

## Frederick George Woods: Chestermere Ditchrider (1912-1918)

One of eight children, Fred Woods was born in Midsomer Norton, Somerset, England in May 1876 and was baptized on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September in the parish church.<sup>1 2 3</sup> At the time of his birth, his father was employed as the local railway station agent. In 1891 by the age of fourteen he was already employed as an ironmonger's assistant, a job which he also held ten years later.<sup>4 5</sup>

Perhaps seeking better opportunities on the other side of the pond, Fred left Liverpool aboard the RMS *Victorian* on 7 June 1906 and disembarked on the 16<sup>th</sup> at Montreal, bound for Toronto.<sup>6</sup> Just six months later, on December 27<sup>th</sup>, he crossed into the U.S. at Detroit. The border crossing card described him as being 5 feet 1½ inches tall, and of ruddy complexion with brown hair and blue eyes. His stated occupation was that of carriage builder and he had most recently been resident in Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>7</sup> After a period in the States, Fred returned to Canada and worked various jobs including on the CPR irrigation survey. When his intended bride was to arrive in Canada, he secured the position of ditchrider at Dalroy.<sup>8</sup>

Bessie Jane Hook was born in June 1875 in Bridgwater, Somerset, England where her father was a self-employed master tailor.<sup>9 10</sup> She was baptized at Holy Trinity Church on 6 October 1875.<sup>11</sup> By 1901, Bessie was employed in Swansea, Wales as governess to four young children.<sup>12</sup> She boarded Canadian Pacific's RMS *Empress of Ireland* at Liverpool on 11 March 1910, landed at Saint John, New Brunswick on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and made the long journey across the country on CPR trains.<sup>13 14</sup> Fred and Bessie were married in Calgary on 24 March 1910 and went to live in the Dalroy district.<sup>15</sup> The contrast between the climate and surroundings of her native England and the new home on the Canadian prairies was something of a shock to Bessie. Decades later, her daughter wrote that in the summer of 1910, despite being hot and dry, the prairie was plagued by mosquitoes. Bessie missed the green of England and being surrounded by neighbours. She had to learn to bake bread, dress chickens, pump water and numerous other chores required of country women. The first year she boarded ten men.<sup>16</sup> The Woods' first daughter Margaret Irene was born in April 1911.<sup>17</sup>

After two years at Dalroy, the Woods family moved to the Chestermere headquarters where they lived with outgoing ditchrider Joseph Bannerman and his family for a month.<sup>18</sup> Neighbour Kate MacKenzie recalled, "Fred Woods came to take the job of ditch rider in place of Mr. Bannerman. He brought his wife and baby Margaret, so now we had another fine neighbour."<sup>19</sup>

While living at Chestermere, the Woods' second daughter Bessie Mary was born. Referencing this event, Kate MacKenzie's daughter Agnes Lester later wrote, "On 14 February 1915 Mother went up to see our new neighbour, the Woods, the ditchrider and family to the north. We knew that Mrs. Woods was expecting and when she got there the baby girl had already arrived very early that very day. Mr. Woods had the only telephone in the country and had got a nurse out of Calgary. Mother helped him get the bread that Mrs. Woods had started that morning into the pans before she came back with the exciting news."<sup>20</sup>

In writing her family's story for the 1971 local history book, Bessie (Woods) Hinchey described the first Chestermere ditchrider house and outbuildings. "The house when I remember it first was "C.P.R. green" with white trim. It was a three bedroom bungalow, built prairie style, no hallways and no closets, small bedrooms but fair sized living room, small dining room and a lean-to kitchen. There was a shop building we called the shack, which had two lean-to sheds attached, a shed in which we kept the one seat buggy that took us to school for many years, the other the coal house filled yearly with coal. Next door was the pumphouse, which housed a pump above a deep well."<sup>21</sup> "East of the house we had a green barn, small

with a pointed roof, with eight stalls, a small chicken yard, feed bins and a hen house, where we kept around 50 hens, to produce eggs and meat mostly for our own use.”<sup>22</sup> It is not clear how many of the outbuildings were part of the original CPR site and how many were added over the years by Fred, but at minimum the house and barn would have been built by the CPR.

