

WILLIAM GRAIN, 1833-1877

By E. T. Wilkie

William Grain was a son of Thomas Grain, who at the time of William's birth on November 1st, 1833, was Governor of the Commissariat and in the Royal Engineers stationed at Gibraltar, Spain, and who died at Cranfield Villas, Chelsea, Middlesex, England, in 1867, while William was in Canada.

After spending his boyhood in Gibraltar he went back to England with his parents, and was educated at King's College, London, where he obtained some prizes for proficiencies in his studies, and became instructor in Mathematics at Woolwich Academy. He came to Canada on the engineering staff of the Victoria Bridge for the Grand Trunk Railway over the St. Lawrence River, at Montreal, begun in 1854, and remained there till he went to Fergus, Ont., probably about the early part of 1857, where he obtained his commission as Provincial Land Surveyor on April 13th, 1858. He was employed on the Engineering staff of the Grand Trunk, Great Western and Wellington, Grey and Bruce Railways, and did some local surveying as well as owning and operating a sawmill for a few years, at Glenlamond, on the Grand River, a short distance above Fergus, until 1871. He then went to Battle Creek, Michigan, where he was on the Engineering staff of the Michigan Central Railway, and from there went to superintend the Bennington and Glastonbury Railway and Mining Company, residing at Bennington, Vermont, while in that position, his brother Frank being located there also. Early in 1874 he returned to Fergus, where he built a comfortable stone house, but did not enjoy it long



as he died on January 10th, 1877, aged 44 years, two months and nine days, and was buried in Belsyde cemetery in Fergus.

On March 20th, 1866, the Crown Lands Department issued instructions to William Grain, to survey Lots 5 to 9 inclusive, Concession 1, Pilkington Township, and his survey was confirmed by the Department on October 30th, 1866.

In early life, he and his brother, Col. Edward Grain, later well known in British military annals, were both fair artists, and executed a number of water-colour paintings, one by William, was of the Villa at Gibraltar, where he lived as a boy, which, along with some others, are now in the possession of Mrs. Annie Grain, widow of his son, Dr. Orton I. Grain, now living in Winnipeg, Man. She has a medal, engraved on one side, "To Master William Grain for intense application and eminent attainments"; and on the reverse side, "Gibraltar, 1843". She also has a book given as a prize and a certificate signed by Thomas Hall, M.A., professor of Mathematics and Prebendary of St. Paul's, saying that in June, 1849, William Grain was senior mathematical prizeman in the department of applied sciences, also a certificate signed by R. W. Jeff, D.D., principal of King's College, dated February, 1850, certifying to his attainments and qualifications. About this time he became instructor in Mathematics at Woolwich Academy.

The Victoria Bridge was opened for traffic on December 12th, 1859, and was formally opened by the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII, in 1861. After this ceremony the Prince made a trip through Ontario. At a ball given in his honour in Guelph, he danced twice with Mary Orton, who was, at the time, engaged to marry William Grain. The heavy black walnut bedroom suite, specially sent from Toronto for the Prince's use, was purchased by Mr. Grain toward furnishing his future home, and is now in the possession of Mrs. Dr. O. I. Grain, in Winnipeg.

On August 21st, 1862, he was married to Mary Orton, at Barton, by Rev. F. L. Osler, head of one branch of the famous Osler family. Mary Orton, born in March, 1837, was daughter of Dr. Henry Orton, who practised in Guelph more than 100 years ago. Four sons were also doctors, Thomas, who served in the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny, returning to Canada as Surgeon-Major in 1886. Henry practised at Ancaster. George T. practised in Fergus, and became a well known member of Parliament, and went to the West as surgeon in charge of the medical work on construction of the Canadian Pacific

Railway through the Rocky Mountains, dying in Winnipeg in 1904. Richard practised in Guelph for many years.

Mr. Grain's family was two sons, Orton Irwin who was born on August 9th, 1863, and became a doctor, and William T., who died in infancy.

After Mr. Grain's death his widow and son continued to live in Fergus, where Orton went to school, afterwards going to Toronto University. In 1883-84 Orton went to assist Dr. Smellie in the medical work on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway along the north shore of Lake Superior, then returned to Toronto to finish his medical studies. After graduation he went to assist his uncle, Dr. George T. Orton, with the medical work on the construction of the C.P.Ry., through the Rocky Mountains. He continued to practise along with Dr. Orton till 1889, when he bought a practice in Selkirk, Man., and took his mother to live with him there, where she died on December 12th, 1903, aged 66 years and 9 months, and was buried in Mapleto cemetery. In 1890 he married Annie Cull, of Winnipeg. In 1892 he made a professional trip, for the Government, travelling over 300 miles by canoe, visiting the Indians in northern Manitoba. In 1896 he was elected mayor of Selkirk, and in 1899 was elected to the Manitoba Legislature to represent Kildonan-St. Andrews. In 1914 he moved to Winnipeg and continued to practice there till he died in February, 1929, leaving his widow, three daughters and two sons, one son being a doctor in the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan.