

**An Account of Ezekiel James, Jr., (1782-1870) of Uxbridge  
and the  
Murder of His Son, Isaac James, in 1828.**

*compiled by Sandra McCann Fuller*

The family of Ezekiel James (1736-1807) was amongst those early Quaker pioneer families who migrated from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada in the first few years of the 19th century. The James family received a certificate of removal, addressed to Pelham Monthly Meeting, dated 24th of 9th month 1803, signed by Isaac Wiggins and Mercy Loyd, clerks of Catawissa Monthly Meeting of Friends. The family of Ezekiel James, his wife Kesiah, with three minor children - Isaac, Harvey, and Lydia, and four adult children - John, Ann, Hannah, and Ezekiel Jr, set out on their journey to a new home in the wilderness. Isaac Coates, who travelled to the Niagara Frontier in 1803 as part of the Indian Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, reported that on their return trip from visiting Friends in Pelham Monthly Meeting (established 1799), they rode to the abode of Mr Beech, in the wilderness of Western New York State where they met with two families from Cattawissa, one of which was Ezekiel James's who were moving to Yonge Street in Upper Canada. They all lodged in this cabin, being twenty-three of them, besides the family

Because he was an older man, Ezekiel James required the convenience of a location on Yonge Street. In 1803, he purchased a farm on the east side of Yonge Street, near the Holland River, Lot No.84 in the Township of Whitchurch (between Aurora and Newmarket), thus leaving the application for a grant of land to his younger son, Ezekiel James Jr.

Ezekiel James Jr, son of Ezekiel & Keziah (Harvey) James, was born 6th 6 month 1782 in Chester County, Pennsylvania.. After helping to clear and settle his father's farm on

Yonge Street, he decided to strike out on his own and became one of the first settlers in the Township of Uxbridge. The north-west corner of the township was taken up in 1805 by those who were mostly Quakers from Pennsylvania. In June 1805, Ezekiel James Jr petitioned for land, stating that he had lived in the province for 18 months, and that he was 23 years of age.

Ezekiel James of Whitchurch, Yeoman, late from Pennsylvania, One of the People called Quakers, five feet ten inches high, grey eyes, light hair, twenty-two years old, having made the Affirmation of Allegiance and Declaration prescribed by law, do subscribe the same at York, the 5th Day of June 1805.

Before me, William Willcocks J.P.  
Ezekiel James

After having been recommended for 200 acres of land on June 13 1805, he received a patent on September 26, 1805 for Lot 32 in the 5th Concession in the Township of Uxbridge. Part of the Lot stayed in the family until 1881 when his grandson, Alonzo James, sold the last 10 acres to Samuel Ball.

Some two years later, on 28th 5 month 1807, at Yonge Street Monthly Meeting of Friends, Upper Canada, Ezekiel James Jr married Ruth Lundy, the daughter of Enos & Rachel (Carpenter) Lundy. Ruth Lundy was born 22nd 3 month 1789. After living in a log house for a number of years while he was clearing his land and establishing his farm, Ezekiel James Jr, an industrious farmer, had prospered sufficiently to have a large two-

storey stone house constructed on Lot 32 which would accommodate his large family. Ezekiel & Ruth (Lundy) James) were the parents of 10 children, five sons and four daughters who lived to adulthood -

1. Isaac James, born May 10, 1808, murdered September 24, 1828
2. Job James (1810-1859) m 1840 Hannah Palmer Moore (1817-1905), daughter of Andrew & Agnes (Brown) Moore
3. Samuel James, born/died 1812
4. John James (1813-1876) m 1837 Rachel Widdifield (1819-1899), daughter of William & Anna (Willson) Widdifield
5. Ann James, born/died 1815
6. Mary James (1816-1891) m 1839 Joseph Gould (1808-1886), son of Jonathan & Rachel (Lee) Gould
7. Rachel James (1818-1892) m i) 1840 - Gideon Vernon (1821-1850), son of Nathaniel M. Vernon & Mary (Phillips) Vernon; married ii) 1855 - Rev'd Thomas Foster (18??-1890)
8. Sarah/Sally James (1820-18??) m 1839 John Vernon (18??-1870), son of Nathaniel & Mary (Phillips) Vernon
9. Harvey James (1826-1850)
10. Lydia James

