

# Clara Clare BIOGRAPHY CARD

*Reproduced with permission from Irene Bjerky, Clara Clare's great-granddaughter.*

**Clara Clare (1881-1974) was a leader in her church community at St. John the Divine, in Yale, B.C., where she helped repair textiles that had become worn over time and use. She attended All Hallows School for Indian Girls between from 1889 to about 1902, when she married.**

Clara, known to all her grandchildren and great-grandchildren as "Nana", lived the European ideal of an Indigenous student who married and became, for all intents and purposes, completely anglicized, yet privately retained her native customs and skills. She came from a background where she did not know her real father, and she had brothers and sisters who had different fathers. Her mother, Amelia York, had four husbands: two who moved on, one who died (Clara's father), and one whom she married and spent the rest of her life with. The only father Clara ever knew was Joe York, her mother's legal (and last) husband. This story reflects the challenges of that time and paints a portrait of a family in transition.

Clara Dominic was born in Spuzzum, B.C., as a member of the Nlaka'pamux Nation, known more commonly as the Fraser Thompson tribe. Amelia, Clara's mother, was a fine basketmaker and her baskets were so exceptional that anthropologist James Teit recorded her in his book *Coiled Basketry in British Columbia and Surrounding Region* as Informant #30. Clara's father was named Harris (his first name is unknown), and he was an Indigenous man with a racially-mixed background from the Skeena River area. Harris worked as a telegrapher for the Canadian Pacific Railway and was killed on the job during railroad construction in about 1884. No further records have been found about his life.

According to her family's oral accounts, Clara was descended from Chief Pelek of Spuzzum who greeted Simon Fraser in 1808 as he passed through on his exploration of the Fraser River. Clara's great-granddaughter Irene Bjerky shares what she knows about this part of their family history:

"Nana always kept up the custom of hiking up to Frozen Lake, a traditional destination for our family, located above Yale, picking blueberries and huckleberries along the way. My mother also remembers many mushroom-picking trips on the mountain.

My mother, Clara Chrane remembers Nana sitting down to rest on a trip to Frozen Lake and telling her the story of how Chief Pelek shot the arrow across the bow of Fraser's canoe. She had the distinct impression that Nana was discouraged from discussing her aboriginal heritage at home, but felt comfortable about it while up in the mountains."

In about 1889, when Clara was eight years old, a group of Anglican nuns took her by train from Spuzzum to the All Hallows Mission School for Indian Girls at Yale. At All Hallows, Clara learned homemaking skills which were considered important for women in that time period, such as sewing, baking, cooking, gardening, laundry, needlework, and basket making. She received several school award medals for these skills. Clara also learned the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Indigenous girls were taught enough to get by in everyday life but did not receive the same level of education as European girls who attended public or faith-based schools and could go on to university. Indigenous girls were given an education that would allow them to live in the new European-based society and were expected to be able to do housekeeping and raise children in the European ideal. Clara did well in all respects and her specialty at school was bread baking.

She stayed at All Hallows until her marriage late in 1902 to William Frank Clare, an Englishman from Devonshire who worked as a section man for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Their wedding was enthusiastically proclaimed in the 1903 All Hallows Digest, and the little magazine mentions her in several instances after that, during visits, either by her to the school with her children or of other "school daughters" staying with her or stopping in for shelter from a storm.

Clara continued to be very involved with the Anglican Church after her marriage. She taught Sunday School for many years, and her register is kept in the museum. She did most of the needlework repairs on the much-used church textiles in the St. John the Divine Church.

Clara and Frank Clare raised five children, one who died in her early thirties and four who lived to have grandchildren, who knew Grandma Clara as "Nana". Several of their descendants still live in the Yale area. Clara and Frank's children were: Catherine, Leonard, Sidney, Elizabeth May, and Dorothy.

Frank Clare died in 1948, and Clara lived on to enjoy her grandchildren until 1974, when she peacefully passed away in the Chilliwack Hospital at the age of 92.