Apparently grain and cattle prices were good in 1918 so when the opportunity arose to purchase the Chestermere headquarters, Fred decided to retire from ditchriding and become a farmer. He seeded his first crop in 1919 and experienced the ups and downs of agriculture throughout droughts, bumper crops, and the Depression in the ensuing years.<sup>23</sup> Fred had a passion for mechanical things and spent his spare time keeping the gasoline pump engine and his Model-T Ford in good running condition.<sup>24</sup>

Fred Woods was the only Chestermere ditchrider that remained in the community after his term of employment. He died in hospital on 3 September 1943 following a brief illness and was buried in Burnsland Cemetery.<sup>25</sup> His wife Bessie rented the farmland to neighbour Pete Lester (Kate MacKenzie’s son-in-law), sold the livestock, machinery and household effects at an auction sale in November 1943, and moved to Calgary.<sup>26 27</sup> “The farm house was rented to a succession of tenants, then stood vacant, was stripped by vandals, then burnt by a fire bug.”<sup>28</sup>

Bessie died on 25 November 1965 and was buried in Burnsland beside Fred.<sup>29</sup> Daughter Margaret married Bernard A. “Tom” Pople, had one son, and died in Calgary in January 1988.<sup>30</sup> Daughter Bessie married Glenn B. Hinchey, had two sons and a daughter, and died in Hawaii in August 2001.<sup>31</sup>

The Chestermere district of Kinniburgh sits on part of the land farmed by George and Bessie Woods.

The complete Woods family story from *Saddles Sleights and Sadirons* is available online at <https://cdm22007.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p22007coll8/id/533614/rec/6>

Photos – Fred, Bessie and baby Margaret Woods; Fred, Bessie, Margaret (standing behind Bessie) and Bessie Mary Woods; ad for auction sale; obituaries of both Fred and Bessie; share certificate Bessie Woods Chestermere Country Club 1931 ( original in possession of Chestermere Historical Foundation);map of location of their home.

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<sup>1</sup> “Chestermere Lake Pioneer Dies,” *Calgary Herald*, September 4, 1943, 21.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/479862567/>

<sup>2</sup> 1911 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll T-20326, Alberta, Calgary, subdistrict 2, page 9, family 23, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1911&op=&img&id=e011069867>

<sup>3</sup> Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914 [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016; citing Reference Number D\P\MSN/2/1/13, Anglican Parish Registers, Somerset Archives & Local Studies, South West Heritage Trust, Taunton, England.

<sup>4</sup> 1891 England Census [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005; citing *Census Returns of England and Wales*, Public Record Office, 1891, RG12, Piece 1927, Folio 7, Page 8, GSU roll 6097037, The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey, England.

<sup>5</sup> 1901 England Census [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005; citing *Census Returns of England and Wales*, Public Record Office, 1901, RG13, piece 2332, folio 12, page 16, The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey, England.

<sup>6</sup> Passenger Lists, 1865 -1922, RG 76, Roll T-487, Department of Employment and Immigration fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/passenger-lists/passenger-lists-1865->

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[1922/Pages/image.aspx?Image=e003660660&URLjpg=http%3a%2f%2fcentral.bac-lac.gc.ca%2f.item%2f%3fid%3de003660660%26op%3dimg%26app%3dpassengerlist&Ecopy=e003660660](http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/2f/item%2f%3fid%3de003660660%26op%3dimg%26app%3dpassengerlist&Ecopy=e003660660)

<sup>7</sup> Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895-1960 [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010; citing The National Archives at Washington, D.C., Washington, D.C., *Manifests of Passengers Arriving at St. Albans, VT, District through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic Ports, 1895-1954*, RG 85, M1464, Roll 046.

<sup>8</sup> Bessie M. (Woods) Hinchey, "The Fred Woods Family of Chestermere," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 247.

<sup>9</sup> 1911 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll T-20326, Alberta, Calgary, subdistrict 2, page 9, family 23, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1911&op=&img&id=e011069867>

<sup>10</sup> 1881 England Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004; citing *Census Returns of England and Wales*, Public Record Office, 1881, RG11, piece 2375, folio 40, page 15, GSU roll 1341571, The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey, England.

<sup>11</sup> *Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016; citing Reference Number D\P\bw.ht/2/1/2, Anglican Parish Registers, Somerset Archives & Local Studies, South West Heritage Trust, Taunton, England.

<sup>12</sup> 1901 Wales Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005; citing *Census Returns of England and Wales*, Public Record Office, 1901, RG13, piece 5071, folio 195, page 25, The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey, England.

