

John Smithurst, of Lea,  
( & William Shore)  
Suitors of  
Florence Nightingale?



John Smithurst

Edited by George Wigglesworth

## Contents

	Page
John Smithurst	Front cover
Editor's Introduction	Inside front
Those seeking Florence's hand	3
Smithurst lineage	5
Shore/Nightingale lineage	6
William Shore [illustration]	6
Bibliography	7
Map	8
The love story of Florence Nightingale and John Smithurst: J. Connon:	8
The life and work of the Reverend John Smithurst 1807-1867:	
Rev Eric R Griffin,	17
The love affair with Florence Nightingale: Rev Eric R Griffin,	19
Victims of fiction: Research notes on 'The love story of	
Florence Nightingale and John Smithurst': Rev Eric R Griffin,	23
Fox Lake. Resting place of Florence Nightingale suitor: R Mielka	29
John Smithurst time line	Inside back
Florence Nightingale Chamber Opera [illustration]	Back cover-

## Introduction

John Smithurst was born in Lea and christened at Dethick. The story of him and Florence Nightingale is confusing and seemingly grew from a story in the Toronto Sunday World written by John Connon. It has been more frequently commented on here in Derbyshire recently. The Rev Dr Eric Griffin wrote two articles in the Wellington County History which examine it closely. The former is on the web but Griffin's articles are difficult to access and so it seems useful to make copies available here in Derbyshire. William Shore was her second cousin who emigrated to Wisconsin and comment after his death is appended.

I was helped in many ways but mention must be made of Rev Dr Eric Griffin who had studied this pastor of his home parish and made many suggestions. As always my wife, Margaret, has searched for the many grammatical and spelling mistakes.

## Those seeking Florence's hand

That she never married is a matter biographers have dealt with and attribute to many features of her life but to me, most probably, it developed from her perception and rejection of married women's roles at that time and their incompatibility with a call to God. That she was seen as a wealthy, gifted 'catch' must have been apparent although her personality, if known, may have deterred some. Such issues are not a concern here. One of the first suitors must have been George Henry Nicholson, rejected, at least in part, because he was demonstrably a first cousin. She had expressed, from her wider experience rather than understanding, concern over the deleterious results of conceptions between close relatives .

William Shore [a second cousin, a suitor] is mentioned, becoming an American 'remittance man' in Wisconsin, that is to say he lived on money from abroad. He was born in Gainsborough son of George [first cousin of Florence's father] and Matilda. He went to Fox Lake about 1853 where he knew a family of an employee previously on his father's estate. He is characterised by ladies admiring his courtly manner and stylish dress, men for his silver-mounted gun and hunting dog brought from England. To boys he was a hero with a gun, a dog and nothing to do! His estate included 150 acres of choice hunting and fishing land and he died an aloof, wealthy, landed man in 1868 to be buried with his dog.

Richard Monkton Milnes is widely written about as a persistent suitor, refused finally in 1859. It has however been speculated there could be yet another and here we deal with this fourth [or fifth ...] because of his connection with Lea, namely John Smithurst (1807-67). The dubious romantic story has developed in Canada but it should not be allowed to diminish his important role, for instance in the Hudson Bay Territory.

At the age of 28, so the story goes, John fell in love with his 16-year-old 'cousin' Florence. He was born on the 9 Sept 1807 in Lea, son of William and Christiana, [elsewhere rendered as Christina and Christie] to be baptised in October at Dethick less than a mile away, a chapelry within Ashover Parish. His two brothers are mentioned in his will. The name is unusual enough. There are a few of that name in the adjacent villages but especially in South Wingfield. The earliest 'licensing' of the Jug and Glass in Lea which has been found is between 1753 and 1763 and was by Enoch Smithurst. The date stone outside the pub is inscribed, SSE 1782 probably standing for Smithurst, 'S' [probably Sarah who was perhaps one of two wives] and Enoch. The surname survived in the village on the 1841 census.

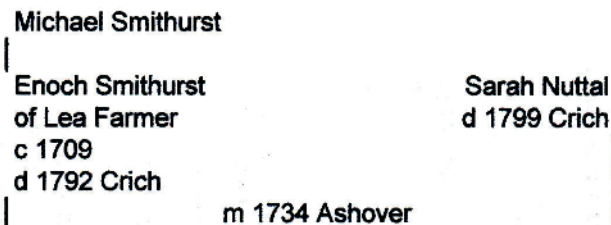
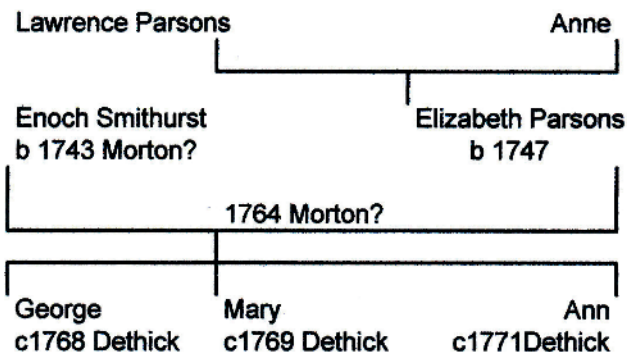
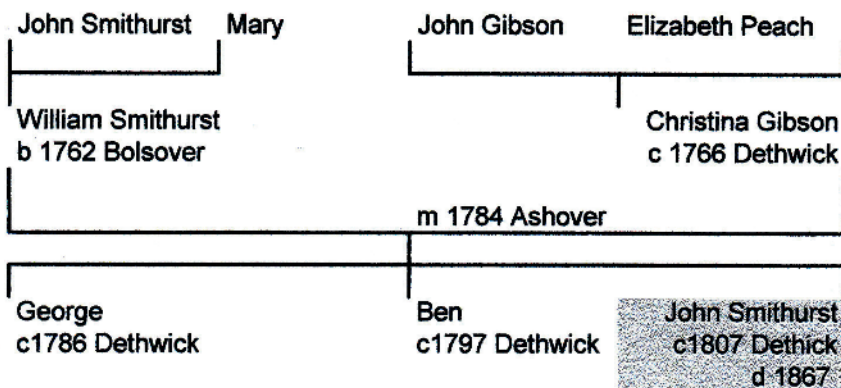
One called John Smithurst was Clerk at Dethick 1819-1831 it seems but 'ours' was too young'. Someone of the same name, and very likely in this case to be he, seems to have been involved in speculative building appearing in Wirksworth Court sued for payment in 1834. There seems no evidence within the IGI and family trees published of the Smithursts being perceptibly connected with the Florence Nightingale line genetically [unless illegitimately]. However it must be recognised that Florence had over forty cousins on her mother's side to which must be added those on the father's side and thus I may not have discovered all their surnames. Lea Hall was owned by the Nightingales and initially was the home of Florence's parents. The Jug and Glass was where Nightingale rent days were located and just possibly there was a connection with the landlords of both pub and estate. So the person, John, is established as the one born in Lea [1807] dying in Canada, at Elora [1867]. His extensive lineage is hidden.

Without a doubt Florence's parents had strong views about a need to marry and about the 'suitability' of any partners. That they opposed this marriage, if it was a real possibility, is easily assumed but their grounds are not stated. Evidence that it was based on blood relationship seems dubious for the prevailing tendency of the times was that true first cousins often married. Mind you 'cousin' is also a word used with less precise meaning in those times. Today cousin, unless qualified, should mean first cousin, a blood relation. Family historians may use "cousin", [in inverted commas as it were], where they do not define the exact, distant, blood relationship. The term 'Aunt' has been used for a family friend where children might be referred to as cousins although there is no blood relationship. Cousin matings are used in, for example, plants and horses where disadvantaged offspring, however that is defined, may be disposed of. Genetically, in the jargon, it mainly revolves round increased chance of accumulating 'homozygotic recessive genes' and some maybe harmful such as haemophilia. However this was not known then. Church of England makes no ruling about cousin marriage however close. That Smithurst might be seen as socially unsuitable revolves around his description as 'employed by a merchant,' employed by Arkwright and as a speculative builder.