Quakers have always held a strong belief in education. Ezekiel James contributed liberally to providing schooling for young people. Coincidentally with the passing of a School Act in 1816, their eldest son, Isaac James, and other youngsters in the neighbourhood, including Joseph Gould who was the same age as Isaac, were ready for some more formal instruction. In 1817, Ezekiel James had erected at his own expense a log school, the first school in the township, and sustained it for several years. It was built at Quaker Hill on the north-west corner of Lot 31 in the 6th Concession, about where the Newmarket-Uxbridge settlement trail crossed the 6th Concession Road. The next closest school was in the Quaker Settlement on

Yonge Street near Newmarket where Joseph Hilborn, son of Thomas & Sarah (Brundage) Hilborn of Uxbridge, replaced Timothy Rogers Jr, its first schoolmaster. Joseph Gould attended this log school at Uxbridge and recalled that 'a little Irishman was employed to teach in the school, but the teacher was, like the house, a very poor one.' Schools were to be available for the use of Anglican clergy on Sunday. On several occasions, the Revd Adam Elliot preached and performed baptisms in this log school. An entry in his journal for 1833 reported that 'the congregation [at Uxbridge] consisted of between fifty and sixty persons who were assembled in the schoolhouse belonging to Mr James.' In 1834, he again arrived in Uxbridge Township, and the first night he 'lodged at the house of Mr James.' The log school became known officially as the James School, and was used until about 1856 when a frame building was erected nearby.

Ezekiel James, a very honest, industrious, prudent man, and a good farmer, made himself wealthy as compared with farmers generally. He was very charitable and kind to the poor and needy settlers who came in after him, and being always forehanded, his granary was a reservoir for such poor settlers as frequently ran short of bread before harvest, and he often lent and gave away provisions without ever asking or thinking of a return.

The month of September 1828 blew an ill wind in the direction of the Quaker communities in which two persons by the name of Isaac James lived. After the War of 1812, in 1815, Isaac James, the brother of Ezekiel James of Uxbridge, had moved from Yonge Street UC to settle in the vicinity of Concord Meeting at Mount Pleasant, Ohio. In 1828, he became involved in the Separation which had disastrous effects upon Friends in America. Dissent about interpretation of Quaker doctrines climaxed at Ohio Yearly Meeting held at Mount Pleasant, Ohio. The proceedings became so turbulent that the Evangelical

Friends charged a number of the Friends of Hicks with trespassing, disturbing a religious society, and gathering to commit a riot. They were required to appear before a judge at Steubenville, Ohio, where David Hilles, Clerk of Redstone Quarterly Mtg, and Isaac James were found guilty of disturbing a religious gathering and fined five dollars each.

Meanwhile, in the backwoods of Upper Canada, events were unfolding which brought about the murder of Isaac James, the eldest son and firstborn child of Ezekiel & Ruth (Lundy) James. It is a tragic tale which James descendants have heard from childhood. Ezekiel James had a great fondness for fine horses. He had a very fine span of dappled-grey mares, with black manes and tails, which were the admiration of the whole country round about. He was very proud of them and always drove them himself.

In 1828, Ezekiel James had hired an Irishman by the name of John Christie to help him through with the harvest. Christie and his wife, Catharine, had resided for a month or two on the farm of Ezekiel James. As part of the compensation, Mr James had agreed to move Christie, his wife and two children, to York at the end of the season. They then wished to go to the States.

Just at the time that he was to take Christie to York, Ezekiel James was taken down with a sickness. Christie persuaded Mr James to send his horses and waggon with them as far as York. Although Mr James had not allowed him to drive the young mares, there was no alternative but to allow his eldest son, Isaac, to take his place and drive the team. Young Isaac James was a fine young fellow of twenty years, with an amiable disposition, much loved by all who knew him. Isaac had never made the journey alone before, but he received all proper advice and directions from his parents. The mares were hitched to a light double-waggon with hoops bent over the box and a canvas cover over all. The Christie family with their bed and traps were loaded

into the waggon and they started upon the long journey of going to and returning from York which was to take four days of travel. According to Hannah Hutcheson, they set off about 11 o'clock on Wednesday morning, 24th September.

