

Rawdon Ready for Development in 1830

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One wonders about the topography and watercourses on the Seventh and Eighth Ranges of Rawdon Township in 1830, and the types of trees that grew in the virgin forest. This was a developing area, and only ten years after the small settlement that was established along the lower ranges. Now, a few ambitious settlers were opening farms and mills independent of those on the First and Second Ranges. Answers to these questions are found in a detailed report by government commissioners—a team of experienced surveyors appointed by the Parliament of Lower Canada to explore the territory between Grenville on the Ottawa and the St-Maurice River. Their report is included in the Appendix to the XLth volume of the Journals of the House of Assembly of the Province of Lower Canada (the first session of the fourteenth provincial parliament).

Background

In 1829, the Lower Canada legislature voted a sum of money to explore the territory that lay “in the rear of settlements” between Grenville on the Ottawa River and the St-Maurice River, and to examine the practicality of opening a road between these two points. T. [Toussaint] Pothier¹superintended the exploration and reported to the House. Two men who had served on a previous expedition of exploration were recommended and engaged for the work: Lieutenant Ingall of the 15th Regiment and surveyor John Adams, Esquire. The party, which included workers with axes and provisions, departed from Montreal on 24 September 1830 and began work at Grenville on 26 September. The journal that follows contains the remarks of both men.

They proceeded in a north easterly direction behind “the northerly settlements”, diverging “according to the nature of the ground” occasionally, and passed through the townships of Grenville, Chatham, Abercrombie, Kilkenny, Kildare and Rawdon [sic Rawdon & Kildare], the Seigniorie of Daillebout [sic d’Ailleboust] and the Township of Brandon etc. until they reached the banks of Lake Maskinongé in the Seigniorie of Lanaudière. From there, they continued through the townships of Hunterstown and Caxton, traveling southeast to Three Rivers and then to Quebec, where they arrived on 22 November.

The commissioners took pleasure in “remarking the facility with which a road of communication may be opened” from the St-Maurice to Grenville, through areas well adapted for cultivation and settlement. Information from other persons “especially Indians” suggested another expedition be undertaken next summer, up the St-Maurice to Matawa River and to explore the rivers that enter the Ottawa.

Ingall had served gratuitously, and it was recommended that he receive a recompense equal to Mr. Adams so that he might support his family continue with the proposed project. The Commissioners “flatter themselves” that this would be approved by the Legislature.

T. Pothier, Commissioner, 28 February 1831

A large section of the 7th and 8th ranges, lots, 12 to 28 of Rawdon Township had been reported on by Surveyor General, Joseph Bouchette (LAC-2515 Vol. 57 pps, 29,105 - 29,123). He used the field notes of the surveyor John Sullivan taken in October 1826.

Remarks of Ingall and Adams recorded when the survey, on an imagined line,
passed through Rawdon 7th & 8th Ranges

October 25, 1830 *A hard frost the whole night. Thermometer at six o'clock, twenty seven. Started at half past seven o'clock and descended abruptly to the discharge of the Lake; we crossed it over a beaver dam. And observed that the stream was towards the north. After a short ascent, we entered Lot 4 of Rawdon, still between the seventh and eighth ranges. We descended fifty feet gradually and continued over level land, as far as lot five; timber beech and maple. Soil a light sandy marle. On entering lot five the land was rough; timber hemlock, spruce and cedar; this rough tract terminated in an abrupt descent into a valley; still black timber. This valley will be found to run round the north side of the hill until it meets the level tract on lot four. We crossed a small brook and descended gradually about one hundred feet and met a stream running south east; this stream was about eighteen feet wide. We crossed a wood path and continued on level ground for some distance, until we reached a small brook. We then ascended gently to the top of a low hill and almost immediately descended forty feet abruptly into a small valley. The timber we had passed since crossing the stream or small river was hemlock, spruce, balsam and a few black birch trees. On entering the valley, we crossed a small stream and came out on a clearance but uninhabited.² Here we saw another wood road or path. We soon entered lot seven and ascended a very high hill, close on our right or south east, a very easy and gradual ascent. This high hill was covered with beech and maple. We wound round a rugged part of the hill, and entered lot eight, and then ascended over another steep and rough tract. On gaining the summit we perceived that a fine valley or large ravine wound close to the south east. At a great distance in a south direction, we could distinguish a sheet of water which we imagined to be in the neighbourhood of Montreal, and in the middle distance we could see a tinned spire and one or two buildings glittering in the sun.³ From the height we were upon, the intervening country appeared to be almost flat. We made a gradual descent into a valley of hemlock, spruce and cedar, and finding some water under the root of a tree, stopped to dine. In running a road along this line, of course the ravine to the south-east should be taken advantage of. After our dinner we pursued our march, and found the valley end in small swamp, which brought us into lot 9. We could distantly hear a fall or heavy rapid to the north. The whole of this lot was a continuation of undulating land covered principally with hardwood. Through one of the valleys ran a brook of clear water. We ascended a gradual rise and entered a clearance on lot ten and another on lot eleven. The inhabitants were employed making ashes.⁴ We left these clearances by a small path leading towards the east and shortly after came on another farm. We then changed our course a little more to the north, and passed through a wood for about half a mile, which brought us into a cleared meadow, or strip of interval land, on the banks of the River Lac-Ouerreau [sic]. Here we camped for the night. This fine river (which at this place was deep and poured down a vast body of water) owes its name to a large lake many leagues to the north of the settlements at Rawdon. and is navigable the whole way for canoes. Some Indians we fell in with encamped on its banks, informed us that the Lake Ouerreau was with a half day's journey of a very large lake which was the source of the North River, and that the communication with the River Matawa [sic] and Vermillion, was close to the same lakes. The shore where we were encamped were low and convenient for erecting a bridge. The banks of the river were pretty well settled, and a road on the opposite side communicated with the lower parts of the Township and the Seigniorie of L'Assomption.*

