

PEI LOYALIST BEACON



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Sago Potter, Loyalist of Lot 30

By Kevin Wisener U.E.

One of the intriguing Loyalists' names is that of Segoe (Sago / Seago) Potter. One of his few mentions is his Loyalist land grants. The first, dated September 15, 1784, mentions his arrival in Charlottetown from Shelburne on September 13, 1784. The muster roll also shows that Sago was 46 on that date and therefore born c. 1738. This would make Sago one of the oldest Loyalists coming to Prince Edward Island. Also noteworthy was that he arrived by himself. This does not mean that he was single. Rather, most Loyalists who arrived in this manner already had a land grant in Nova Scotia or New Brunswick; their families would join them later, often after their initial land grants were sold or conveyed.

The proposed land grant was on the Pinette River, Lot 58, Queens County, Prince Edward Island. However, Governor Patterson was unable to secure a portion of Lot 58 for the Loyalists and for those who declined to become squatters on Lot 58, alternative land had to be found.

respecting my past Conduct as well as his
Instructions for my Guide in future—
I have only to add that I have sought
myself as far as in my power to obtain
his Approbation.

I have the honor of
(signed) Stewart

Master Rolle of the following Discharged & Distanced
Slaves and their families with their respective families
who arrived on the 15th Day of September and are pro-
-posing to settle at the Island of Saint John, to whom
15th Sept. 1784

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We do hereby Certify that the Men, women & children particularly mentioned in the above Roll are ^{male}

Fortunately, a few weeks later, on September 24, 1784, Sago and several of the other Loyalists originally intended for settlement at Pinette River were granted land in Lot 30.

By His Excellency Walter Patterson Esquire Cap^t: General
and Governor in Chief in and over His Majesty's Island
Saint John, and the Territories thereto adjacent
He.. He.. He..

To Thomas Wright Esq. Surveyor General of Lands.

You are hereby Equired to Admeasure and
lay out unto the following Refugees and
Disbanded Troops the several proportions of
Land which are annexed to their names, on
that part of Lot N^o 30, which has been given
up for the benefit of Refugees &c. Taking care
to observe the Instructions you have already
received for your Guidance in such cases.

To - Sago Potter - - - 500 acres	To - Archibald Sellers - 300 acres
- James Fraser - 500 -	- John Brown Young - 500 -
- Samuel Jameson - 500 -	- Benjamin Ferrar - 300 -
- Hugh Fraser - 500 -	Privates { Michael Jeffries - 100 -
- John Kingston - 500 -	{ Alexander Boyce 100 -

And for so doing this shall be your Warrant

Given under my Hand & Seal
at Charlottown, said Island
this 24th Sep^r: 1784. -

By Order
Jas Swanwick Esq.

Source: UELAC RG14 Box 2 45. Reproduced with permission for the Public Archives & Records Office of Prince Edward Island

Sago and most of the Loyalist refugees on Lot 30 were granted 500 acres. Two other refugees received 300 acres, and two army privates received 100 acres each.

A grant of 500 acres often was reserved to a senior military officer while a grant of 350 acres often signified a large family. However, in this instance we know that Hugh Fraser, James Fraser, John Kingston, and John Brown Young all arrived with their wives and three children each and were granted 500 acres in Lot 30. It is also notable that James Fraser also arrived with two servants (possibly African American), but no additional land was given.

Seeking Mr. Potter, the Loyalist Refugee

But who is this mysterious fellow who was able to secure 500 acres of land due to his loyalty during the American Revolution?

The Ward-Chipman Loyalist Papers have only one reference to Sago Potter and that is the Muster Roll (above) dated Sept 15, 1784, at Charlottetown.

Seago Potter can be traced to England, where he was baptized on January 5th, 1743, at Denham, Suffolk, England, the son of William Potter and Elizabeth Giles.¹ By 1760, Seago was apprenticed to Master Edward Goody of Barrow, England while residing in his home. Seago's apprenticeship was for the trade of wool stapler.² A wool stapler is person who sorts wool according to its staple, or fiber. In the commercial sense a wool stapler is a dealer in wool who buys wool from the producer, sorts and grades it, and sells it on to manufacturers. Wool textiles were Britain's biggest export, comprising over a quarter of all exports for much of the century, growing significantly from 1701-1770. The introduction in 1764 of James Hargraves "Spinning Jenny", a revolutionary multi-spindle machine dramatically increased textile production by allowing one worker to spin multiple threads simultaneously. The increased production, led to increased demand for wool and its supporting occupations. It is not certain when Seago Potter emigrated to America, but he is by 1777 a foreman at an iron furnace in Delaware, certainly not an occupation of a recent immigrant. Possibly he had emigrated c 1770 once he had established himself in his trade and had the financial resources for the voyage.

