

Four Generations of Pioneering from Markham to the Great Divide

A Historical Fiction of the Haacke Family — Markham to Montana

A standalone companion piece — not part of the genealogical chapter— written to a large degree by the AI program Claude and modified by myself in a number of places. 20 July, 2026

I. The Corduroy Road — Henry² Haacke, Markham to Goderich, 1834–1837

The road west out of Markham did not, in those years, deserve the name. What passed for the Huron Road beyond Guelph was a track the Canada Company's own laborers had cut through a wall of standing timber only a few years before — swamp and virgin forest laid open just wide enough for a wagon, and "paved," where it was paved at all, with corduroy: whole logs laid crosswise over the mud, so that a wagon crossing it did not so much roll as lurch, log to log, for mile after bruising mile. A Scottish traveler who'd made the trip from Guelph to Goderich not long before Henry and Nancy Haacke made their own said two-thirds of the road was crossway like that, and that here and there a tree four feet through had simply been left standing in the middle of it, too large for the road crew to be bothered clearing. Whole families made that trip regardless — oxcart, one good horse if they were fortunate, children walking alongside more often than not to spare the animals — and Henry, twenty-four that year, with Nancy Alexander three years married to him, made it too, in 1834, following a pull west that half of young Markham seemed to feel at once.

What drew them was the same thing that had drawn thousands of others to that particular corner of Upper Canada: the Canada Company's million acres of Huron Tract land, opened for sale in parcels a settler could actually afford — seven shillings sixpence an acre, a down payment and the rest paid over five years, if a man could manage it. Goderich itself, when the Haackes arrived, was barely a decade past its founding — John Galt and the famous "Tiger" Dunlop had cracked a bottle of champagne over the townsite in 1827 and called it a beginning, and a beginning was more or less what it still was: log cabins, a Company office, a scatter of French, English, and Scots families and the Anishinaabe and Métis guides and hunters whose knowledge of the country the Company depended on more than it generally cared to admit. By the time Henry and Nancy settled in, Goderich held perhaps a few hundred souls; within a decade it would be a town of shops and mills and over a thousand people, but

that was still ahead of them in 1834. What was in front of them was bush to be cleared, a cabin to be raised with whatever timber came off that clearing, and a long first winter to be gotten through on whatever they'd managed to put by.

Henry bought his own lot — 478 — in the spring of 1837, the same year the whole colony came apart at the seams over grievances that had been building for a decade: a government that answered to a small entrenched class rather than to the farmers and shopkeepers who made up most of the province, a Reform movement that had tried petitions and elections and been rebuffed at every turn, and finally, in December, an armed rising under William Lyon Mackenzie that marched down Yonge Street and came apart in a single ragged skirmish before most of the men involved had gotten off a shot. Word of it reached Goderich only in pieces, days behind the event itself, the way all news reached the Huron Tract in those years — by rider, by rumor, each account a little different from the last. The district could raise only fifteen able-bodied men to answer the call for a temporary militia to guard against the rebellion spreading west. Henry was one of them, alongside D. H. Ritchie and John Morgan, names that would keep reappearing beside his own for the next thirty years, in land deeds and council votes and each other's mortgages. Under Capt. Lisgars of Goderich, and the eccentric, well-traveled Dr. Dunlop as their colonel, the fifteen of them spent that hard winter of 1837–38 stationed at a bare crossroads that had no name of its own yet — the corners where the town of Clinton would eventually rise — watching an empty road for a rebellion that had already broken apart hundreds of miles to the east.

It would be another four years, 1841, before Henry began buying land in earnest in Stanley Township, the eighteen acres on lot 10, Range E, that put him within reach of the little settlement at Bayfield; two more years before he was properly counted among the early settlers of the Goshen Line; and not until 1848 that he and Nancy actually made Bayfield home. There, on Bayfield Terrace, with the river, the harbour, and the lake all visible at once before the trees grew up to block the view, Henry raised an old Canada Company log store into something the county would remember — the River Hotel, built up in additions until it ran twenty-three rooms deep, framed, the family always said, on the very same principle his twin brother George used a province away in Markham: one great shaft of timber spanning the whole width of the structure, as if twins, whatever distance came between them, kept building from the same plan.

