



Harry Iveson in his Harness Shop.

Osgoode Township Historical Society & Museum

Vernon School
P.O. Box 83 - Vernon, Ontario
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Newsletter

VOLUME 8 1982 NUMBER 3

In the year 1827 Britain undertook the difficult task of constructing the Rideau Canal. Fifty years previous, the British army under General Burgoyne had been defeated in 1777 and the hopes of American people who opposed the Revolution were dashed. Some of the Army were captured and imprisoned, others escaped and congregated at Fort St. John's east of Montreal or at other safe places along the Canadian - Quebec - border. For six years there was uncertainty as England tried to look after the needs of thousands of Loyalist Refugees, men, women and children. On Christmas Eve, 1783, the "Colonies" were granted their independence and immediately land had to be surveyed to locate these people in new homes in a new Wilderness.

In 1984 the bi-centennial of the founding of Ontario will be celebrated. If any of your many ancestors were among those who "joined the British Standard before 1783" the United Empire Loyalist Association would like to hear from you.

Roger Stevens was one of those who was in Burgoyne's army. He went ahead of the Surveyor's and made a rude home for himself and his wife and four children along the Rideau. He was Carleton County's first settler. A. E. Cruikshanks, writing in the Ontario History publication, calls him THE FORGOTTEN PATRIOT. He had left Pittsford Vermont where he had a Mill on Stevens Brook and was not to come back on pain of death. He lost there 1030.5 pounds. His son, Christopher Babuty Stevens, received land in Osgoode, lot 7 con 5, in 1811.

Since there are a great many errors in books concerning known facts about his life, we quote from a few of the many references to him in the Public Archives. Even the U.E. List credits him with too many children, some being his sisters. Incidentally, the word Rideau is spelled in at least a dozen different ways: Redo, Rido Rideaux, Riddeau etc. Roger first had to make a road from Matilda Township to the Rideau, and in 1790 removed his family there. Since the land was unsurveyed at the time, he later found that he had made improvements in Marlborough Township on Crown Land. When he asked later for land - 2000 acres was allotted to an Ensign - he said that he had been on the Rideau eight months without a neighbour.

The following Petitions from R.G. 1 L3 speak for themselves:

"I certify that I saw Roger Stevens in General Burgoyne's Army at Fort Edward in the State of New York when he joined the British Standard in the month of August 1777 - that he came to Canada after the capture of that Army and was frequently employed in Secret Service, and in 1783 obtained an Ensigncy in the King's Rangers to which Regiment I then belonged...."

Geo. R. Ferguson Captain

"Roger Stevens was under the command of Matthew Howard - my father - and he escaped from Bennington Jail in 1782."

Peter Howard

PETITION OF WIDOW POLLY STEVENS ...

sheweth

That your Petitioner had the misfortune to have her husband drowned last fall - and is left with three small children - and has lately lost her house and moveables and provisions by fire.

Your Petitioner therefore humbly prays Your Excellency will be pleased to grant her eight hundred acres of land - that is two hundred for herself and three children - first concession Number thirty in the Town of Marlborough - and 600 acres on the first three lots adjoining above Marlborough - This being the land on which Your Petitioner's Husband Ensign Roger Stevens made his first Improvements - Which was the first Improvements made in this Wilderness.

County of Grenvil
17 December 1793

Polley Stevens

Roger Stevens had not had the opportunity to get his signature on his Grant before he drowned. There was more trouble for the widow.

Petition of Stephen Burritt, Agent and Trustee of Mrs. Stevens and Children, widow and minors of the late Ensign Roger Stevens.

Known that a fraudulent collusive entry has been obtained of the said lands by one William Merrick whereby the widow and suffering infants may be wronged out of the property for which the Heirs and Father fought.

(Written 1795. The 3 children were: Sarah, Guy Carleton and Christopher Babuty.)

The Plaque at Merrickville states that Wm Merrick bought the land from Roger Stevens.

Another Petition Thurs May 30, 1793

Present

The Hon'ble Wm Osgoode
The Hon'ble Peter Russell
The Hon'ble James Baby

Roger Stevens Esq and Associates.

Memorial Praying for a Township and also for four hundred acres of land on the Great Falls on the River Rideau, having erected a good Saw Mill thereon and has at this time the necessary preparation to build a grist Mill in consequence of the Land Board of Lunenburgs promise to recommend him to his excellency.

Ordered that the four hundred acres be granted but not the Township.

30 May 1793

Roger's oldest daughter, Martha, married Stephen Burritt. Roger did not live to see his first grandchild, Edmund Burritt, born later in 1793.

These incidents have been mentioned to reveal that the worst of the settlement problems were over by the time Osgoode was settled. Stegman was appointed Surveyor of the Townships along the Rideau: Marlborough, Osgoode, Gloucester, North Gower, Nepean. The work began in 1793 but Stegman died 1794. That is the reason that land was given out on our western boundary as early as 1799.

