

# Samuel Robertson and Peter Baker

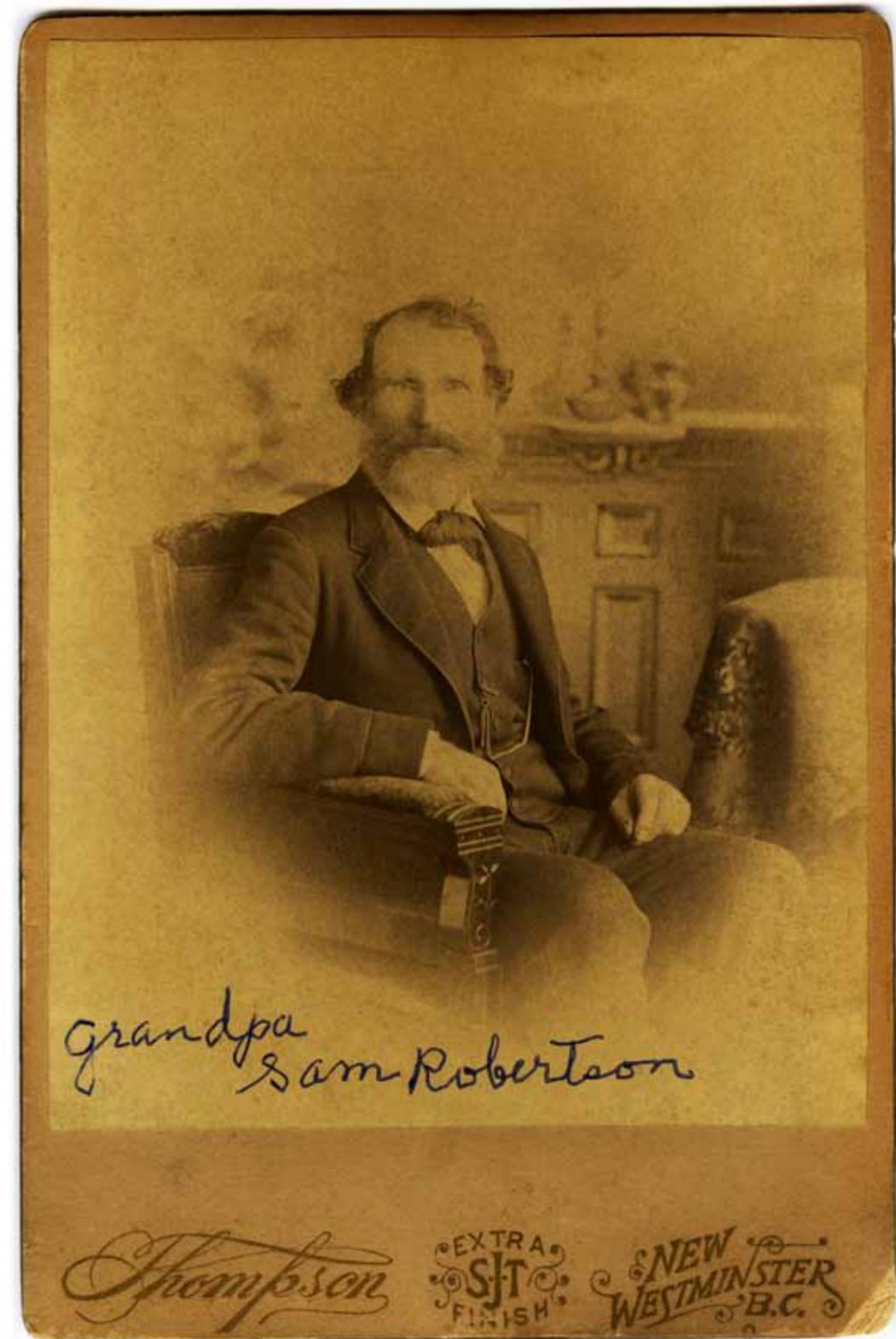
SAMUEL ROBERTSON, the first land owner in Albion, was born in 1819 in the Orkney Islands of Scotland. His childhood years were spent there, and as he reached adulthood he received training in carpentry and became a skilled cabinet maker and boat builder. He then became an employee of the HBC and left Scotland bound for Canada. Sam arrived at Fort Langley in 1843. With the discovery of gold on the Fraser River and later in the Cariboo, he left the employment of the HBC to enter into a partnership with Peter Boulanger to open the What Cheer House at the old Derby Townsite to cater to the thirst of the miners that passed through on their way to the goldfields.