In those days, the only way to get from Uxbridge to York was by way of Newmarket and Yonge Street. The loneliest part of the way was through the fourteen miles of solid bush between Uxbridge and Newmarket with the road merely brushed out around the trees. In the afternoon, about 6 or 7 miles from Ezekiel James's at Uxbridge, John Plank met Isaac James and the Christie family in the woods, with no houses nearby. Christie was walking about 5 or 6 rods ahead of the waggon, with a gun in his hand. About 5 or 6 o'clock, further on 8 or 9 miles, and 13 or 14 miles from James's house, Moses Reeder saw Ezekiel James's team, but he did not see young James in the waggon - a stranger was driving the team. As soon as he had committed the murder, Christie drove off with the horses. Samuel Balls reported that he had seen the team go by that day and they were driving very fast.

About evening, Christie arrived at Yonge Street, about Gamble's, and stopped for a short time at Raymond's, then proceeded to York but avoided the usual stopping places. On their arrival in York, Christie took the waggon and horses to the Blue Bell, and went down alone to Thompson's Tavern to get a sum of money owed to him. Before Christie and his wife had gone out to Uxbridge, they had spent five days in Thompson's hotel. Mr Thompson reported that Christie had allowed her to take her food alone, while he himself ate with the boarders, and he judged that she was under great fear of her husband. Charles Thompson reported that Christie came for \$38. which he had left with him in part payment of a lot of land. Thompson concluded that Christie had quarreled with his wife as he said that he had left her at Ezekiel James's,

and was going to the States. Thomas Richardson, landlord of the Blue Bell, saw the woman as they took breakfast at his house but did not see the man. He had heard that the next night they slept at Sumner's. As soon as was possible, Christie took the road to the west of York which went round the head of Lake Ontario to Niagara Falls, and from there he took the Ridge Road through Rochester and on to Troy, New York State.

The trip to York and back usually took three days, so Isaac was not expected home until after the fourth day. His absence up to that time would have caused no uneasiness were it not for a dream which greatly troubled his mother. The night of the day on which he left home, she was awakened repeatedly by a dream where she saw her son wounded, bruised and bloody, groaning in pain and agony. She was by no means a superstitious woman, nor were any of the staid James Quaker family that way disposed. Terribly troubled, she aroused the whole household. She was anxious to set out and make enquiries on the road but Mr James, who was laid up with typhoid fever, had no fear of anything being wrong and would not consent to her going. When Isaac did not arrive home after the fourth night, they were uneasy, and on the fifth day, his mother, who was noted for her good riding, accompanied by her son, John, set out on horseback, taking the trail through the bush to Newmarket, searching the woods on her way. At one point, when within about a mile of being through the twelve miles of woods, the horses snorted and shied off as they passed a log-heap beside the road track, but it was thought that their fright was caused by a wild animal. Her fears were increased from making enquiries on the way and hearing that the horses had not been at their usual place of rest, and therefore that they must have been turned from the correct route. They pressed onward until they reached the home of Mrs James's brother, Isaac Lundy, at Whitchurch Township, where they expected

to learn news of Isaac and the team, but they had not been seen.

Realizing that Isaac might have come to harm, Mr Lundy immediately went along Yonge Street to make enquiries at the blacksmith shop where the horses had been frequently shod. The blacksmith told him that he had seen the team pass his shop on the day they had left home, but that a strange man was driving them, with a woman and children. He had seen nothing of Isaac. The whole neighbourhood was alarmed at the news. When retiring to rest that night at her brother's house, Mrs James was very much agitated and was greatly alarmed by hearing a voice say most distinctly three times over, 'In the woods!' She immediately got up and informed her brother, and persisted in saying that her son was murdered in the woods. Mr Lundy finally yielded to her entreaties and started off a messenger on horseback to Uxbridge to get a party of searchers to start from that place while he organized a party commencing from the Whitchurch end. Settlers in Whitchurch, East Gwillimbury, and Uxbridge Townships, were greatly shocked and joined the search parties.