The recent book - THE RIDEAU - has a few inaccuracies in referring to Roger Stevens because the writer is confusing him with his father of the same name. At Niagara, 1796, the father Roger states:

"I came into this Province in 1795 with a wife (Mary Doolittle) and ten children."

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During the last week of July, 1982, the people of Vernon are celebrating the Centennial of the formation of S.S. #20 and the building of the brick school.

By the year 1879 tradesmen seemed to feel that the high ground between parts of lots 39 and 40 in concession 6 and the same lots in concession 7 was a safe place to set up shop. Duncan McDonald and James Campbell owned all of lot 39, concession 6 and James Walker owned the E½ lot 40. In concession 7, Francis Pepper had W½ lot 39 and Matthew Porteous W½ 40. Small parcels were being bought from these lands - all had the address Osgoode. Those living in concession 6 went to "The Swale" school #9; those in concession 7 to Spring Hill, #8.

Most of the business men were young: Edward Bowen, a Mason, was 32, in 1881, helping out David Fraser and wife in the store; John Howell held ¾ acre and Thomas Howes ½ acre. They worked together as blacksmiths, the former 28 in 1881, the latter 32. Next to them was Daniel Cook, older, a cooper. Thomas Watts was a cabinet maker; Hugh Cameron a miller; James Comrie a carpenter; John Phair, shoemaker, 35 in 1881, had 50 acres lot 37 concession 7 beside Sheldricks as well as ½ acre lot 39. He later increased the lot to ¾. And there was Richard Bowen, George Jeffrey, Thomas Campbell, Alex Smith, Peter Dalgleish. And there were the CAMPBELL BROS., Joseph A. and John M., Lumbermen, who had two acres, NE corner lot 40 con 6; and Thomas Bow a Merchant.

Vernon was a busy village 100 years ago and it is no wonder that there was a demand for a school. The school building reflects the craftsmanship of the workmen in the village.

ROBERT MCGREGOR

For those of us who attended Lisgar Collegiate or the Ottawa Normal School, the sign MCGREGORS SAUSAGES, warned us that the street car had arrived at Lisgar Street and we should get off and proceed eastward. Sausage making may seem a long way removed from logging in Osgoode Township, but the young children who grew up in the Wilderness here learned to be both imaginative and industrious.

Recently, Ron Crowe of Toronto, a descendant of the McGregors from Glen Lyon who settled for a time in Chatham, Quebec, (and claim descent from Rob Roy McGregor) gave as a gift to the Society the Memoirs of Robert McGregor. We believe this piece of writing to be invaluable in depicting both the hardships of Pioneer life and the satisfaction derived from it.

Robert's father, Alexander, was one of 12 children born to Malcolm McGregor and Christiann Blakie. The Robert mentioned in Newsletter 1 remained unmarried and died at David Fraser's home. He is buried in Spring Hill Cemetery. When Alexander married Clementine McArthur, they settled in a shanty, concession 5 lot 35, that had been erected by the original owner in 1830 on a small knob close to the present Dalmeny Road. Here children Malcolm and Margaret were born, and on December 13, 1847 twin boys, Robert and Daniel Arthur. The following year the family made one of several moves, as did many of the early settlers. Moving was easy when there was practically nothing to move but yourself and what you could carry on your back.

In 1860 they rented lot 37 concession 5 from Peter McNab. Peter had married Christiann, a twin and sister of Alexander. There were now six children, Chrissie and David as well as the other four. The parents and Margaret remained here (the Wyatt - Moss farm) until Robert was able, in 1870 to move them to a house he had built on Creighton Street New Edinburgh. The parents had spent almost thirty years of their married life in shanties, but each of their six children had a distinguished career.

When Robert was 87 years old, his son Fred, Private Secretary to McKenzie King, persuaded his father to write the story of his life. The work took 3 months and a copy was sent to each of his nieces and nephews. Many of our readers knew Robert McGregor, he died in 1934.

Quoting from the logging by two young boys:

"In January of 1860, my father still thought there was money in the lumbering business ... With himself, Malcolm, and the twin boys, we commenced working in the bush. That was alright for full grown men, but for thirteen year-old boys to work in deep snow, chopping with now regular sized axes, it would look to some, at the present date, more than should be expected... In a month we were felling elm trees alone. Before felling a tree we would see to felling two trees of any kind crossways to where the elm tree would fall and thus not allow the elm to be buried in deep snow. After felling the tree, father might cut off the length that would be used for square timber - anywhere from thirty to forty feet ... I remember one particular cold freezing day we two boys driving the team of horses away back into the bush, backing the sled under a large piece of timber left high enough to get the sled under it, fastening it on with chains that would stick to bare hands, driving two miles to the Castor Reiver, leaving it on the ice and coming home in the open sled; Dan's face freezing and several times getting off and rubbing it with snow; dashing the horses into the stable and getting into the house. And oh such a mother met us. All was well then.