A rather exhaustive search did turn up a single person of that name during the American Revolution: a Sago Potter of Sussex County, Delaware. Delaware was a colony, consisting of three counties (Newcastle, Sussex and Kent), which form a large part of the Delmarva Peninsula. Delmarva is a composite name indicating the peninsula has territory of three colonies Delaware (Del), Maryland (Mar) and Virginia (Va.) Interestingly, Delaware is the US state closest in size to Prince Edward Island, which is 12% larger.

Delaware was a colony comprised mostly of inhabitants of English descent and among the highest colonial populations loyal to England. English vessels, both commercial and military, often anchored in Delaware Bay, which separated Delaware and New Jersey. However, northern Delaware itself was only 35 miles from Philadelphia, where the Revolutionaries had declared independence and was on the main road to nearby Baltimore and Washington. So early on, the revolutionaries endeavoured to sway Delaware to the cause. Delaware did indeed declare itself for the cause led by many of its wealthiest families and residents in the northern part of the state. However, in southern Delaware the population tended towards loyalty to Great Britain. It should have been no surprise then that when Great Britain captured Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1780 that this would stir the Loyalist cause among others where they were perceived to be in the majority. It also helped that on June 30, 1779, General Clinton in his Phillipsburg Proclamation encouraged slaves to run away from their masters and join the British forces. Southern Delaware with its Loyalist majority and significant African American population of both freemen and slaves was ripe with loyalist sentiment and hopes to return to the previous system. It only needed a spark to set the wheels in motion.

It appears that Seago Potter resided in Sussex County, Delaware, when a local rebellion of Loyalists occurred in 1780. This uprising, known as the Black Camp Rebellion, was a local reaction to the American Revolution and aimed to secure the county for the British.³ The name Black Camp most likely refers to the Loyalist Camp in the Black Swamp and does not specifically infer being African American, as most of the Loyalists were white. However, Lord Dunmore's proclamation in 1775 offered freedom to enslaved and indentured people who joined the British cause. This was a powerful incentive for many Black

¹ Suffolk, England, Extracted Church of England Parish Records, 1538-1850.

² UK Register for Apprentices' Indentures. 1710-1811.

³ https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/1780_Black_Camp_Rebellion...

individuals in Delaware, where slavery was a reality, to align with the British. The Black Camp was in the Black Swamp or, as it is now known, the Nanticoke Swamp in Sussex County, Delaware. The Nanticoke swamp was a large, forested area, largely untamed and with plentiful swamps. It had become the refuge of choice for those fleeing Maryland, Virginia and Delaware authorities, runaway slaves, and poor farmers, both Black and White seeking free or low-cost land.

“The Black Swamp rebellion, also known as the 1780 Black Camp Rebellion, was a brief Loyalist uprising in Sussex County, Delaware, during the American Revolutionary War that occurred from July 15 to about August 10, 1780. The rebels, primarily poor farmers, were led by Bartholomew Bannum and William Dutton and established a camp in a swamp near present-day Ellendale, Delaware. Pro-American militia forces would later quickly suppress the rebellion, arresting the participants.”⁴

A description of the start of the planning of the Black Camp Rebellion

Around July 15, a number of Broadkill men began to train under Bartholomew Bannum, a relatively small planter in the hundred whom they chose as their Captain. A Cedar Creek Company was also organized, which elected William Dutton to command them. Chosen as Cedar Creek’s First Lieutenant was William Ratcliffe, a son-in-law of George Messick; Job Townsend was elected second lieutenant and Seago Potter, another son-in-law of Messick’s, the company’s clerk. Coincidentally, Potter was the overseer of the iron furnace belonging to William and Thomas Lightfoot.⁵

The Black Camp Rebellion was interesting because it was led by the extended family of Seago Potter’s father-in-law, George Messick, Sr., illustrated by the following family chart. The family of Sarah Messick (Mrs. Seago Potter):

The Messick family Loyalists

The Messick (Mezick, Messex) family were an old Delaware family via Maryland c. 1650 and originating in Nantes, France. Nantes, with a significant Calvinist Protestant population, was also the place from which the Edict of Nantes was issued following the resolution of the Wars of Religion. Upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, it appears that the Messick family were among those Huguenots who emigrated to the mid-Atlantic colonies under the rule of the Protestant British monarch.

George Messick Sr., b. 1733, Somerset, Delaware, died 1781 Sussex County, Delaware. He married c. 1750 Patience Ingram (1735 Sussex County. - 1798). They had the following children⁶:

- I. Minos Messick, b. 1750
- II. Meley Messick b. 1753
- III. **Job Messick** (1755-1829), a participant in the Black Creek Rebellion
- IV. Rachel Messick (1757 –) married Allan Short
- V. Nancy Messick (1759-) married **William Ratcliffe**, First Lieutenant in the Black Creek Company and participant in the Black Creek Rebellion.
- VI. Sarah Messick (b. c. 1761 – after 1850) married c. 1781 **Seago Potter** (1736-1806), the Clerk of the Black Creek Company and a leader of the Black Creek Rebellion. It is possible that this was Seago Potter’s second marriage.
- VII. **George Messick Jr.** (1763-??,) mentioned as participant.

⁴ Wikipedia AI Summary Black Swamp or Black Camp Rebellion.

⁵ *Old offenders: Loyalists in the Lower Delmarva Peninsula 1775-1800*, Doctorate Thesis of Timothy James Wilson, University of Toronto, 1998, P. 198; National Library of Canada.

⁶ George Messick, Sr. died c. 1780. His will noted his heirs as: wife Patience Messick; sons Minus, George and Job Messick; daus. Meley, Rachel Messick, Nicey Rackliff (wife of William), Love Johnson (wife of Isiah), Mary Hemmons (wife of Jonathan) and Sarah Potter (wife of Seco); grandson George Crafford. Source: Calendar of Sussex County, Delaware Probate Records, 1680-1800. Georgetown, DE: Public Archives Commission, 1964.

VIII. Lovey Messick (1765 -) married **Isaiah Johnson** (1750-1809), a participant in the Black Creek Rebellion.

IX. Mary Messick (1767) married **Jonathan Hemmons**, who participated in the Black Creek Rebellion

In addition, several Messick cousins also participated in the Black Camp Rebellion.

The causes of the Black Camp rebellion were explained by the testimony of certain of the rebellion's leaders at their trials.

Testimony of Jonathon Ryley:

Sayeth "that George Messix jr. and Isaah Johnson came to his house on Fryday the 4th inst and told him that they wanted to Nock down the Act which made a poor man pay as much as a rich man in the way of hiring men to go to Camp and word had come from the Black Camp that the Whigs was distressing people and taking away their living to pay their fines etc. and that the people was to meet at George Messick's that day to conclude whether they would go to the Black Camp or not and at the Black Camp they had plenty of Arms, Ammunition & Provisions and about 100 men."

And later Ryley states:

*"He went to Messix (though against the opinion of his wife) where he stayed all night with about 15 or 20 men Viz. Wm Dutton, Sago Potter, Wm. Ratcliffe, Isaah Johnson & others."*⁷

The following testimony of Levy Messick, Loyalist, being held by General Dagworthy's militia and interviewed by a Justice of the Peace dated August 10, 1780, reveals the following about the Black Camp members:

*"That he heard some weeks ago that Soldiers and others had been firing at the people of the Black camp as they were at work in their corn fields and they reconned that they were going to kill them up totally and since that had heard no more until Fryday the 28th of July when Jacob Messic came to Lawrence Rylies where the examinant was and told him that the Black Camp men was rising to beat down the Tax Laws and make the rich pay as much of the pound rates as the poor pay must & must go with them for they should all be killed up totally for the whigs was there upon the Black Camp People daily and after they were all killed up the Tories would all be Served in the same way."*⁸

Near the end of Messic's testimony he gives the names of those who accompanied Mr. Dutton (one of the leaders of the Black Camp Insurrection) on his return home.

"Tuesday Dutton told everyman to take care of themselves he then moved homewards with about 30 men in company viz. Sago Potter, Wm Ratcliffe, Jonathon Hemmons, John Carlile, Wm Dutton, Wm Collings, James Abbott of John Ivory Cornwell, Foster Dulaven, jr., Levin Vincent, Isaiah Johnson, Jewel Messix, James Messix, Job Messix at home on Wednesday til evening he went to John Ryleys to see if he would come and give himself up he went to bed and about midnight he was made prisoner by Joshua Hall and party."

In the testimony of Jeremiah Veatch, we learn the following:

"saith that he went to George Messicks, Monday the 6th of August, 1780 and marched with a company of men from there till we joined a company Commanded by Captain Banam who had some prisoners some of which was wounded in battle they had that day as they told us the Officers of the Company I went in

⁷ *Revolutionary War in Three Volumes, Volume 3*, page 1288, published by Public Archives Commission of Delaware.

⁸ *Revolutionary War in Three Volumes, Volume 3*, published by Public Archives Commission of Delaware.

was Commanded by Wm. Dutton, William Ratcliff First Liutenant, Job Townsend second Lewtenant, Sago Potter Clerk to said Company”⁹

At the Treason Trial of Sago Potter and others, the charge as read:

That Seago Potter being an inhabitant and subject of the Delaware State and owing allegiance to the Government thereof not having the fear of God in his heart but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil as a false Rebel and Traitor to the State by devising and most wickedly and traitorously intending to change and subvert the Rule and Government of the said State and reduce the same to the Domination of the King of Great Britain on the eighth day of August in the Year of the Lord One thousand seven hundred and eighty and at divers other days and times as well before as after at Broadkill, Broad Creek and Dagsbury Hundreds and at divers other places in the County afsd with a great multitude of other Traitors and Rebels to the State being Armed and Arrayed in a Warlike and hostile manner to wit with Guns, Pistols, Swords, Clubs and Divers other weapons as well Offensive and Defensive with Force and Arms did falsely & Traitorously Assemble and join themselves against the said State¹⁰

Asked how he would Acquit himself, Seago Potter declared that he was “*not thereof Guilty and thereof for good or ill he puts himself upon the County.*”¹¹

Seago and his seven co-defendants were all found guilty and sentenced to hang. However, in Sussex County, a county believed to have significant Loyalist sympathies this was not an easy nor popular outcome. Appeals were launched and in a few months the issue was addressed at the Delaware Statehouse. In November 1780 the Delaware General Assembly voted to pardon all those convicted of Treason in the Black Camp Rebellion Trial. Similar trials were held in Kent and New Castle counties with only a few leaders eventually being hung. However, there were other courses of action taken against prominent Delaware Loyalists.

Of the Loyalists of Sussex County, Delaware many had their lands seized and sold.

“Less than £ 100 000 in Pennsylvania currency was secured from the sale of property under this act, mostly from the receipts for the properties of Joshua North (£38,439) and Thomas Robinson (£34 177). Nine people in New Castle County and an equal number in Sussex County had their property confiscated and sold; no records exist for Kent County. More than twenty Delawareans migrated to Canada, especially to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, after the war. At least eight sought refuges in England. But a few returned to Delaware. Jacob Smith, a young farmer of Brandywine Hundred who had served in the British army, did not like Canada and returned in 1786. The health of Thomas Robinson was poor, and President Nicholas Van Dyke granted him permission to return in 1786. He spent his last years in Sussex County. Through the intercession of the French minister to the United States, Luke Shields, pilot, who had served first the British and then the French, was permitted to return to Sussex County. Living in Nova Scotia after the war were Thomas Robinson, Joshua Hill, Abraham Wiltbank, Samuel Edwards, Jacob Derickson, Jehu Hollingsworth, Joseph H. and Peter B. Burton and William Milby. Robinson and Hill were the two wealthiest and best-known Loyalists from Sussex County; both fled to the British lines because they were about to be arrested. Wiltbank, Edwards, and Milby were pilots. In exile in New Brunswick were Jacob Smith, Capt. Isaac Atwood of the King's American Regiment, Ens. Thomas Gill, Capt. Simon

⁹ *Revolutionary War in Three Volumes, Volume 3*, page 1296, published by Public Archives Commission of Delaware.

¹⁰ *Revolutionary War in Three Volumes, Volume 3*, page 1303, published by Public Archives Commission of Delaware.

¹¹ *Revolutionary War in Three Volumes, Volume 3*, page 1304, published by Public Archives Commission of Delaware.

Kollock of the Loyal American Regiment with his two sons, Charles Goff (pilot), John Greenwood, and James and William Springer. Living in Quebec Province was Benjamin Galloway.”¹²

Sago Potter and Prince Edward Island

As mentioned above Sago Potter, Loyalist, was awarded 500 acres of land in Lot 30, PEI. Did he sell the land? Did he have a family? A search of the land records at the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island found no record of Sago Potter ever selling or conveying his land grant. Sago Potter appears to have left PEI prior to the 1798 Census as there are no Potter families on PEI at that time.

However, the 1798 Census of the township of Charlottetown does list a John J. Potcher with a female and a female child under 16 years of age. A search of the PEI Public Archives concludes that there was no family named “Potcher” on PEI. It is very likely that this is one of the many family name transcription errors of Robert Fox, the Census taker. If this is so, John J. Potcher of the 1798 Census is most likely John J. Potter, who is possibly the son of Sago Potter or a servant/slave of Potter who adopted his surname. The Potter family of Charlottetown Royalty was of African lineage dating back prior to 1798 on PEI.

In an interesting twist the PEI Loyalist Land Claims Commission in 1856 had this to say about Sago Potter’s land:

“Regarding Lot 30, King George III directed the Governor of Nova Scotia to grant John Murray Lot 30 in 1767. In 1783 John Murray allocated a portion of his land in Lot 30 for Loyalists and Disbanded Troops as requested by the Colonial government. The government of St. John’s Island then allocated the land to eight Loyalist refugees and two disbanded soldiers in 1784. In 1790 John Murray sold Lot 30 to the Messrs. Montgomery for 5 shillings sterling.

By referring to the records of the Registrar’s Office, Your committee finds that no more than four grants have been issued by the Proprietor of Lot 30, and they were in favour of the following persons Hugh Fraser, James Fraser, Michael Jeffries, Sago Potter. The allocations to Hugh and James Fraser are still claimed by their representatives. The land granted to Michael Jeffries was not reserved in the land transfer on Lot 30 from the Messrs Montgomery to Mr. Stewart who exercises over it the right of ownership.

The land granted to Sagoe Potter was specially reserved by Messrs Montgomery when they sold the Lot to Mr. Stewart in 1842, but notwithstanding the specific reservation, Mr. Stewart has taken possession of the land and has leased a portion of it to Patrick Dougherty.”

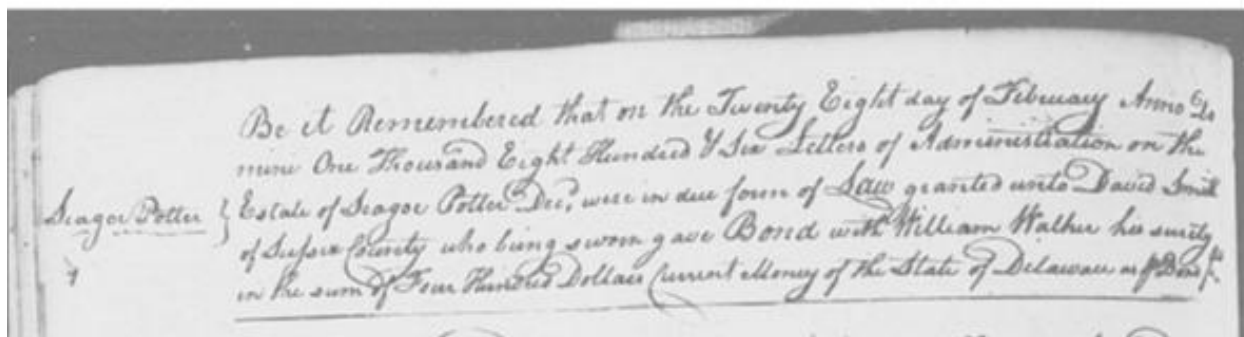
The Commission continues:

“And your Committee cannot help but express their emphatic condemnation of the gross injustice practiced by Mr. Stewart in claiming and attempting to claim the right of ownership over tracts of lands granted to the Loyalists without giving any consideration therefor and in one case as herein before particularly referred to usurping a certain piece of land without the shadow of a claim, reserved for Sagoe Potter and his descendants.”¹³

Below: The Estate Administration of Seagoe Potter c. 1806 courtesy of the State of Delaware Public Archives.

¹² *Liberty and Independence, The Delaware State During the American Revolution*, by Harold B. Hancock; pages 135-6, Delaware American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Wilmington, Delaware.

¹³ *The Examiner*, June 23, 1856, page 1; published in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.



Seagoe Potter died in early 1806 in Delaware. His estate administration in Sussex County, Delaware was dated February 26, 1806, with sales of the estate assets to be completed by February 28, 1807. The documentation does not list to whom the estate's value was to be paid, possibly indicating the Potter had died intestate. It is believed that Seagoe's wife Sarah Messick passed away after 1850 and it is likely to her whom the estate's value would be paid. Given that Potter was granted 500 acres in PEI he is most likely to have had 3 or more children as had the other Loyalist families in Lot 30 allotted 500 acres.

And so, we can see here that most likely Sagoe Potter had descendants and that they most likely had been in contact with the Commission regarding the Potter land claim. If this is true, were there Potter descendants on Prince Edward Island?

Historically, the name Potter on PEI continued for many generations as Black Islanders.

The Potter Family of Prince Edward Island

By Kevin Wisener U.E.

with assistance from our summer research intern, Zac Elsinga

Given that the African Canadian Potters of early Prince Edward Island may have had a familial connection to United Empire Loyalist Seago Potter of Delaware, it is important to acknowledge this connection and their lineage.

The reader should be aware that early records on Prince Edward Island did not record first and second-generation information of many Loyalist families, in part because of a lack of religious institutions which would have recorded births, marriages and deaths. That being said, the challenges for descendants of Island African families researching these early generations are much greater. A proposed reconstruction of the Potter family on PEI might appear as follows. Clearly, much information is missing, and this genealogy should be used as a guide until new information can be provided.

Generation 1:

1) John J. Potter, born c. 1770, residing in Charlottetown & Royalty in 1798 with a wife and daughter. The surname appears as "Potcher" in the 1798 Census, but research at the PEI Public Archives shows that no family of that name existed on PEI. It is most likely Potter.

Generation 2: Children of John J. Potter and his wife:

This generation includes the female recorded in the 1798 Census as well as two probable sons, who would have been born after the 1798 Census.

- 1.1) Female Potter, born between 1790 and 1798
- 1.2) Thomas Potter, born c. 1799, married Mary (Unknown)
- 1.3) Peter Potter, born c. 1805, married Susan Doherty

Generation 3: Children of Thomas Potter and Mary

The families of this generation are recorded in the St. Dunstan's Roman Catholic Church records at Charlottetown, where most of the Potter family appear to have converted to Catholicism prior to 1818. Thomas Potter leased land in 1823 on Lot 30. Loyalist Seago Potter was granted 500 acres in Lot 30, but the Land Commission records of 1856 show that the land was not preserved for Potter's descendants after Seago Potter returned to Delaware.

- 1.2.1) John Potter, born August 12, 1818, on Prince Edward Island; died December 10, 1903, Irishtown, New Brunswick; married Mary Hattrick of Prince Edward Island, born in Scotland; moved to New Brunswick. John Potter was a farmer.
- 1.2.2) Catherine Potter, born c. 1818-1822; had a daughter Caroline McNevin out of wedlock with Cowen McNevin, baptized at St. Dunstan's Basilica.
- 1.2.3) Amelia Potter, born c. 1823 on Prince Edward Island
- 1.2.4) James Potter, born c. 1823 on Prince Edward Island. He did not marry.

Generation 3: Children of Peter Potter and his first wife Susanna "Susan" Doherty

- 1.3.1) Susanna Potter, born 1825
- 1.3.2) Edward Potter, born 1827

Children of Peter Potter and his second wife Mary Carpenter

- 1.3.3) Mary Potter, born October 1839

Children of Peter Potter and his third wife Emilia (Amelia) Potter

- 1.3.4) Francis Potter, born c. July 1841

Generation 4: Children of John Potter and Mary Hattrick residing in Westmoreland County, New Brunswick

- 1.2.1.1 Caroline Potter, born March 17, 1852, on Prince Edward Island; died March 4, 1936, at Shediac, New Brunswick.
- 1.2.1.2 William Potter, born c. 1855; married Bella Shepherd in 1876; resided in Charlottetown Royalty
- 1.2.1.3 Ellenor Potter, born c. 1862.
- 1.2.1.4 George Potter, born c. 1866
- 1.2.1.5 Georgina Potter, born c. 1868