The next day, Tuesday 30 September, Mrs James led the search party which set out from her brother's place in Whitchurch Township. After about two hours' search, the body of Isaac James was found on the road side by the Whitchurch party. Mr Widdifield first saw the body. Samuel Balls reported that the body lay about 3 rods from the waggon track, on the other side of a log heap. When John Plank saw the body of Isaac near the log heap, he concluded that it appeared as if he had been struggling as one of his hands was grasped full of dirt.

As there were, at that time, no railroad or telegraph lines, it was easy for criminals to get away by crossing over into the States. A notice, dated the same day as the body was found, September 30th 1828, at Whitchurch, Upper Canada, was placed in the name of the

grief-stricken father, Ezekiel James, in the *Colonial Advocate* newspaper at York, and published on Friday, October 2, 1828.. Editors of newspapers in Canada and the United States were requested to insert the notice in their newspapers for the sake of justice and humanity. In response to the horrible deed, the government of Upper Canada placed a notice of a reward of £100 in the *Upper Canada Gazette* published on Thursday, October 16, 1828.

Christie had kept traveling until he had reached the city of Troy in the State of New York where he had quietly settled down, thinking that all danger had passed and that he was perfectly safe. But the Governor's proclamation offering ^100 for his apprehension, and the description of the horses, whose conspicuous appearance made them remembered all along the road he had travelled, soon secured his arrest and extradition to Canada.

The news of the reward offered by the Government soon reached the city of Troy. John N. Barhyde [sheriff?] who lived in Schenectady NY had seen Christie's description in a small advertisement which he cut out of the newspaper. He first saw him with a load of corn on his waggon going down towards the ferry. Barhyde took Christie prisoner and arranged for his conveyance to York for trial. When they were first apprehended, Mrs Christie told several versions about the event ñ but when John told her in Irish, *be husht* she then stopt her stories. Christie's explanation was that Ezekiel James had owed him money and he had taken the team for his pay.

The reward offered by the Government spurred many to pursue the murderer, and there are a number of accounts of his capture. According to Joseph Gould's account, William Reid of Sharon UC, a high-spirited young fellow, was foremost amongst those in pursuit. On horseback, he reached Hamilton where enquiries placed him on the track which he followed until he reached Troy,

New York. En route, he distributed copies of the proclamation offering the reward and containing the description of the murderer and the team of horses. Reid posted a copy of the proclamation in the bar-room at Troy. A young man by the name of Brown asked for a copy and started out for a farm near Troy where he had seen a man and a team answering the description. Brown apprehended Christie, and refused to give up the prisoner to the Canadian who had the warrant for his arrest. Brown delivered Christie to the Canadian authorities himself and got the reward.

Samuel Brown had first become acquainted with John Christie and his wife before the murder was committed. He met them at Mr Gamble's on Yonge Street and had several other conversations with Christie when they were moving up to the Quaker Settlement. He next saw them in Schenectady jail after the murder had taken place. Brown reported that on the trip back to York, between Rochester and Lockport, they were accompanied by a Baptist Preacher who was the only person, in his opinion, who ever made any alteration in or impression upon Christie's feelings. On conversing with this minister, Christie and his wife shed tears. John Christie said, 'Mr Brown, it is useless for people to question me about this fact I know I shall be tried by the law and am willing to die for it.' Says Mrs Christie, 'Och, och, John,' in their Irish way, 'I am willing to die with you.' The cook who heard her, said, 'Foolish woman, what will become of your children?' The reply was, they would be taken care of. Soon after, she said she was neither willing nor fit to die ñ another time, she said she was a quarter of a mile off when the murder took place, and wearied for John's coming up. In giving an account of the arrest of John Christie, near the Nine Locks, for the murder of Isaac James in Upper Canada, *The Waterford Reporter*, revealed that on the examination of one of their children, a boy, four years old, it appeared by his story, that he saw his father

murder James, and that his mother assisted in committing the horrid deed!

The case was tried immediately on their arrival at York, as the Court was sitting at the time, and Christie was tried, convicted, and executed, in a matter of days. In those days, communications may have been slower - but justice was swifter. The trial of John Christie, and Catherine his wife, for the murder of Isaac James, was tried on Monday 27th October 1828 before Mr Justice Hagerman. The Court was greatly crowded. The indictment set forth, that the husband, on Wednesday, 24th September 1828, had shot Isaac James and had beaten him with an axe or other instrument on the back of his head and killed him and that the wife had abetted and assisted in the cruel acts. The husband pleaded guilty and the wife not guilty. The male prisoner was then ordered to be removed.

George S. Boulton was requested to give his aid as a professional man. The jury consisted of Wm Elliot, John Hayden, Jonathan Gates, Peter Lytle, John Hawkins, W. Devenish, John Richardson, Daniel Knowles, Bradshaw McMurray, John Ashton, A.A. Thompson, and W. Richardson. The Attorney General briefly stated the circumstances under which the murder had been perpetrated. Doctors Biswick, Thompson, Auldjo, and Widmer were called to describe the number and nature of the wounds inflicted on the body.

Mr Stanton JP, who had examined the prisoner and her husband in the police office, took their depositions and John Christie acknowledged that he had killed the deceased by several blows. He acquitted his wife of participation. Catharine Christie said that being unwell she went a piece ahead of the waggon, and when her husband came up she asked where Isaac was. He said it was none of her business and she at last got into the waggon.

The evidence of Mr Widdifield who first discovered the body, could not be received because of his being a Quaker. It was stated

that the settlement at Whitchurch was inhabited chiefly by Quakers who do not swear and whose testimony could not be taken as the law stood at that time.

Mr Hagerman charged the jury - the jury brought in a verdict of acquittal and the woman was discharged from the bar after receiving a wholesome admonition from the bench.

John Christie, the murderer of the youth Isaac James, was brought up and placed at the bar. He was sentenced to be hanged on Thursday October 30th, and his body to be dissected and anatomized.

A few years later, in 1830, there occurred a bizarre coincidence. Because of a growth in his nose, Joseph Gould and his father were advised to call upon Dr Widmer at York. Gould recalled,

The housemaid ushered us into a consulting room which she had kept darkened to keep out the flies ... After sitting down, I leant back in my seat and something that felt bony and uncanny touched my head and made a rattling noise. As I turned to see what damage I had done, the girl raised the blind to let in the light, and behold there, to my horror, was a human skeleton! Just at this moment, Dr Widmer came in and, laughing heartily at my fright, pointed to the skeleton, That is Christie who murdered young James.

In a tribute to the life of Isaac James, memorial verses were composed by Wing Rogers, printed and distributed.

For a number of reasons, Ezekiel James took an interest in the future of Joseph Gould and through him, the future of Uxbridge. He was a great lover of his country, preferring no country to Canada. He encouraged Gould to see what fortune would bring his way by staying in Canada instead of going to the States. The sound business advice which

Ezekiel James offered soon brought about an improvement in his worldly circumstances. By 1835, 27 year old Joseph Gould was thinking about finding a helpmate for life - one whose social position, habits of industry, and feelings and sympathies, and religious sentiments should harmonize with his own. Their neighbour, Ezekiel James, the leading man in the community, had three fine daughters whom his excellent wife, Ruth, had carefully brought up and well trained both as to religion and the practical duties of housewifery. The three of them were blooming into womanhood at this time. They dressed strictly in the old Quaker style - rich, plain, clean, and tidy - and to Joseph Gould's mind, no dress in the world set off a young woman so well as the Quaker dress. Ezekiel James, who had been a friend and counsellor, invited him to his house where Joseph renewed his visits by going home with the girls from meeting. He soon found that Mary, the oldest of the James girls, born in 1816 and nearly eight years younger than Joseph, had quite an attraction for him. Mr & Mrs James were pleased to receive him as a son-in-law, and his parents were satisfied with his choice. Joseph Gould's own prosperity and the commercial benefits which he gained for the community caused him to be considered the founder of the Town of Uxbridge.

Ezekiel James was a very quiet inoffensive man, and one who would rather suffer wrong than do wrong, and was therefore esteemed by all. He was a strict member of the Society of Friends and brought up his family as strict members of that profession of faith. He provided well for his family and bought farms for his sons and settled them down beside him, and left all his descendants well provided for. A liberal in his politics, with his vote and influence he always supported the reform cause. He was a great lover of home, preferring no farm to his own. He and his wife lived happily on the same farm for over sixty years. Ruth (Lundy) James died 27th 6

month 1870, and Ezekiel James died about six weeks later on 13th August 1870. Both are buried in the Friends' Burying Ground, Quaker Hill, Uxbridge, Ontario.

*Sandra McCann Fuller is an archivist and heritage consultant who lives in Newmarket, Ontario.*

**Sources:**

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*Colonial Advocate*, No.228 (Third Series), York, October 2, 1828, p2, and  
*UPPER CANADA GAZETTE*, Vol.3/No. 21, York, Upper Canada, Thursday, October 16, 1828, p. 86

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"Another Old Pioneer Gone" [obituary, Ezekiel James] in *The Uxbridge Journal*, Uxbridge Village, Ontario, Vol.2/No.11, Wednesday, August 17, 1870, p. 2

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## **MURDER AND ROBBERY!**

Notice is hereby given, that on Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> September 1828, Isaac, the son of Ezekiel James, was murdered on the road between Uxbridge & Whitchurch, Upper Canada, as is supposed by a person calling himself JOHN CHRISTIE, alias JOHN WELMAN. John Christie, with his family, consisting of a wife and two children, had residing in Uxbridge, about two months, and becoming dissatisfied with the country, requested the said Ezekiel James to send his son with horses and waggon to move him with his family to York UC which was done; but the young man not returning at the time expected, a search was made, and the body was found, on the 30<sup>th</sup> September, lying on the back of a log-heap, where said road crosses the 6<sup>th</sup> Concession of Whitchurch, with severe wounds on his head.

### JOHN CHRISTIE

is about 5 feet 6 inches high, tolerably stout, dark eyes and hair, but of a fair complexion, full face, apparently from 25 to 30 years of age, and a native of Ireland. When he left Uxbridge, he had on a dark-coloured dress. His wife, who accompanied him, is a middle-sized woman, with black hair, blue eyes, and thin face, much marked with the small pox. The oldest child is a son, about 5 years old, the younger, a daughter, about a year old, both red hair, fair skin, and full freckled faces.

The waggon which was stolen with two mares, was a good one, with white linen cover - one of the mares was about 16 hands high, dapple grey, with dark legs and face; the other, is an iron grey, about 15 hands high; each about 6 or 7 years old.

Any person who may apprehend the said John Christie, alias Welman, and his wife, or either of them, shall receive a handsome reward from the subscriber, father to the murdered boy.

Whitchurch, Upper Canada, September 30<sup>th</sup> 1828    EZEKIEL JAMES

Editors of papers in Canada and the United States are requested to insert the above for the sake of justice and humanity.

*Colonial Advocate*, No.228 (Third Series), York, October 2, 1828, p2



By Authority.  
**PROCLAMATION**  
**MURDER AND ROBBERY**  
**£100 REWARD**  
**UPPER CANADA**

*By His Excellency Sir Peregrine Maitland, K.C.B., Lieutenant Governor of our Province aforesaid, and Major General Commanding His Majesty's Forces therein, &c, &c, &c*

WHEREAS, a young Man named Isaac James, Son of Ezekiel James, of the Township of Uxbridge, in the Home District, of this Province, was found dead behind a log heap near the road side, in the Township of Whitchurch on the thirtieth day of September, instant, and from several gun-shot, and other wounds inflicted upon his person, no doubt can exist of his having been barbarously murdered; and from his having left home, six days previously, in company with **JOHN CHRISTIE**, whom he was conveying with his Wife and Family to York in a Waggon, and the said JOHN CHRISTIE, with his Family having absconded with the Waggon and Horses, there is every reason to believe that the said JOHN CHRISTIE hath committed the atrocious act.

**NOW KNOW YE**, that the above Reward will be paid to any person who shall apprehend the said JOHN CHRISTIE, and cause him to be brought before any Justice of the Peace of this Province, to be dealt with according to the Law.

Given under my Hand and Seal of Office, at York, this Thirtieth day of September, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand, Eight Hundred and Twenty-eight, and in the Ninth year of His Majesty's Reign.

By Command of His Excellency. Peregrine Maitland.  
H. J. BOULTON, *Solicitor General*,  
D. CAMERON, *Secretary*.

*UPPER CANADA GAZETTE*, Vol.3/No.21, York, Upper Canada,  
Thursday, October 16, 1828, p. 86