He subsequently was admitted, 26 Dec 1838, a deacon at the Church Missionary Society at St James, Westminster. As such he officiated at a wedding in Islington 1839. He was ordained and appointed to Fort Garry in the Red River Colony of the Hudson's Bay Company and played an important part there among the migrants and indigenous people. The book by Fritz Pannekoek, reviewed by the Rev. E R Griffin deals with the more contentious events of his subsequent ministry at Elora. Here he established an estate of three or four hundred acres from the 'Queen's Bush'.

# The lineage of some Smithursts in Lea

Derived from IGI on the web and other secondary sources



Showing no Smithurst marriages from which a Smithurst cousin could arise. Showing Wm Shore and Geo. Henry Nicholson



William Shore

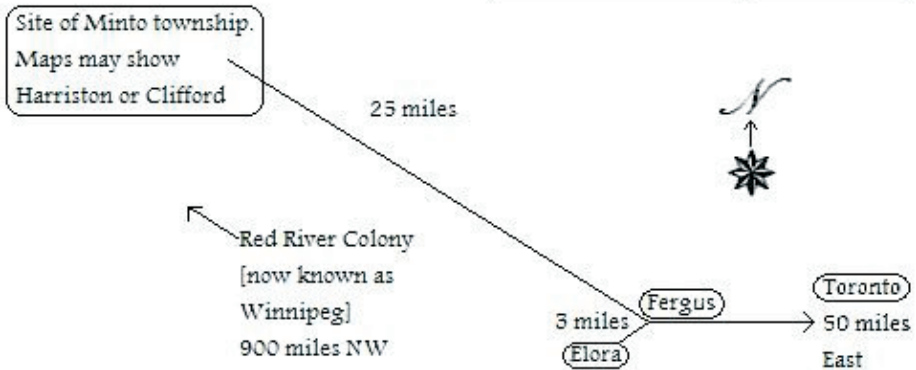
In conclusion therefore one might assume that Smithurst had an affection for the village of Lea where he was born and Lea Hurst after which he named his estate. No blood relationship with Florence can be found. The gifts of a bible and un-engraved communion set reflect more a routine gift through the CMS to pastors acting as missionaries and their parish rather than a personal gift by the family. What is clear is that there are many interpretations. In fact though the only references to any liaison I have found trace back towards John Smithurst and none in Florence's direction.

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Places associated with John Smithurst



There follow transcriptions of articles not readily available in England.

**THE LOVE STORY OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND JOHN SMITHURST** *by J Connon originally published in the "Toronto Sunday World" 16 October, 1921*

Elora has a tradition, beautiful and sad. One of the best beloved women of all history is its heroine. A brief account of her is contained in a letter to a young girl: – "Did I ever tell you the story of another girl who wanted to be a trained nurse? This young lady was born in Florence, Italy, but her father owned estates at Embley Park, in Hampshire, and at Lea Hurst, in Derbyshire, England. Her cousin, a young man employed by a merchant in London, fell in love with her. To break off this attachment, her parents took her from her home, and for several years traveled on the Continent. The young lady wanted to be a nurse, and at all the cities which they visited, she learned what she could of nursing as it was then, and of hospital organization."

After giving the name of the disappointed lover, the Rev. John Smithurst, late of Elora, Ontario, Canada, the letter goes on to say: – "Now you will want to know who she was. When the very urgent need came for nurses during the Crimean War, the only one in England at the time who had studied hospital work, and knew how it should be organized, was this young lady who became the heroine of the British Army – Florence Nightingale."



The letter represents an accepted view of a romance, which has almost been forgotten. It was written to an Elora girl more than 47 years ago. Florence Nightingale lived until 1910. John Smithurst died in 1867. They never married. But did love's flame die down, or did it ever burn? The letter, as quoted, has told that he loved her, but there is much more in the case than that. The letter was an attempt to tell the story as it was generally believed in Elora while the Rev. John Smithurst was still alive. Just one more paragraph of this account remains to be given. The letter proceeds: – "But what did her lover do? Come to the Cemetery at Elora, and on that free-stone cross you may read the inscription: "John Smithurst, Clerk in holy Orders, died September 2nd, 1867, aged 59 years, 11 months, and 23 days. A native of Lea Hurst, Derbyshire, England, 12 years missionary to the Red River Settlement; nearly six years Incumbent of Elora; afterwards resident of Lea Hurst, in the Township of Minto, and missionary to that Township."

So concludes the outline of a remarkable love story, as known in a country town and its adjacent townships, a generation ago. But, gradually, like fallen leaves in Autumn, those who knew Rev. John Smithurst intimately have gone to the dust, until the tradition itself has become mythical. Proof of the story goes back into the forties of the 19th century. Recent research brings back the vital fact that, not only did John Smithurst love his Florence Nightingale, but she loved him.

Out of Elora towards the new settlement rode a sturdy, stocky man of serious face, alone. Strangers were told he was a clergyman who had sought the seclusion of a farm. He had come to Elora when the place was new, but when the hamlet had become a village he went into the bush to live. Although of middle age he was not married. Acquaintances said he was too close-mouthed about himself. Friends knew better; his secret was not to be spoken of lightly. He might work alone in his garden for long hours, or walk solitary through the beaver-meadow on his farm, but there came times when he sought company, and told his story. The people of the Irish settlements between the farm and the town, 35 miles away, were his friends. To two sympathetic Irish folk his lonely heart was bared. Driven out of their homes by the Irish potato famine, many families crossed to Canada. Some entered the bush country beyond Elora in 1846. Among these pioneers of the Township of Peel were many Anglicans. Worthy to be the confidant of the heart-burdened clergyman were Mary McConnell, a woman of great strength and kindness, and her husband, James McCague.

Another confidant in the later years of the lonely man was his family physician. There was another, whose son has made diligent and fruitful enquiries in recent years. Their accounts, much more intimate than that

given in the letter agree substantially. There can be no doubt as to the main outlines of the interwoven lives. The tender love story of Florence Nightingale, *The Lady with the Lamp*, leads to the Red River Settlement, to the backwoods of Wisconsin and to the upper reaches of the Grand River in Western Ontario, as well as to Florence, Harley Street and Scutari.

How many names and places were interwoven! The Nightingales gave their daughter the name of her birthplace. John Smithurst gave his bush-farm the name of Lea Hurst, after the seat of the Nightingale family. But the story is based on evidence that is more conclusive. One day when John Smithurst rode past the McCague homestead to his distant abode, his thoughts were of the old Lea Hurst and his head drooped. Mrs. McCague called him to turn in and he did. That day he told his story. The crux of the narrative came when he said, "I asked Florence what I was to do since she could not marry me, and she replied 'John, I would like you to be a missionary to the Indians in North America.'"

It was in obedience to her request that he gave up business and went into training for the new work, which led first to the Red River Settlement, now Winnipeg. Why her refusal to marry him? This, it was said, was because of their blood relationship. They were said to be first cousins, and, influenced by their parents, she concluded that this was an insuperable obstacle.

The Red River experience was but the commencement of the great romance. The family of Florence Nightingale was closely associated with the Church Missionary Society – C.M.S., which had been receiving repeated appeals from the Indians at a far flung out-post of the Empire, the Red River Settlement in Canada, to send them another *Praying Master* to relieve the over-worked missionary who was ministering to them. It was to such appeals that Florence decided John should respond, with the result that he entered the Church Missionary Training College at Islington to prepare for his work. In 1839, after an impressive ceremony of ordination by the Bishop of London, John set sail for the Red River Settlement, now Winnipeg, Manitoba, then at the end of the earth, to be the first exclusively Canadian Church of England Missionary to the Indians.

John came to Canada first as a Chaplain of the Hudson's Bay Company and it was intended that he should live at the Fort Garry Post. But *en route* he learned that the Indians had built a house for him in their village. Upon his arrival at the Fort, accompanied by the overworked missionary, Mr. Cochrane, John made representations to the Governor of the Fort for his release from Chaplain's duties in order that he might minister exclusively to the Indians.