<sup>13</sup> *UK and Ireland, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012; citing Commercial and Statistical Department and successors: Outwards Passenger Lists, BT27, Records of the Commercial, Companies, Labour, Railways and Statistics Departments, Records of the Board of Trade and of successor and related bodies, The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey, England.

<sup>14</sup> Passenger Lists, 1865 -1922, RG 76, Roll T-4821, Department of Employment and Immigration fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/passenger-lists/passenger-lists-1865-1922/Pages/image.aspx?Image=e003625187&URLjpg=http%3a%2f%2fcentral.bac-lac.gc.ca%2f.item%2f%3fid%3de003625187%26op%3dimg%26app%3dpassengerlist&Ecopy=e003625187>

<sup>15</sup> Bessie M. (Woods) Hinchey, "The Fred Woods Family of Chestermere," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 247.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-248.

<sup>17</sup> Census of Canada, 1911, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll T-20326, Calgary, subdistrict 2, Alberta, page 9, family 23, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, 2007. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1911&op=&img&id=e011069867>

<sup>18</sup> Bessie M. (Woods) Hinchey, "The Fred Woods Family of Chestermere," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 247.

<sup>19</sup> Kay Clarke family papers.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Bessie M. (Woods) Hinchey, "The Fred Woods Family of Chestermere," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 246.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-249.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>25</sup> "Chestermere Lake Pioneer Dies," *Calgary Herald*, September 4, 1943, 21. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/479862567/>

<sup>26</sup> Bessie M. (Woods) Hinchey, "The Fred Woods Family of Chestermere," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 249.

<sup>27</sup> "Auction Sale," *Calgary Herald*, November 12, 1943, 19. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/479865084/>

<sup>28</sup> Bessie M. (Woods) Hinchey, "The Fred Woods Family of Chestermere," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 249.

<sup>29</sup> Bessie Woods obituary, *Calgary Herald*, November 27, 1965, 42. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/481805139/>

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Irene Pople obituary, *Calgary Herald*, January 29, 1988, D10. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/484001909/>

<sup>31</sup> Bessie M. Hinchey obituary, *Honolulu Advertiser*, August 21, 2001, B2.  
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/266734013/>



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 Chestermere Historical Society, 1971



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 Chestermere Historical Society 1971

**AUCTION SALE**  
 Having received instructions from  
 MRS. B. J. WOODS of Chestermere,  
 who has rented her farm and is  
 moving to Calgary, I will sell at the  
 Farm, situated  
 S.W. QUARTER 11-24-28, W. 4th,  
 being 13 miles East and 1 mile  
 South of Calgary, and 1 mile South  
 on East Side of Chestermere Lake,  
**TUESDAY, Nov. 16th**  
 Commencing at 1 p.m. Sharp

**Milch Cows, Implements,  
 Poultry and  
 Household Effects**

**MILCH COWS:** 1 Red Milch Cow,  
 4 years old, to freshen Nov. 10;  
 1 Black Milch Cow, 7 years old,  
 with Calf at foot.

**IMPLEMENTS**  
 1922 Pontiac Sedan with license,  
 first class condition; 9-ft. I.H.C.  
 Cultivator; 20-Run Cockshutt Double  
 Disc Drill (power lift); 8-ft.  
 Massey-Harris Binder; 44-inch Gang  
 Plow; 8-ft. Tandem Disc; Stone-  
 boat; 1 1/2-inch h.p. Pump Engine;  
 U.G.G. Fanning Mill; 2 Wagons and  
 Three-Deck Grain Boxes; Wagon  
 and Bundle Rack; 5 1/2-ft. Massey-  
 Harris Mower; Walking Plow; 14-  
 inch Sulky Plow; 10-ft. Hay Rake;  
 Wheel Scraper; Democrat; 3 Sec-  
 tions Boss Harrows; 6 Sections Dia-  
 mond Harrows; Jumper, two 10-ton  
 Screw Jacks; 1 Pump Jack; Garden  
 Cultivator; Buggy, Slip; Set of Bob  
 Sleighs; Feed Rack; Harrow Cart;  
 Roll Hog Wire; Grindstone, Forks,  
 Chains, Shovels and other Tools too  
 numerous to mention.

