn't quite finish High School as he broke his leg playing rugby. Besides packing coal for his Uncle Chester, and working in the Dockyard, James worked for the city of Victoria Sanitation Department. He retired 7 years ago after 33 ½ years of service.

James has led a very active life: he played soccer for Victoria West and played Softball and baseball until "no longer able to play." He volunteered in Little League baseball for 36 years and umpired for 41 years. In addition, James has umpired for the Little league World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania on five separate occasions. His present interests include golfing, bowling and gardening.

James has also spent a considerable amount of time gathering and compiling data on the Alexander family tree. When asked whether he had discovered any surprises during his research, he related the tragic story of his great uncle's drowning. These two men were James, 33, and Howard, 18, brothers of Thomas Alexander. Apparently they had gone down to the brickyard pond, where Woodward's is now situated on Douglas, to go skating. When one disappeared after going out to test the ice, the other went to his aid. The ice broke beneath him also. James wife, Mary Ann Grant and another woman, perhaps a friend of Edward's, were witnesses.

Extract: "So besides yourself, are there any other descendants of Charles and Nancy on the Island?"

"There's a lot!"

They include Karen Porchell, granddaughter of John Alexander, who lives at Maplewood and Cook; and Ray Mitchell, great grandson of Charles Alexander, who lives not far from Shady Creek Church on Mt. Newton X Road. In addition, there is a cousin Ellen, daughter of Cliff, who lives in Vancouver. She had eleven children and her brother Tom had eight. James also has two sisters in Seattle.

1981 In 1981 over a hundred people attended a Black Pioneer Reunion which was held at the old Saanich Municipal Hall on West Saanich Road. The event was organized by a committee chaired by James Hudlin. Other members included Arnold Barnswell; ray Mitchell, Vice-Chair; and individuals from the Alexander and Woods families. Meetings were held

every month for six months. Each committee member was responsible for contacting so many people each.

Extract: “And how did you decide who to invite? Was it people who had actually lived here?”  
“Yes, people who had actually lived here...black people who had moved away from Victoria. Some were quite a lot older and when they saw one another after so many years, it was really a joyful thing.”

People came from Saltspring, Vancouver, Seattle and of course Victoria and Saanich. There were a lot of children that no-one had seen and they were kept busy in the playground at the back of the building. One of the Barnswells was bartender and among the guests was High Curtis who had gone to school with Norm Alexander. Everyone “mixed and socialized and had a great time.” Many guests brought photographs to share and, as a result, James obtained several he didn't have. His interest piqued, he later discovered more photographs of the Alexander family members from local Archives. His collection of family photographs is very interesting and quite impressive. Many individuals appear extremely well-dressed and distinguished in demeanour. The Reunion started in the early afternoon and ended around nine in the evening.

Every year, on a Sunday before Christmas, the Shady Creek Church celebrates its many years of operation. Descendants of pioneers who attended the church are invited. During the service, the Minister stops preaching and goes over the entire family. When people hear their name, they stand up.

Extract: “He said, “If I make a mistake, you correct me.” Many in the congregation are Saanich residents. Last year Verna Cranton who married Norm Alexander was there. James observed that the occasion was more of a social affair than a church service!

The descendants of Charles and Nancy Alexander are numerous. James estimated the figure to be 500.