Boulanger was a Frenchman from Alsace, Quebec, who in 1849 joined the California gold rush by working his way south down the Atlantic Coast on a sailing vessel as far as Panama. Here he jumped ship, changed his name to Peter Baker to avoid detection, and began footing it across the isthmus, where he contracted and nearly died of malaria. He then sailed up the Pacific Coast to the California diggings. After a short while at Sacramento, he heard of the discovery of gold at Fort Colville. As a result Baker, accompanied by two other Quebecers and an Iroquois, began working northward, mining around Rock Creek, Tranquille, and various other places along the Thompson and Fraser Rivers. He taught the Indians in the vicinity to pan for the yellow metal and then bought their findings for next to nothing with plugs of chewing tobacco. He and several other entrepreneurs might have become prosperous had the First Nations braves not shown their discoveries to HBC Chief Trader Donald McLean at Fort Kamloops. McLean bought their gold from that time onward and told the First Nations men not to sell any gold to the miners.

Attracted by the beauty of the countryside on the north side of the Fraser River opposite Fort Langley, Robertson on 7 February 1858 filed pre-emption on what is now known as Albion Flats. He was soon followed by Baker. Both lived alongside the Fraser River. Baker chose to homestead upriver from his former partner.

In 1860 Robertson supervised the building of a number of cabins on the east side of what is now called Kanaka Creek near its confluence with the Fraser River for recently discharged Hawaiian employees (Kanakas) of the fort. He then set about clearing the land and

**Seated in possibly the most photographed chair in the Lower Fraser Valley, Samuel Robertson, Albion's original settler, poses all dressed up in a vest suit and a tied silk bow complete with a pocket watch.**





**Pierre Boulanger, afterwards known as Peter Baker, was one of the earliest pioneers to live in the Albion area.**

developing a farm with hired fun-loving Hawaiians. By this time several of these islanders were married to Kwantlen and Katzie First Nation women. As time passed, Robertson built a large home near the bank of the Fraser River for his Aboriginal wife Julia and their three children, Donald, James, and Mary. He also built a large barn, piggery, chicken houses, granary, two cellars for his root crops, a boat house, and a machine shop. It was estimated that he obtained approximately 700 acres of land downriver from his pal Peter Baker. Sam was quite capable of multi-tasking and had a blacksmith shop, boat building facilities, a fruit drying plant and even a smoke house for curing meat and fish. As time passed, he acquired a large number of animals that were fed hay and root crops, mostly turnips. Some of these root crops were stored in a large cellar in the barn that was often buried under the hay.

Robertson began growing an apple orchard by bringing cuttings from Scotland that were grafted onto crab apple trees. These trees grew and really flourished, and after the CPR train service became available he shipped apples to Savona, near Kamloops. Various sternwheelers that plied up and down the Fraser River often called at Sam's

homestead, which was called Robertson's Landing. The laying of CPR track through Sam's property created a problem in that the trains often struck his pigs or cattle. To prevent such accidents, Sam had to split fence rails and use them to erect a fence to keep the animals off the tracks.

When Sam's first wife passed away, he married Harriet Edge, the widow of William Edge who was killed in the Haney Slide, and helped her to raise the six children from her first marriage.

Samuel Robertson passed away in 1897 after living in Albion for a total of 39 years. His son James took over the farm but sold out to David Spencer in 1919. James's sister Christina married Henry Valentine Ritchie, and they started the Ritchie General Store and Post Office on Baker Road. Ritchie's father had been one of the original settlers on Thorne Hill. When James Robertson passed

away his sons Ronald and Roy with their sister Elma took over the running of the store.

Due to the erosion of the banks of the Fraser River, much of the land where Sam's farm had been and a good deal of adjoining land were washed away by the river. The 1948 Flood was the *coup de grâce* that flooded all of the Robertson property and destroyed the buildings.



**Ritchie's General Store, built on the southeast corner of the Lougheed Highway and Baker Road (240<sup>th</sup> Street) in 1927. The photograph of the derelict building was taken in 1974, a short time before it was demolished.**



Originally the Samuel Robertson and Peter Baker farms, Albion Flats as it came to be known later, became the 400-acre dairy farm of Colonel Victor Spencer of Vancouver and still later the site chosen by the municipality for the Albion fair, 2005.