By the middle of the winter, quite a lot of timber was on the Castor River. The next thing to do was to get all this timber into large cribs, twenty-five pieces in each. These timbers were bound together in very strong frames made of large long poles, and bound together with heavy withs, also heavy snubbing withs. Withs were used instead of ropes. They were made from young sapling elm trees from ten to twenty feet long, about the thickness of a handspike, also smaller ones. They were so twisted from the small end down to near the butt so as to be altogether soft and pliable, and would be as strong as any rope. The butt end of the with was forced into a large auger hole in the frame of the crib and wedged in tight, one on each corner of every crib. This had to be done before the breaking up of the ice in the spring. When the timber was all hauled and laid down on the ice, and all frames completed and the ice cleared from the river, two men were put on each of the five cribs. Dan and I were entrusted with one crib to go as far as Duncanville (Russell).

The water was quite high and the current swift. (Cont'd Number 4)

We should like to know who chose Osgoode Township for settlement after working on the Rideau Canal. The work on the Canal commenced, as was stated previously, in 1827, the year the first permanent settlers arrived in Osgoode. Tradition says that William Kelly was a stone-cutter on the Canal, and we have the large Kelly settlement in Osgoode as well as many descendants elsewhere. John McNab is said to have worked on the Canal and to have encouraged other members of the family to come from Scotland. He and wife, cousin Catherine McDonald, have no descendants living today. We hope during the year to find payroll lists or other documents relating to the actual workmen, telling of the perilous times, and perhaps the deaths resulting from accident and fever.

We know of one permanent settler whose name appears on the 1st of one of the companies of ROYAL SAPPERS AND MINERS. Two companies, 7th and 15th, were raised in England in 1827. On arrival in Canada some of the men, apprehensive of the difficulties involved, deserted. To stall any further desertions, the men were offered one hundred acres of land on the completion of the work. At the end of the year 1831, about half of the men wished to remain in Canada, the others returned to England where they were either discharged or assigned to other duties. For example, William Cameron, Bugler, was to serve in Bermuda, John Eads in Gibraltar, Arthur Kelly would reside in Armagh.

John McDonald was one of those disbanded at the Rideau Canal 31 December 1831. 2nd Corporal Daniel McDonald - no relationship known - had been discharged 24 December (P.A. C 3160, p178). Other local names in the list include: Nesbitt, Little, Fraser, Hume, Connor, Hay, Burns, Murdock, McLaren, Porteous.

In a report by Archibald McDonell in 1832, he lists John McDonald as having taken possession of N^y lot 28, concession 10 in 1830. How had he learned, when working at one end of the Township of this beautiful piece of property at the other end? On the south half of the lot, also straddling the Castor at what was to become Kenmore, were his younger brothers, William and James, who had come to Canada two years after John arrived. Each of the brothers has many descendants in the Osgoode - Russell area.

John had married Elizabeth McMullen - when? Her parents, Zachariah McMullen and Jane Brunton also came to Canada in 1827. The record of the oldest son, William, born in Bytown, no doubt, has not been found, but the next three are recorded at St. Andrew's by Rev. John Cruikshanks. Daughter Jane was born in Bytown January 19, 1831, and is said to have been carried to the shanty prepared on the bank of the Castor when she was two months old. Jane McDonald - Widow Jane Reid - Grandma Reid to Kenmore folk, spent nearly 90 years in that area, dying in Ottawa at the home of a daughter Margaret Thomas. The Bytown in which she was born was indeed different from the city in which she died. John McDonald is assessed in Gloucester in 1830; in Osgoode in 1831. His grand-daughter Lena Reid, Mrs. Hugh Watson, told of his walking to Manotick early every Monday morning and home again every Saturday night for the year he was living in Kenmore before the Canal was finished.

We mention below 3 valuable books that have been reprinted:

HISTORY OF THE HIGHLAND CLEARANCES by ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

Printed in Great Britain (Originally printed in 1883)

.....
MACKIE'S SHORT HISTORY OF SCOTLAND Revised by GORDON DONALDSON

.....
HISTORY OF THE COUNTIES ARGENTEUIL, QUEBEC, PRESCOTT, ONTARIO
by C. Thomas

.....
We appreciated the contributions from one of our native daughters who has a fine gift for art and writing. Below we print a poem received a year ago.

TO AN OLD CHEESE FACTORY

*You told our story, forty years ago -
At crossroad near the outskirts of a town:
Your business big as butterfat and flow
That lapped in cans rough-jogging up and down
A dusty mile, in milk-rig, buggy, cart
To wait in line: each driver keen to learn
The "latest"; old Grey sensing stop and start
While banter raced and lagged ... until her turn
To move ahead beneath your stoop's dim shade.
The Cheesemaker, with hoist and vat and scale
Balances a family's fortune; sampled, weighed;
Marked in "the factory-book" the gain or fail.
Your milk cheque monthly made or saved our day
And still how sweet, fresh curd; how sour, whey.*

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P.S. June is DAIRY MONTH.