In his diary, John writes: ‘ . . . the consequence is I am no longer a Chaplain of the Hudson's Bay Company, but simply a missionary. Ambition might have been gratified by the title of Chaplain, worldly interest served by the salary attached to the office with a residence at the Fort, but conscience would not have been satisfied.’ Some idea of the privations and sacrifices which resulted from this decision may be gleaned from his diary in which he describes his 'horse up to its knees in water so that it took three hours to travel fifteen miles', or, 'through storm and snow, my shoes freezing to the stirrups, my horse white with hoar frost and icicles of frozen breath hanging round its mouth', or so plagued with mosquitoes that he wrote desperately, 'how truly thankful I shall be when winter returns again.'

But not all his work was spiritual! Gravely concerned over the hardships and hunger suffered by the Indians through the winter months, he turned his hand to farming and encouraged the Indians in community efforts in order to preserve their life and health throughout the long winter months. Some extent of this work is recorded in his journal. One year he notes freezing and storing '2000 pounds of buffalo meat and a larger quantity of beef and mutton'. September 1st 1841 – 'We have now securely stacked all our corn. It is estimated at 300 bushels of wheat, 200 bushels of barley, and 200 bushels of potatoes. With this I trust I shall be able to provide for the schools and the poor and the needy.'

Under his leadership the work grew to such an extent that he was given an assistant, a superintendent for farm work, and three school teachers. And still he found time to experiment in horticulture. He introduced to the Red River cucumbers, kidney beans, melons and other novelties. He published an English-Cree Dictionary, and a book designed to help the Indians learn English. He established needed schools in other parts of the country, calling meetings, traveled many miles to attend them, and transacted the necessary business with the Church Missionary Society, which financed them.

In two instances his work was publicly recognized. In 1846 a detachment of 150 men was sent to the Red River Settlement from England and were quartered at the Lower Fort. Quite voluntarily, John rode seven miles every Sunday to hold Services and visited the sick during the week. Someone later wrote to England about this fine work, and John was suitably honoured. In 1849 he was honoured by being made a member of the governing body of the Red River – the Council of Assiniboia [now Assiniboine?]. But throughout this great work the inspiration behind his activities was that of this great woman back in England who had sent him to minister to the spiritual welfare of the Indians. It is doubtful if there has ever been a finer piece of work done amongst the Indians than John Smithurst achieved almost a

hundred years ago at Netlet Creek. And one wonders if it was only coincidence that John's first work was at Netlet Creek, and Florence's first crowning reform in England was at Netley Hospital. After twelve long, hard, weary years, of faithful service at Red River, John returned to England, and friends who later had his confidence, affirm that he went with the hope of marrying Florence. But it was **not** to be. No doubt he found family feeling in the matter still unchanged. Florence had in the intervening years refused several offers of marriage, and entries in her diary the year John was home indicate that she was most unhappy.

Disappointed and unrequited in his love, John returned to Canada in 1852 after almost a year in England. But never again did he return to the Red River Settlement. He took charge of St. John's Church, Elora, Ontario, where he became Rector in 1852. Under his guidance and leadership the Parish progressed and flourished. Elora received two Services a Sunday. The Rectory was completed. The work was extended to Fergus where occasional Services were held. Florence Nightingale had her way about choice of a career, and went into a systematic and continuous training for her profession. Quite definitely, John Smithurst had lost. At least, he was certain of never winning her for his wife. But there are many evidences that his influence was proving decisive in her life, as her influence had shaped his career. If she could not marry him she would marry nobody. Her parents saw that. Their opposition to her plans now proved ineffectual – perhaps it had weakened. It looked as if the two had reached an understanding. She had challenged him to give his life, and he had done so. In that year after the Missionary's return to their childhood haunts, she had accepted his challenge to give her life. In the Crimea she made good abundantly, her promise to the man she loved.

The visible sign of their tender and abiding attachment is, curiously enough, the Communion Set which is now in the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora. On the underside of one of the pieces, that one which is called a Paten, is engraved the following Latin inscription: –

*DONO DEDIT HOC MUNUSCULUM REVERENDO JOANNO SMITHURST  
AMICO DELICTISSIMO ALUMNUS EJUS EBENEZER HALL OFFICIO-  
RUM IN SE GRATE MEMOR A.D. MDCCCII."*

The only name mentioned, is not that of Florence Nightingale, but whose is the "AMICO DELICTISSIMO" of the inscription?

A free translation explains: "ACTING AS AGENT FOR SOMEONE EBENEZER HALL GAVE, AS A GIFT, THIS SET OF COMMUNION SILVER TO REVEREND JOHN SMITHURST, A VERY DEAR FRIEND, IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF HIS MANY KINDNESSES. A.D. 1852."

The "someone" – whose "very dear friend" was John Smithurst – was none other than Florence Nightingale. As soon as he had left for the last time, she devoted all her time to the study of nursing. As a newspaper account has it *"From this time, after her declaration of independence and the beginning of her serious training for the work of her life, there is never a syllable in her diary or letters which denotes anything but happiness and satisfaction."* Little did the newspaper writer know that the "declaration of independence" was really a great renunciation of a loving soul. A New Year's letter of 1851 says, "I have never repented or looked back,....."

What made it necessary for her to speak in this way? What was there in her outward life to explain these words? It was her heart's cry that she sought to stifle with this reiteration, "I have never looked back, not for a moment". While her lover went to Canada, she went to Germany. At Kaiserwerth, on the Rhine, she trained under Pastor Fliedner and his wife, and afterwards at the Maison de la Providence in Paris. Returning to London she undertook the post of superintendent of the Harley Street Hospital for Sick Gentlewomen. It was at Harley Street in October 1854, that her call to the Crimea came. Florence Nightingale accepted. If she could not lavish her love on one man, she could care tenderly for thousands. Henceforth her ministry was the more spectacular and crowded. Are the horrors of Scutari's sufferers all that explain the abandon with which she spent herself?

When the Reverend John Smithurst recrossed the Atlantic it was said he could not endure the climate of England. That was the reason given for his return to this Continent. He went to the Township of Grantham, near St. Catharines, but was stationed there for a very brief period. Before the end of 1851 he was in Elora. Soon came the mysterious silver Communion Service. The new Rector became something of a mystery. He was incurably a bachelor and the people wondered why. All through the surrounding townships he ministered energetically. In the neighbourhood of the McCague's he had a Mission Church. The McCagues were the second couple he married after arriving in Elora, and they became fast friends. But at this time he told them little.

During the Crimean War, the Rev. John Smithurst was in Elora, and his interest in reports from the theatre of war was amazingly intense. The name of the woman he loved came to be on the lips of everyone. He admitted proudly their blood relationship, but that was all. She was keeping her promise splendidly. The story has often been told how Mr. Sidney Herbert, then Secretary for War, wrote to Miss Nightingale, asking her to undertake the task of evolving order out of chaos in the Military Hospital at Scutari, and how his letter crossed one from her to him, offering her services. That

exchange of letters was on October 15, 1854. On October 21, less than one week later, she started for Bosphorus, accompanied by a band of forty two trained nurses. The departure of this gentlewoman shocked Victorian England. It opened a new era in nursing. Its success was surpassed only by its toil and sacrifice.

Florence Nightingale broke her constitution. The Lady with the Lamp was ever afterwards an invalid. Her unhappy state might have aided in the break-up of her lover's health. The last lingering hope of their life together was gone. Shortly after the war he had to retire to his open-air life on a bush farm. A new portion of the Six Nations Reserve was being opened up for settlement, and thither he went.

Haldimand had given Brant and his Indians the land on each side of the Grand River, six miles each way, and from mouth to source. As White settlements had surrounded the strip, the Crown had bought back portions. Minto was one of the last areas to be made into a township and offered for sale. Smithurst bought 400 acres, two and a half miles east of the Village of Clifford, and thirty-five miles northwest of Elora. The workmen from Elora who were employed by him to put up buildings, long remembered the winter evenings when, seated around the large, open fire-place with its blazing logs, the owner of rustic Lea Hurst would read novels to them in his deep rich voice, or relate even more interesting tales of that far-off and little known region, Rupert's Land, the home of the Indian, the trader and the settler. Sometimes he told of the old Lea Hurst and his early life.

But they heard much less than Jamie McCague and his wife, Mary McConnell, when the aging man would call in to renew friendships as he drove to Elora for supplies. Ten years he lived on the bush farm, clearing some acres, but without the hope of sons to inherit the arable land, or drain the beaver meadow. Then his health failed utterly, and he needed to have medical attention and nursing. Strange the irony of his fate, the one woman who knew best of all how to care for him, lay helpless in the old home. So he returned to Elora, and found a haven in St. John's Rectory. He received every attention from his successor, the Reverend C. E. Thompson.

Perhaps the complete avowal of his love affair came under these circumstances. During the final illness he was attended by Dr. A. H. Paget, who came to Elora in 1858. When Florence Nightingale died in August 1910, Dr. Paget felt that the time had come to make it certain that the real facts would be put beyond dispute. From his place of retirement in the city of Toronto he wrote the following letter:

*Jarvis Street, August 17th, 1910.*

*"I had the pleasure of knowing the late Reverend John Smithurst, of Lea Hurst, Minto; a fine, educated gentleman. He was engaged to the late Florence Nightingale. I attended him, with Dr. Clarke, of Guelph, during his last illness."* But the actual engagement was something which was not allowed for in the earlier accounts as they were circulated by word of mouth in the Elora district.

With Dr. Paget's statement the terrible earnestness of Florence Nightingale's "declaration of independence" becomes clear. In 1839, or earlier, she had broken the engagement. In 1801 she had finally given up any idea of marriage. In 1854 she could write in her diary, "I have never repented, nor looked back, not for a moment." Just as this simplification came, a new complication entered. The following despatch was printed in a daily paper:

"FOX LAKE, WIS. AUGUST 18 – The death of Florence Nightingale, 'The Angel of the Crimea', in London this week, recalls a very pretty romance, in which Fox Lake is indirectly interested. "William Shore and Florence Nightingale were cousins and lovers in England in the long ago. English law forbids the marriage of cousins, so they pledged their troth and separated, neither ever to marry. William Shore drifted to Fox Lake, and lived here many years, finally dying in 1868, and his remains are now resting in beautiful Waushara Cemetery in this village. Florence Nightingale remained faithful to her vow."

Some inaccuracies in this despatch are obvious. English law does not forbid the marriage of cousins. The Mosaic Law forbids the marriage of second cousins, but it is silent as to first cousins, such as John Smithurst and Florence Nightingale. But still, the despatch might be true, if John Smithurst were a consummate liar, or if Dr. Paget and Mrs. McCague had misunderstood.

Refutation of this despatch came with the discovery of a man who had received from Mrs. McCague an unusually detailed report of the story given her and her husband by their old Rector. John Smithurst told her that he was born at Lea Hurst, Derbyshire, England, on September 9th, 1807. In early manhood he was in business and for a time he was employed with the firm founded by Sir Richard Arkwright, inventor of a famous machine for spinning yarn. But a change came in his career, for, according to Mrs. McCague, he and a cousin fell in love with the same girl, who was also their cousin – Florence Nightingale.



And then follows her story of the decision to separate, prefaced by her homely words: "Then, says John to Florence, what would you have me do, says he." (Although of Irish parentage, Mrs. McCague had grown up in Ashton-under Lyne, England, and acquired there the 'says he, says she,' mannerism). Hers is homespun evidence, but she had a remarkable character. To accept the evidence of an unsupported and obviously inaccurate story against the testimony of a friend, and a physician, would not seem tenable, especially when all the facts in connection with the critical years, 1839 – 1854, point to the correctness of the story told by the known witnesses. The fact that John Smithurst had told that his cousin had also fallen in love with Florence Nightingale supports the better known version of the whole affair. If a man were making up such a story out of whole cloth, would he mention the other man?

The Wisconsin story cannot be tested by such method, for William Shore is supposed to have died in 1868, and nobody is said to have heard his version. The Fox Lake despatch is much farther from the original sources of information than the Elora letter, which is the weakest piece of evidence supporting the Ontario story. On the other hand, the Elora evidence is direct, personal, and circumstantial. Mrs. McCague gave an interview and the notes of that interview have been seen by "The Sunday World". Dr. Paget wrote a letter, and which this paper has seen. The known and public circumstances, as reviewed in this article, fit in with both interview and letter. Perhaps Dr. Paget is more direct as to a formal engagement than Mrs. McCague, but "engagement" may mean two different things. It may be, that, because of parental disapproval, Florence Nightingale never formally engaged to marry John Smithurst. That does not lessen the probability that she confessed her love for him. It is enough that they loved each other. Renunciation brought no unique opportunity to him, but in her case renunciation made history. Their loss of happiness was the world's gain. All may sympathize with the pair who highly resolved to give up the chance of happiness, to accept the cross of loneliness, taking upon themselves a life of service, if, perchance, their love thereby might be forgotten and separation made enduring.

When they parted, as John Smithurst went out as a Missionary, each might have thought that there might come an attachment to some other. But twelve years later they had no illusions. They loved each other. Of this the Silver Communion Service to her "dearest friend" was the token. When the invalid in London heard, in 1867, of the lonely grave in Canada, she could only realize that for her the end had come. For another generation she remained. Of all that she suffered in that time little can be known. If John Smithurst was restrained, she was even more restrained. Her diary tells only by inference. In it she says that she 'never looked back'! Hers was an iron will,

but did she never look back – across the ocean to the grave that she could never see? It may be that as the facts become better known, the love story of Florence Nightingale and John Smithurst will take rank as one of the greatest love stories of history. There is one curious difference between this and the classic example of Dante and Beatrice. Without Dante his sweetheart would have been forgotten. Without Florence Nightingale her lover would not have the same appeal. Beatrice inspired Dante's muse. The Reverend John Smithurst fired Florence Nightingale into action.

Whatever the world may say, Canadians at least will not forget John Smithurst, whose story is here made public for the first time.

**‘The life and work of the Reverend John Smithurst 1807-1867’** Rev. Eric Griffin, *Vol 1 of the Wellington County History*. There follow some abstracts, particularly about his early life.

His contributions to pioneer Canada were very significant, especially in education and settlement, as well as in the Christian ministry, yet he is chiefly remembered for his celebrated love affair with Florence Nightingale of nursing fame..... John Smithurst was born 9th Sept 1807 in the village of Lea near Matlock, Derbyshire, England, the son of William and Christina Smithurst. <sup>1</sup> They had at least two other children, for John mentions in his will his brothers George and Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>

*[John's early education is obscure but Lea School was a typical village school where a small weekly fee would be due, mainly to pay the teachers. It was founded by public subscription in 1808. (Peter Nightingale then dead, WE Nightingale a minor and Peter Arkwright of Cromford have variously been said to be involved.) Such experience may have contributed to his own involvement in public education in Elora where, for example, the School Board met in his rectory. Ed]* His theological training of 1836-39 shows that his earlier education was ... *[deficient; courses at the Church Missionary Society could be to remedy these previous limitations.] [ ... where besides.... Ed]* courses in Latin and Greek authors, Greek and Hebrew Grammar, and Biblical History, he took courses in Euclid, Astronomy, English Composition, Geography and writing.<sup>3</sup> The ‘Dictionary of Canadian Biography’ <sup>4</sup> states “Nothing is known of John Smithurst’s childhood and youth.”

