

WHO KILLED WILLIAM ROBINSON?

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Original Version of site



Welcome



William Robinson was a real person, a Black American who was murdered on [Salt Spring Island](#) in the British Colony of British Columbia in 1868. He had arrived in the Colony a decade before, as part of a contingent of Black Americans fleeing persecution and slavery in the years leading up to the American Civil War.

Robinson was one of three island residents killed in this small community in the space of less than two years. All three were Black. An Aboriginal man named Tshuanhusset, also called Tom, was charged with the murder, convicted and hanged, but a closer look at the evidence challenges the guilty verdict.

In the pages that follow you will find as complete a collection of historical documents, that relate to the death of William Robinson and the other two Blacks killed in the same period, as the two originators, their research assistants, and their friends and colleagues have been able to find.

The documents do not just tell about their deaths. "Who Killed William Robinson?" is just the first of the questions you may ask of this web site. "How did he live?" is another. In the documents that follow there is a rich social history of the Blacks, Aboriginal People, Kanakas (Hawaiians) and Whites of many national backgrounds, from Azorian Portugese to the British colonial elite, who settled Salt Spring Island. Their stories tell us much about the settlement of British Columbia, Canada and to a degree, the United States. They tell about settlement, the importance of land, the dispossession of aboriginal people, about justice, racism, family life, religion -- the full gamut of life in the colony.

The documents include newspaper stories, inquests, trial documents, private correspondence, diaries, paintings, artist's reconstructions and photographs. Altogether there is a whole archive here: hundreds of pages of documents and nearly a hundred different images.

No one expects a researcher on a limited time frame to explore every document in any archive or library, and that is true here, where material has been drawn from several archives. You choose your path into the original sources and follow the leads and questions that seem interesting to you.

Chances are you will come to different conclusions from others who have explored the same site, but seen different evidence. This was the case when a selection of these documents was shown to university and college professors who research and teach British Columbia History. Legal historians, social historians, labour historians, political historians, all interpreted the evidence in different ways and came to different conclusions.

This web site then is not just about William Robinson or about British Columbia. It is also about historical understanding. It allows you to look at the same documents that professional researchers look at to build their accounts. It allows you to interpret the raw material of the past and to ask the larger questions like, how do we know what happened in the past?