II. The Long River — David³ Haacke, Bayfield to the Bitterroot, 1871

David, one of Henry and Nancy's sons, left Bayfield at twenty-seven, in 1871, for a country that made even the raw Huron Tract of his father's youth look settled by comparison. By then the fastest and cheapest way into the Montana Territory was neither wagon nor rail but river: a steamboat up the Missouri from St. Louis, a journey of some twenty-six hundred miles that took, in a good year, about two months and cost in the neighborhood of a hundred and fifty dollars — a fare that bought a man deck passage, his own provisions, and a berth among the ten thousand or so who made that same run toward the goldfields in those years. The boats ran only a matter of weeks each spring and early summer, while the river carried enough water to float them; miss that window and a traveler waited for the water to rise again, or went overland instead, by wagon roads that moved at fifteen miles a day behind ox teams and cost a man five months to cover what the river could, at its best, do in two. However, David made the crossing — steamboat to Fort Benton and freight wagon on from there, most likely, following the same route that carried nearly everything and everyone into the territory in those years — he arrived in a Montana still measured by rivers and wagon roads rather than rails, the railroad still more than a decade off.

He went first to Granite, where prospectors had been finding color in the ground since the mid-1860s, and worked whatever smelting and milling work the district could offer a strong young man with no experience in hard-rock mining beyond his own two hands. The lead in that ore likely began, in those years, the slow work that would eventually take his sight — a cost the men who worked those smelters rarely knew they were paying until decades after the fact. He helped Louis Clairmont finish the grist mill down in the Bitterroot Valley and sacked its first flour himself; he drove freight wagons of that same flour back up to the mining camps, where it sold, delivered, for a dollar a pound — freight rates being what they were in a territory with no railroad yet and every pound of goods dependent on the same ox teams and wagon roads that had carried David himself into the country. He set an orchard in the valley and grafted it by hand, hauling the fruit to Missoula by team years before the rails reached that far either.

In July of 1875, thirty-one years old, David married Harriet Louisa Phelps — fourteen when her own family left Illinois in a covered wagon, fifteen when she became his wife. Her father had once practiced law alongside Abraham Lincoln; she herself had seen Lincoln's body lying in its coffin at the age of five. She and her three brothers had come into Montana the same way half the territory's settlers came

into it in that decade, by wagon and by whatever combination of river and road the year and the water allowed. In May of 1876, word passed through the valley that a party of Nez Perce, longtime rivals of the local Flathead people, might be moving through — and the women and children of the Bitterroot, Harriet among them, sheltered at the reconstructed Fort Owen while the men, David included, rode out to see what was coming. That crossing, as it happened, passed without violence; the following year the same road through the mountains would carry a different band of Nez Perce toward the fighting at the Big Hole, a battle that would help push the Flathead Reservation into being not long after. One of the men who passed through the Bitterroot in those years, a Nez Perce named Jim, became something more than an acquaintance to David — a friendship that outlasted the reservation years, outlasted even David's own death, when Jim came by one final time only to say he wouldn't be stopping by anymore, and once more after that, only to collect an old tobacco tin David had always kept aside for him.

David and Harriet raised eight children on the Burnt Fork, buried two of them young, and kept the rest through a life David spent going gradually blind over his last thirty years without ever, by every account that survives him, losing the gentleness that ran through everything he did. He worked his bees blind. He grafted trees blind. He died at home in June of 1922, seventy-seven years old, remembered by his grandchildren less for anything he'd built than for the kind of man he'd simply, quietly, been through his entire life.

III. The Great Divide — Henry Arthur⁴ Haacke, Phillipsburg, early 1900s

David's son carried his grandfather's given name into a Montana that had changed almost entirely from the one David rode into in 1871 — no longer a territory reachable only by steamboat and ox freight, but a state threaded now with rail lines, its mining country around Phillipsburg and Granite grown from prospectors' camps into company towns with churches and newspapers and, at Granite itself, in its brief boom years, nearly three thousand people living on a mountainside that would be empty again within a generation. Henry Arthur Haacke married Stella Rose Whittaker, an Ontario-born girl herself, in 1908, and the two of them raised what would become seven children through the mining towns of Granite County as the work moved them — Phillipsburg, Little Trout Creek, Gold Creek — Henry Arthur laboring on farms through the years the census found him there, Stella keeping the household and, in the leaner years the record shows, taking in laundry to help make the arithmetic of feeding that many children come out even.

Every autumn, when the work allowed it, Henry Arthur went up into the Great Divide for weeks at a stretch — sometimes closer to two months, sometimes three — after the meat a family of that size needed to see out a Montana winter on a laborer's wages. It was not, for a man in his position, much of a choice. It was out of necessity, the same kind that had sent David up the Missouri five decades before and Henry into the Huron bush seventy years before that — each generation doing what its own country handed it and coming out, each time, at the same answer: go, and be gone as long as the going required.

What happened in the house during those long absences belongs to a different kind of record than land deeds or census rolls — a story the family has only ever kept the way families keep such things, passed down as a whisper rather than set into any document. Jim Carey worked the neighboring ground, close enough to hear his axe fall chopping would on a still morning, close enough that a woman managing a household of children alone next door through a long hunting season might reasonably lean on a neighbor for what the season demanded. However it began, it did not stay innocent and it did not stay hidden forever. Decades later, a Y-DNA test taken by two of Henry Arthur's own descendants — Waldo and Jim — proved what that whispered story had hinted at for two generations without ever saying it plainly: that Albert, the last of Henry Arthur and Stella's children, born in 1924, was by blood not Henry Arthur's son at all, but Jim Carey's.

What the family has always said followed — Henry Arthur's discovery, and a beating that by every account came within a hair of killing Jim Carey — exists only in that same oral record, in no court paper or newspaper column any research has yet turned up. What can be said with more confidence is what came after: that the two men went on being neighbors for years afterward, in whatever grim, wordless truce two men in that position manage to keep between them. And that when Jim Carey died an old man, he left his land to the Haacke children his will — and the family, every last one of them, refused it.

IV. Meeting Jim — Montana, in later years

Albert grew up, by every account, believing the family record was simply the family record, with no more reason to doubt it than any child has to doubt the name on his own birth certificate. He married Ramona Stevens, and in 1948 their son Jim was born — the same Jim who would one day, decades later and at my own asking, agree to a DNA test that neither of us expected to unsettle anything at all.

Long before either of us had any idea what that swab would eventually reveal about his father, Jim and I had already built something unhurried and good between us — letters back and forth across the years, a visit here and there, the kind of correspondence two people keep up simply because they enjoy each other's company, not because either one is chasing a fact. He wrote to me once, in December of 1989, about a trip he'd taken down to Dillon with his son Jeff, where they'd counted hundreds of antelope out across the flats — the meat, he warned me, was awfully strong tasting, though he seemed to have enjoyed the hunt regardless of that. I had also had the opportunity to join their local Haacke family reunion one year and Carl Haacke had delighted in showing me the original homestead and walk me up the small rivulet called "Haacke Creek". It was a unique opportunity getting to know a long separated family branch from the birth of the twins Henry and George in 1810, nearly 200 years earlier.

That is the Montana I carry with me now when I think of this branch of the family: not the corduroy road out of Markham, not the corners at Clinton in the winter of 1837, not David riding blind toward an orchard he'd never see fully grown, not even the old, whispered wrong of Jim Carey and the Great Divide — but an ordinary letter about antelope, written by a man who had no idea yet how far back, and how strangely, the story behind his own name actually ran.

Author's note: This piece is written as standalone historical fiction, not part of the family history chapter itself. Names, dates, marriages, migrations, and documented events (the 1837 militia service, the River Hotel, David's blindness and life on the Burnt Fork, the Fort Owen episode, Henry Arthur and Stella's family, and the DNA finding regarding Albert) are drawn from the family's own chapter records and are intended to be accurate. The surrounding historical texture — road conditions on the Huron Road, the mechanics and cost of Missouri River steamboat travel to Fort Benton, and the development of the Granite mining district — is drawn from general historical sources on Canada Company settlement and Montana Territory transportation, used here to set the documented family events against an accurate backdrop rather than to assert specific facts about the Haackes' own journeys, which were not individually documented. The affair between Stella and Jim Carey, the confrontation, and the refused inheritance remain family oral tradition rather than independently verified fact, and are dramatized here rather than asserted as established history.