Smithurst was engaged in the hat-making business, and did well as a warehouseman. <sup>2</sup> He was employed in the firm founded by Sir Richard Arkwright in London, and his obituary in the Church Chronicle states that he was employed in the counting house. <sup>1</sup> *[Hat making was an occupation locally widespread, many were home workers. The most notable factory where he might have been employed was Walkers at Lea Bridge who employed up to a hundred people hand making both military and civilian hats. Ed]*

Smithurst was influenced by the evangelical church and by Wesleyan preachers (although he was later in conflict with the Wesleyans)... as well as being interested in the Sunday School at Cromford. Boon holds that it was likely here that he met his lifelong friend, Ebenezer Hall.

Why Smithurst decided to become a missionary is unclear. Boon maintains that he first felt the call in 1826, but was delayed as he was the sole supporter of his parents [*although he did have two brothers seemingly older and at that time alive. Ed*] who died in 1830 (father) and 1833 (mother). The romantic tales hold that since he and Florence Nightingale were forbidden to marry, he asked her what to do, and she told him to become a missionary to the Indians in North America. This ... account [*from a secondary source Ed*] is unlikely.

A.N.Thompson, a church historian, states that it is unknown how Smithurst came to the attention of the Church Missionary Society, because the CMS wrote to local clergy requesting candidate referrals, and it appears that Smithurst applied himself to the Society. There is, however, a letter dated 1836 from Smithurst's home vicar in Matlock, The Rev. H. Arkwright, indicating that Smithurst might have been led to apply.<sup>2,3</sup> Despite his church involvement and enthusiasm, the letter states that he was not known as a person of "very decided views" and that "he should not think himself qualified at present for missionary employment." [*This perhaps reflects the times when those ordained in the Church of England were largely drawn from University Graduates whose previous education was often at so called 'Public Schools', often boarding where considerable fees were charged. Ed*]

The "Love Story" sources hold that Miss Nightingale's parents were involved with the Church Missionary Society, and since the CMS had received letters from the Red River Settlement Indians requesting another "praying master", she decided that John should be the one. This does not seem to be the case, for the RRS letters are dated 1838, two years after Smithurst's enrollment in the CMS school, and secondly he was originally intended to go to the West Indies. Furthermore, when it was decided he should go to the North-West American Mission, it was as a Hudson's Bay Company Chaplain and Missionary to Cumberland House, not the RRS. It would appear, therefore, that Florence Nightingale [*nor her parents. Ed*] had nothing to do with Smithurst's ..... being sent to the RRS Indians.

Undaunted by his first unfavourable first report, Smithurst was interviewed by the rector of Bonsall, near Matlock, who sent a favourable report of him to the CMS, and on 2 May 1836 he was granted an interview. He was accepted with the view to becoming a catechist in the West Indies in the following year, and he expressed a willingness to be ordained if deemed eligible. He was enrolled in the CMS school at Islington .... on 10 Sept 1836 as a probationary student. After his first year ....

he was made a regular student preparing for ordination. In the fall of his final year the principal reported:

“Mr. Smithurst is not a man of shining talents, but of good sense and much application - appears to be in his element among the poor and in schools - of decided piety, and likely to pass a respectable examination.”<sup>3</sup>

Smithurst was accepted for ordination ..... and ordained deacon in Dec 1838. [*That he progressed so well and in the face of what I perceive as formidible social hurdles reflects well on his determination and commitment. Ed*]

#### References

- 1 Elora Observer 6 Sept 1867
- 2 Boon, These men went out, Toronto, 1970
- 3 Thompson, The Church of England in Rupert's Land, vol III, Cambridge, 1962
- 4 Halfpenny, The dictionary of Canadian biography, vol IX, Toronto, 1962

#### **A FURTHER NOTE: THE LOVE AFFAIR WITH FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE** *Eric Griffin Wellington County History Vol 1 1987*

John Smithurst was the recipient of a silver-plated communion service in 1852 or perhaps in early 1853. Whether it was brought to him while in Grantham, or in Elora, or even if he brought it with him from England is unclear. After his death it was bequeathed to the Parish of St. John the Evangelist in Elora, where it remains to this day, and for many years it has generally been thought to be a gift to Smithurst from Florence Nightingale. There may have been originally four pieces, but only three are extant: two chalices and a large pedestalled paten.

Briefly, the story is this: Smithurst and Nightingale were first cousins and they fell in love. Since Victorian standards forbade the marriage of cousins, they renounced their love and neither ever married. To break off the relationship, Florence's parents took her to the Continent to learn nursing, and Smithurst, having asked her what he was to do, was told to become a missionary to the Indians in Rupert's Land. After 12 years in the Red River Settlement he returned to England to try to convince her again to marry him, failed, and returned to Elora. As a token of her love, Florence gave John the silver communion set by the hand of Ebenezer Hall. This story has been complicated by a strong, oral tradition in Elora that another first cousin of Florence's was also in love with her, and she sent him to what is now Wisconsin as a missionary, again sending to him another set of silver bearing the same inscription as that of Smithurst's.

There are many problems with this story. First of all, none of this is mentioned anywhere until long after Smithurst's death. There is nothing in Scripture, English Law, nor the Table of Kindred and Affinity in the Prayer Book which forbids the marriage of first cousins, nor, I suggest, would there be in Victorian moral standards. I suggest that if indeed Smithurst and Nightingale were cousins, and if they were in fact in love, being cousins had nothing to do with their being forbidden to marry, but rather parental disapproval for some other reason, such as differing social classes.

Regarding Smithurst's sudden decision to become a missionary, I do not believe that Miss Nightingale had anything to do with it, as I have suggested in the main body of this paper. Perhaps due to his religious interests, he felt that he had a vocation to test, and since after 1833 he was no longer supporting his parents he was free to attempt the ministry; or perhaps, as his Elora obituary states, his interests were more "literary than mercantile". On the other hand it may well be that Smithurst was encouraged at some time by Florence to become a missionary and the story was exaggerated over time. I don't think that the reason can ever be fully known.

The author of "The Love Story of Florence Nightingale and John Smithurst," published originally in 1921, states that Smithurst himself told the whole love story, including the chapter about the other cousin, to a certain Mr. and Mrs. McCague of Salem Ont. while he was living in Minto, but this author is unreliable in other ways and must be viewed with caution. Nor does he cite his sources, except in very vague ways. He states that the following item appeared "... in a daily paper", without mentioning which one:

FOX LAKE WIS. AUG 18 — The death of Florence Nightingale, 'The Angel of the Crimea', in London this week, recalls a very pretty romance, in which Fox Lake is indirectly interested.

William Shore and Florence Nightingale were cousins and lovers in England in the long ago. English law forbids the marriage of cousins, so they pledged their troth and separated neither ever to marry.

William Shore drifted to Fox Lake, and lived here many years, finally dying in 1868 and his remains are now resting in beautiful Wawshara Cemetery in this village. Florence Nightingale remained faithful to her vow."

If this is true, then it would seem to substantiate the local Elora tradition of the second lover/cousin and perhaps even the second set of silver. The author of "The Love Story. . ." then goes on to examine the latin inscription on the base of the Elora paten, and states that it reads:

DONO DEDIT  
HOC MUNUSCULUM  
REVERENDO JOANNO SMITHURST AMICO DELICTISSIMO  
ALUMNUS EJUS  
EBENEZER HALL  
OFFICIORUM IN SE GRATE  
MEMOR  
AD MDCCCII

He is mistaken. The inscription actually reads:

DONO DEDIT  
HOC MUNUSCULUM  
REVERENDE IOANNI SMITHURST AMICO DILECTISSIMO  
ALUMNUS EJUS  
EBENEZER HALL  
OFFICIORUM IN SE GRATE MEMOR AD MDCCCLII

The author then translates his version "very loosely" as:

Acting as agent for someone, Ebenezer Hall gives this set of communion silver to John Smithurst, a very dear friend, in grateful memory of his many great kindnesses. AD 1852.

He is assuming of course, that this "someone" is Miss Nightingale.

I took the liberty of having two latin scholars from the University of Toronto, working independently of one another, translate the correct inscription without having seen the above translation. They offered as follows: "His pupil Ebenezer Hall gave this little gift/offering as a gift to the Reverend John Smithurst, a most choice friend, gratefully mindful of his kindnesses, in AD 1852."

"Mindful of kindnesses to him, Ebenezer Hall, his student, gratefully gives as a gift this little gift to the Reverend John Smithurst, his beloved friend. AD 1852."

The latter translation is probably the most correct. Both scholars agreed that it was poor latin, and upon seeing the first translation, both stated that there was absolutely no support for the translation "acting as agent for someone." Ebenezer Hall founded a firm in the Sheffield plating industry (which apparently still exists under another name), and became quite wealthy. It would seem, therefore, that a gift of a silver plated communion service to a missionary from a rich, old friend who owned a plating firm would be most appropriate. On these grounds I hold, tradition notwithstanding, that the "Nightingale Silver" is not from Nightingale at all, but from Hall himself. This would seem to discount the oral tradition of the second set of silver. This does not, however,

eliminate the possibility that the silver may have been commissioned by Nightingale through Hall. Furthermore, there is supposed to be a letter, now in the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa, from Miss Nightingale to Col. Clarke in Elora, in which her gift of the silver is mentioned. It may be there — I have not had the opportunity to look for it.

There is also supposed to be a letter from a Dr. Paget, who came to Elora in 1858. The author of "The Love Story..." mentions the letter, but does not state to whom it was written or where it is located, only that Dr. Paget wrote it after the death of Miss Nightingale in 1910:

Jaris [sic] Street. August 17th 1910.

I had the pleasure of knowing the late Reverend John Smithurst of Lee Hurst, Minto; a fine educated gentleman. He was engaged to the late Florence Nightingale. I attended him, with Dr. Clarke, of Guelph, during his last illness.

The author of "The Love Story..." will cite no sources beyond the following: Mrs. McCague gave an interview and the notes of that interview have been seen by 'The Sunday World'. Dr. Paget wrote a letter, and this paper has seen the document."

Even if these documents did exist, they only tell second hand that Smithurst *said* that he and Florence loved each other, and that he only made mention of the fact when he was a tired, ill, elderly man who had been away from home and family for almost half of his life. Regarding the love affair:

... Florence Nightingale's biographer, Mrs. WoodhamSmith, declares that the facts do not substantiate the story.

I can find no certain evidence to support any relationship between Smithurst and Nightingale. The love affair may have indeed occurred, but it cannot be substantiated, and if they were in love, the story has been greatly exaggerated. All accounts of it seem to be based on conjecture and poor evidence. I must bring down the Scottish verdict of "not proven" in this case. An exhaustive research attempt into this affair would require a rather extensive investigation of the life and family histories of Nightingale, Smithurst, and Shore; a trip to Fox Lake, Wisconsin to search out the newspaper item and the second set of silver; and a trip to the Public Archives in Ottawa; for none of which have I had the time, resources, nor opportunity.

— Eric Griffin



Later Griffin writes "Connon's account of John's calling experience is entirely false, because John enrolled in the CMS 2 years BEFORE the 'mission letters' were received about a new 'praying master'. He originally intended to go to the Carribean mission as a Lay Reader, which was a one year programme, but was accepted into the ordination stream after his first year."

**VICTIMS OF FICTION: RESEARCH NOTES ON "THE LOVE STORY OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND JOHN SMITHURST" by Rev. Eric R. Griffin**

Some months ago two chalices were stolen from St. John's church, Elora. They were eventually recovered, but there was quite a lot of publicity and concern about the theft, partly because any theft of church furnishings is a serious affair, but primarily because these particular chalices were supposedly the personal gift of Florence Nightingale to a former rector of the parish, John Smithurst, as a token of unrequited love. Coincidentally, this year the Elora Festival will be launching a recently commissioned opera about Florence, which draws heavily on the love story between her and John. In my earlier biographical essay of the Rev. Mr. John Smithurst published in this journal (Vol. 1, 1987) I expressed my doubts concerning the authenticity of this story, and in a postscript appended to that article, discussed the issue more thoroughly. There were left some points for further research, for which I wrote at the time I had not the "time, resources, nor opportunity". Since then I have found some opportunity to follow up some clues, and this short paper will summarize my present findings and working hypothesis with respect to any connection between Florence and John.. ' I intend to go no further with this project, and anyone who wishes to use this material and to research the subject more thoroughly may do so with my encouragement and blessing. From the beginning, my chief interest has been with Smithurst himself, and for him to be honoured simply because of a supposed love affair with a famous woman does his memory a great disservice, and trivializes his substantial contributions to Canadian history.

My current hypothesis that the story entitled "The Love Story of Florence Nightingale and John Smithurst", written by Mr. John Connon <sup>2</sup> is a work of historical fiction. In my earlier essay, I pointed out many discrepancies in this narrative when compared with the facts it purports to relate, not least of which is the false translation of the Latin inscription on the Communion silver bequeathed by Smithurst to St. John's. This story was originally published in the Toronto *Sunday World* 16 October 1921 on pages 1 and 2 of the Magazine section, under the title "The Love Story of Florence Nightingale". Several searches of libraries and archives to find the original article at first proved fruitless, because only one edition of the *Sunday World* from 1921 exists, although all of the weekday issues are available. Happily, however, Mr. Connon

saved two copies of the original story, which are now deposited along with the rest of his papers in the archives at the University of Guelph. I was also able to locate the item which Cannon claims in the "Love Story" appeared in a "daily paper" (unnamed, but in fact the *London Evening Free Press*, 19 August, 1910, p. 12) regarding the connection between Florence and one William Shore, who died in Fox Lake, Wisconsin in 1868. Mr. Shore, the item claims, was a cousin to Miss Nightingale and in love with her, but since they were forbidden to marry due to consanguinity, he came broken-hearted to the New World, both having vowed never to marry. There was also an oral tradition in Elora that Florence sent a second set of communion silver to him, matching the one she gave Smithurst. Miss Nightingale's obituaries, on Monday August 15 1910 were found in both the *World* and the *Free Press*, and no mention of any connection with Mr. Smithurst was made in either of them.

A letter to the archivist in Fox Lake Wisconsin produced some encouraging results. Mr. Shore is indeed buried there; he was in fact a cousin of Florence Nightingale; and until his death, he lived the leisured sporting life of a wealthy "remittance man."<sup>3</sup> Mr. Shore was not a clergyman, nor is there any local story of a second set of communion silver.

The discovery of a second set of communion silver was sheer serendipity. While at a clergy conference last year, I happened to be speaking to a priest who had been Rector in Manitoba of one of the former Red River Settlement parishes. He told me that St. Andrew's parish, St. Andrew's, Manitoba, has a set of communion silver which has always been reputed to be a gift to the parish from the family of Florence Nightingale, while it was a Church Missionary Society mission, and was received while John Smithurst was Missionary-in-charge of the settlement. This is very probable, as the Nightingales were well known to be supporters of the CMS, and countless similar gifts were sent to missions all over the world by different groups and families. Unfortunately, the silver is not engraved or hall-marked, so the source of the gift cannot at present be absolutely proven. Thus it seems very probable that Smithurst did indeed receive a set of communion silver, but from the Nightingale family rather than from Florence herself; this was no doubt intended for the Red River Settlement and not for himself personally. It is not the one at present residing in the parish of St. John's Elora.

This leads us to the final point of my present research, namely a supposed letter from Florence Nightingale to Colonel Clarke, Speaker of the Provincial Legislature and MPP for Elora, in which she mentions the communion silver she gave as a gift to Smithurst. The letter apparently establishes that the Smithurst silver in Elora is in fact from Florence, and its existence would add great credence to the love story. The letter is said to be a response to Col. Clarke regarding some questions of public sanitation, but in the postscript, Florence states that she

noticed Clarke's Elora letterhead, and wondered if Mr. Smithurst still possessed the communion set she gave to him. <sup>5</sup> Extensive searching of the Clarke papers in the National and Provincial Archives has failed to produce the letter. This in itself is not particularly significant, for if the letter does exist, and it well may, it is probably filed in one of the thousands of uncatalogued archival boxes stored at Queen's Park. Then again, without the letter, nothing can be proven.

If this letter exists, however, I strongly suspect that the silver Florence referred to would be the Red River silver given by her family while Smithurst was stationed there, not the silver bequeathed to St. John's Elora by Smithurst. The silver in Elora, according to its inscription (and there is no reason not to take it at its face value) is from Ebenezer Hall, former pupil and lifelong friend of John Smithurst, who became the owner of a silverplating firm in Sheffield. Mr. Connon needed to impose a translation onto the Latin text which would accommodate his conclusions, claiming that Mr. Hall is named simply as the agent for the true giver of the gift; but *alumnus ejus* means "his pupil", not "acting as agent for someone". The only conclusion to be drawn is that the Elora silver in no way connects Florence Nightingale with John Smithurst.

Perhaps one might speculate on the circumstances of the composition of the "Love Story" thusly: because he was interested in the history of Elora, and considered himself to be an authority on it, Connon knew about Smithurst and his years spent at the Red River mission. <sup>4</sup> A few days after the death of Florence Nightingale, which was big news everywhere, he happened across the Fox Lake item on William Shore as the unrequited lover/cousin of Florence. By conflating the circumstances of the lover/cousin in Fox Lake with Smithurst, and by conflating the Nightingale family gift of silver received by John while he was in the Red River Settlement with the personal gift of silver from Ebenezer Hall, Mr. Cormon was able to produce, eleven years after Florence's death, a romantic story set in a realistic, historical, Canadian, and (because he is an Elora enthusiast) a specifically local context. The story was well-received, reprinted in several papers, <sup>5</sup> (reprints have been on sale at St. John's Church since 1953) and the story was quickly received into local oral history first as legend and then as truth. Connon's conflation of real events with fiction was not an uncommon literary device, although in his case it is more likely the result of bad historical method, and he apparently felt no compulsion to restrict himself to mere documented facts. <sup>6</sup> I can see no other conclusion than to consider the "Love Story" a work of sentimental fiction, set in an authentic, albeit elaborately embroidered, historical context.

This does not mean, however, that Connon composed the story as fiction: he may well have believed (or at least hoped) that it was true, and marshalled his evidence in support of it accordingly, based on stories he may have heard in his

youth Cannon had collected clippings on Florence for some years before she died; it seems that he might have been thinking about the love story long before he actually wrote it.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, Cannon in this case is a most dubious historian, and must be read with caution. He may not have cared to, or have been able to, distinguish between fact and hearsay. Cannon's difficulty was in evaluating his sources. He had no training in history, and probably overvalued the accuracy of his oral sources, using whatever he could find to verify his preconceived version of the story. This accounts for the preface "the story was once well known in Elora but is now forgotten..." that begins many published versions of the story.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the question remains, apart from its veracity, of how the story began if it was not with Cannon. I do not think that the answer can ever be fully known. It is possible, however, that John Smithurst may have started the story, or at least told people, after her rise to fame, that he knew Florence, thereby beginning an oral tradition in Elora which would grow in the telling, and upon which Cannon would later build; for Smithurst was rather well-known as a talker and story-teller. But as I also said in my first essay, if he did tell people that he and Florence were in love, "he only made mention of the fact when he was a tired, ill, elderly man who had been away from home and family for almost half his life". In short, it is not impossible to believe that he may have told a few "stretchers" to people who had no way of confirming them. It is ironic that Cannon should himself provide for this possibility, albeit sarcastically, when he tried to disprove the Fox Lake item, by saying that the William Shore connection might be true, but only if Smithurst were a liar. Hoist by his own petard, as it were.

Although it is not impossible that they had at one time been acquainted, there is no evidence that Florence and John were even aware of one another's existence, at least not prior to about 1840. Likewise, there is no evidence whatsoever that Florence and John were related. However, if they were, and had they wanted to marry, being cousins would not have been an impediment. In the 19th century, first cousins often married: indeed Queen Victoria herself was married to her first cousin, Albert. But Florence does not appear to have been the marrying sort: she was openly disdainful of the institution of marriage, regarding it as 'man's chief weapon for the subjugation of women'.<sup>9</sup> As well, she kept some unorthodox religious opinions, even for a 19th century Unitarian. If she were to fall in love, it seems highly unlikely that it would have been with an evangelical, mission-minded, C of E warehouseman with high-church tendencies. There was, as well, a serious age difference between them, for when John enrolled at the seminary in Islington he was 29 and she only 16.<sup>10</sup> One thing John and Florence did share, however, was a notorious propensity towards bad-temperedness, and this would have had done little to endear them one to another. Moreover, class

differences would have been difficult to overcome. The Nightingale family was extremely well-to-do, and moved in high society; the Smithursts, if not actually poor, were nowhere near the same social rank. The Nightingales owned two estates, one in Leahurst, where Smithurst lived, and the other in the New Forest; they had Mayfair rooms in London, and they often toured the Continent: it is unlikely that there would have been much opportunity for John and Florence to meet and to fall in love, as the Nightingales made the seasonal rounds of the fashionable "social circuit". All of the above is circumstantial, to be sure, but amounts to a point of view very different from that given to us by Cannon, and from which the love story seems even more improbable. None of Nightingale's biographers make any mention of a love story whatsoever.<sup>11</sup>

While engaged in a parish-exchange with an English priest four years ago, I became acquainted with a woman whose family was from Derbyshire, near the Nightingale home. Her family's legend is that there was a local man, a cousin, who fell in love with Florence, was forbidden to marry her, and departed in grief to the New World. At first glance, one might think that this would confirm the love story between Nightingale and Smithurst, but, if this story is true, I suspect that the man in question is William Shore. He at least seems to have been a legitimate cousin and from a family of some substance, making him a much more likely suitor. This sort of oral tradition can be quite valuable, if not for fact then at least for a few leads for research. The oral tradition in Elora did lead me to look for a second set of silver. On the other hand, the existence of the oral tradition in Elora is often used as evidence or "proof" of the Smithurst love story, but there is little to show that this tradition existed prior to 1921. I believe that the oral tradition in Elora began with the publication of Mr. Cannon's romance, which in fact concludes with the statement that the story was being "made public for the first time" (although the possibility exists that the germ of the legend began earlier). Since the publication was 71 years ago, there would be few people alive today who didn't grow up knowing the story.

To reiterate: there is not a scrap of evidence to support any connection whatever between John Smithurst and Florence Nightingale; the silver in Elora is indisputably a personal gift to Smithurst from Ebenezer Hall alone; and the hypothesis which seems best to fit the circumstances as we have them at present is: that the Nightingale silver is the communion service now residing in St. Andrew's, Manitoba, which was not a personal gift to John, but rather was received by him as a gift from Florence's parents to the church mission; that by conflating the circumstances of Smithurst and Shore, and by conflating (or perhaps confusing) the two sets of silver, John Cannon was able to produce a fictional historical romance for the entertainment of his Sunday readers, which has unfortunately become accepted as fact, and which I have shown here and in other places to contain both factual errors and outright fabrication. Its fictional nature could

very well be due to Connon's naive historical method, rather than from a desire on his part to fabricate a whole story. Nonetheless, the story has been accepted as true for many years. It has gained credibility through habit and custom of repetition; through events such as the annual Nursing Services (begun in 1946 and held for some years in the Church in Elora); through occasional publicity over the years and the mild tourist trade that has been generated; and through the sheer appeal of the romance. People want it to be true, and are unwilling to be skeptical. For example, in the Toronto Star's report of the theft of the chalices last summer, it was the love story in all its cloying Connonian splendour that was reported as fact, even to the inclusion of the false translation of the inscription<sup>12</sup>.

It cannot be absolutely proven that my present theory is entirely correct in every detail; nonetheless, I feel that it is sufficiently plausible, and is the simplest explanation which fits all of the details as we now have them. I believe that if anyone wishes to assert that some connection existed between Nightingale and Smithurst, the onus is on that person to provide some supporting evidence, and to do so without reference to the document entitled "The Love Story of Florence Nightingale and John Smithurst" or its derivatives.