**HARNESS**—Set Breaching Har-  
 ness; 7 Sets Plow Harness; 12 Col-  
 lars; 6 Halters, 2 Stock Saddles.

**HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS.**  
 6-hole Cooking Range; Beatty  
 Washing Machine; 2 Buffets; Din-  
 ing Room Table and Chairs; Ches-  
 terfield Suite (good as new);  
 Couch; Upright Piano and Stool (in  
 first class shape); 2 Brass Beds,  
 complete; 2 Dressing Tables; Three-  
 quarter Bed, complete; Kitchen  
 Table; Small Table; 2 Coal Heaters;  
 3-Burner Oil Stove; Washstand; 1  
 Aladdin Lamp; Rayo Lamp; two  
 Creamers; Fruit Jars; Dishes, etc.

200 BARRED ROCK HENS  
 400 BU. BARLEY  
 500 BU. OATS  
 7 TONS OF COAL

I will also offer for sale the fol-  
 lowing Cattle from L. Anderson,  
 Chestermere:  
 15 Head of Cows, from 3 to 6 years  
 old; 15 Head Yearling Heifers and  
 Steers, mostly Aberdeen-Angus  
 Breeding; 5 Head of Calves, mostly  
 of Aberdeen-Angus Breeding.

**TERMS CASH — NO RESERVE**

**HENRY GILCHRIST**  
 AUCTIONEER  
 P.O. Box 353, Calgary.—Ph. 91-3331  
 License No. 40-43-44

Calgary Herald 12 Nov 1943 p19



# Chestermere Lake Pioneer Dies

Frederick George Woods, 67, a resident of the Chestermere Lake district for 31 years, died Friday in hospital here after a brief illness.

Mr. Woods was born in Mid-somer, Norton, Somersetshire, England. He was employed with the C.P.R. irrigation department at Chestermere Lake from 1908 until 1919. From 1919 until the present he had been farming in the district.

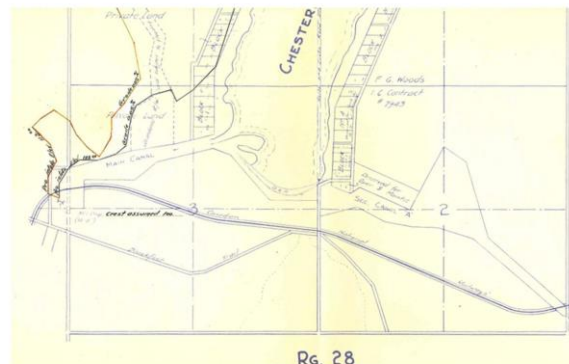
Surviving are his wife, Bessie Jane; two daughters, Mrs. B. A. Pople, Trail, B.C., and Bessie, of Calgary; two sisters and two brothers in England and a grandson in Trail.

Funeral services will be conducted in the Jacques funeral home on Tuesday at 2:45 o'clock with Major Rev. Canon W. H. Morgan officiating. Burial will be in Burnsland cemetery.

Calgary Herald 4 September 1943 p21c1

**WOODS — November 25, 1965,** Mrs. Bessie Woods aged 90 years formerly of 256-18th Avenue N.W. and Chestermere Lake. Born in Bridgewater, Somerset, England, she came to Alberta in 1910 and resided in the Dalroy and Chestermere districts until coming to Calgary in 1943. Mrs. Woods was a member of St. Michael and All Angels' Anglican Church. She was predeceased by her husband Frederick in 1943. She is survived by two daughters, Mrs. B. A. (Margaret) Pople, Calgary; Mrs. G. B. (Bessie) Hinchey, Honolulu, Hawaii; 4 grandchildren; and two great grandchildren. Services at St. Michael and All Angels' Anglican Church, 335-16th Avenue N.W. Monday at 3:15 p.m. The Rev. Canon C. M. Starr officiating. Interment Burnsland Cemetery. FOSTER'S GARDEN CHAPEL Directors. In lieu of flowers, kindly send donations to the Calgary Association for Retarded Children, 64 - 12th St. N.E.

Calgary Herald 27 November 1965 p42c7



Source: A. Griffin, Chief Engineer, Department of Natural Resources, Canadian Pacific Railway Company, Calgary. Map of Chestermere Lake and Township 22 West 1937 M 2761 46 Irrigation Research Project (W. Jacobson Collection).  
 Ontario Archives, Geobase, Western Research Centre, University of Calgary.