It must be confessed that from time to time I feel rather badly, for I know that it appears to some people that I am on some sort of malicious crusade of iconoclasm, gleefully out to destroy Elora's fine old myth. But this is not true. I feel strongly that by restoring the true history, we will be better able to find an authentic Canadian mythology, not based on third-rate sentimentality, but rather based on the accomplishments of real people. "Myth" has come to mean, in common usage, "old wives' tale"; but in fact it means "symbolic story which reveals to us who we truly are". Elora has in John Smithurst a genuine, not a second-hand, hero. If the myth we choose to cling to is the Nightingale love story, we reveal what is unfortunately our Canadian sense of inadequacy and insecurity, rooted in the assumption that anything Canadian can have significance only if it is associated with another country's heroes. By assuming that our own experience can only be validated by what amounts to our adoption of another country's mythology - because our own doesn't seem to us to be quite good enough - we are diminished. In our search for a truly Canadian identity, we need to let go of our insecurities, stop apologizing for being who we are, and claim for ourselves that which is truly our own. <sup>12</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. I am grateful to Steve Morning for his advice and for his contributions towards this present paper.
2. Historian of Elora, though unreliable, and correspondent for the Toronto *Sunday World* and London *Free Press*.

3. This article appeared in the *Beaver Dam Citizen*, under the title "Fox Lake: Resting Place of Florence Nightingale Suitor?", written by Ruth Mielke, probably during the 1950s or 60s. but no exact date was given. I was not able to discover the source of the original 1910 wire-copy item printed in the *London Free Press*.

4. *Guelph Mercury*, 18 March, 1988, p. 3.

5. Connon received more recognition from this story than from anything else he did, and therefore had a strong interest in keeping it alive. He rewrote it several times, and it was published in many papers, including the Hudson's Bay Co. *The Beaver*, September 1939, under the title "The Lamp Shines in Red River."

6. For a discussion of some of the more glaring errors in his narrative, see my first essay on John Smithurst in *Wellington County History*, Vol. 1, 1987, pp. 6, 12(n), 31.

7. On one of these clippings, there is a marginal note "1820 + 30 = 1851: Smithurst in England", correctly deducing that both Smithurst and Nightingale were in England that year.

8. Steve Thorning, private letter, January 1992.

9. See L Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* for an early biographical essay on Florence.

10. An article on Smithurst in the *London Free Press*, 7 October, 1933, by Dr. AE. Byerly, states that the engagement between John and Florence was broken because of this age difference.

11. AN. Thompson relates that one of her biographers, Mrs. Woodham-Smith, has said specifically that the facts do not substantiate the story.

12. *Toronto Star*, 20 July, 1991, p. 2. Sentimentality still makes good copy, I guess.

### **FOX LAKE - RESTING PLACE OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE SUITOR?** *Mielka R, Beaver Dam Citizen, 1950-60*

Those visiting the Riverside Memorial Park (cemetery) in Fox Lake, sometimes ask about a grave plot with its white, century old marble monument, which bears the name William Shore Jr. 1808-1868. Sentimental historians claim it is the grave of a self-exiled suitor of Florence Nightingale ...

A great uncle [*actually uncle, Ed*] of her father, Peter Nightingale, with no [*legitimate, Ed*] heirs to carry on his name bequeathed his fortune which was claimed to yield 40,000 annually [*£ or \$? Ed.*] to William E. Shore, with the condition he assume the surname of Nightingale.

Tradition says that among the young men who fell in love with Miss Nightingale were an uncle [*actually second cousin, Ed.*] and a cousin [*actually not shown to be related, Ed.*] - Wm Shore Jr., who was 12 years



her senior, and a John Smithurst [*equally markedly her senior, Ed*]. Because of family disapproval and the bans of church and civil law [*not true, Ed*] marriage with either could not be considered.

Both the men came to [*north, Ed*] America in about 1853, ... Smithurst [*eventually, Ed*] became a missionary pastor of a church in Elora, Ontario, Canada, and shore came to Fox Lake where he died of pneumonia March 6th 1868. His tombstone bears the poignant quotation, "Thy will be done." Smithurst died six months earlier. Letters and newspaper stories in Fox Lake's historical files indicate that Shore chose to live in Fox Lake because of the George Hudsons, whom he had known as the Merediths in England, where they had been employed on the estate of Shore's parents.

Shore was described as an aloof, sedate and scholarly melancholy gentleman. His silver-mounted gun was admired by 'all the hunters around', while the ladies noted his courtly manner and his excellent wardrobe with very correct hunting attire. Some people called him 'The Remittance Man' because he would disappear for a few days at regular intervals and return with a sum of money. It was believed he went to Dodge County seat at Juneau, Wisconsin, to receive a remittance from England.

Fox Lake was a sportsman's paradise in 1863 when he purchased 150 acres of choice hunting and fishing spots .... Shore drove a small oxen team on a two wheel cart when he visited his property .....

Skeptics, who are inclined to throw an aura of doubt on the thwarted Nightingale-Shore romance legend readily concur that there was a close connection between the two English families. His love for Miss Nightingale was suspected by kindly Mrs. Barron, [*whose establishment was often where he took his meals, Ed*] who was a trusted confidant of many who enjoyed her *American House* hospitality.

Shore's will left all his personal property to George Hudson; 500 [*dollars assumed? Ed*] to Ben Ferguson, a friend; 12000 to a brother, George Clarke Shore of London; and any English property to which he was entitled in any way, to his sister, Matilda ....

Away from his country and the inspiration and encouragement of a family, Shore was merely a small boy's hero with a gun, dog and nothing to do, and the envy of his hunting companions. Another report indicates he suffered during the last hours of his illness, but gave those who were taking care of him little trouble as possible. .... Shore's childhood was spent at Gainsborough, England. ....

## John Smithurst time line

1753-63	Enoch Smithurst applied for licence at Jug and Glass
1768 & 69	Enoch and Elizabeth Smithurst children baptised at Dethick
1782	Jug and Glass date stone S S E
1807[or 2?]	Born son of Wm and Christiana in Lea and baptised at Dethick
1803	Peter Nightingale the younger died
1819	One called John Smithurst [but not ours] was Clerk at Dethick
1820	Florence Nightingale born
1830	John Smithurst's father died
1831	The so called John Smithurst ends Clerkship at Dethick
1833	John Smithurst's mother died
1834	John in court sued for money [building 2 houses]
1835	John it is claimed fell in love with his 16 year old 'cousin'
1835	Wm. Shore, perhaps a suitor, was later a 'remittance man' in US
1836	John's 'calling' experience
1838	John admitted a deacon, Church Missionary Soc. at St James, Westminster on the 26 Dec
1838	Appointed to Fort Garry in the Red River Colony of the Hudson's Bay Company
1839	Ordained as a Priest by the Bishop of London
1839 April	Officiated at a wedding in Islington
1839	John sailed on the 'Prince Rupert'
1840	Performed marriage ceremony of Chief Pigwys
1841	At Red River Settlement, now Winnipeg
1841	One 'Smithurst' was still in the village as a teenager
1845	George Henry Nicholson rejected by Florence [her first cousin]
1845	Working on an English-Cree dictionary
1849	Honoured being made member of the Council of Assiniboia
1851	Returned to England having resigned from the CMS
1852	Joined the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
1852	Returned to Canada first to Grantham, near the Niagara Falls
1852	Appointed to Elora, Ontario
1857	Dismissed by Bishop for going to Minto, abandoning his flock
1858	Dr Paget came to Elora, author of brief letter in 1910
1859	Monkton Milne finally rejected by Florence
1860	Florence's affection for Jowett began
1867 Sept	Death at Elora of Rev. John age 60 of Lea Hurst, Minto



‘Florence, The Lady with the Lamp.’ A chamber Opera first performed Elora 1992  
Score by Timothy Sullivan : Libretto by Anne McPherson



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