October 26, 1830 *A frosty morning. Thermometer at six o'clock, twenty six. Commenced conveying our stores across the river in an old canoe which we found on the west shore. Having seen every thing*

safe across. We proceeded along the east shore to lot 15⁵ on the seventh range, belonging to Mr. Bagnal [sic] where we succeeded in procuring a cart to convey our stores to Mr. Hobbs' [sic] mills on the Red River.⁶ Part of the men went round with the cart, and the remainder, with their axes, accompanied us back to our line. After passing through a small swamp we ascended a hill and entered a clearance on lots fifteen and sixteen. The land continued level as far as the foot of a high and steep hill generally called mountain.⁷ Soil clayey. We gained the summit of this hill by passing round to the south-east through a gorge down which ran a small brook, timber beech and maple. In gaining the opposite side of the hill we descended rather rapidly into a clearance. Here the land was flat and continued so to the next farm which was on the Red River and belonged to Mr. Hobbs [7 / 22]. We proceeded to the mills and found our stores had arrived ten minutes before us. Mr. Hobbs procured a cart to convey the stores round to a Mr. Brown's on lot twenty eight, it being close to the line we were pursuing.⁸ After dinner we proceeded across the Red River (which is about thirty or thirty five feet wide) accompanied by Mr. Hobbs, who very kindly offered to show us the most direct route through the wood to Brown's farm. Leaving a river, we passed over a small hill and soon struck upon the line between the seventh and eighth ranges. We continued in the vicinity of our line, but generally a little to the southward over level fine land, well wooded with beech and maple. We crossed between two farms and reached Brown's at five o'clock situated on lot twenty eight and four and one half acres from the augmentation to Kildare. The air was sultry and peculiarly oppressive. The sky clouded, a little past five we were assailed by a violent thunder storm which lasted until ten o'clock. Some flashes of lightning, and accompanying peals of thunder, were terrific. Thermometer at eight o'clock fifty two.

October 27 A cloudy sky but symptoms of it clearing up. In consequence of our men complaining that their necks were strained from conveying heavy loads over such a rough country, we engaged two men to accompany us for this day. Started from Brown's farm at eight o'clock, and having crossed the four and a half acres, entered the augmentation of Kildare and continued along the front line of the first range.

¹ Toussaint Pothier (1771 – 1845) was a businessman, militia officer, seigneur, member of the Legislative Council and civil servant. The son of a prosperous merchant, he helped to found the North West Company and was actively involved with the Michilimackinac Company and with John Jacob Astor in forming the South West Fur Company. He owned several properties in the centre of Montreal including an immense piece of land along what is now Rue Craig, also the seigneuries of Lanaudière and Carufel. (Source http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pothier_toussaint_7E.html)

Pothier had a Rawdon connection. At 49, he had married the under-age daughter of the late Ralph Henry Bruyeres, one of the sons-in-law and heirs of Captain William Dunbar, who was awarded 3000 acres at Rawdon in 1789 for services to the Crown in the American Revolution.

² I have assumed that they crossed the lots of the Smiley family. Samuel Smiley and his sons Samuel, William and John and grandsons George and John had received tickets of location in January 1828 to parts of lots 6, 7 and 8 of the Eighth Range with one son located on the adjoining Ninth Range. The wood paths and clearances noted in this area are evidence of their early labour to confirm their locations. They received their Letters Patent in 1833 and 1838.

In 1823 and 1824, John Smiley and his three sons had tickets of Location on the Fifth Range at lots 20 and 21. The elder John and Samuel Smiley on Eighth Range were brothers from Corrinny, Parish of Currin, County Monaghan.

³ Probably, they were seeing the spire of *l'église de St-Louis de France* at Terrebonne, which dated from 1734. George Heriot's painting of Terrebonne in 1810 is what I imagine they saw in 1830.

⁴ Abraham Watters had an occupation permit for 7 / N10 in 1828, which he sold to his brother-in-law Henry Smith in 1832. Henry Smith and Jane Watters were the author's great grandparents.

James Croker had been located at 7 / S15 in 1823 and in 1826 and sold to Robert Bagnall. Croker lived at 8 / S10 for the 1831 for which he received letters patent in 1846. James D.C. Holtby lived here before moving to Minnesota in 1869.

⁵ Robert Bagnall (endnote 4) was at 7 / N 15 since 1823. A native of King's County, he operated a potashery and a saw mill.

Lot 15 of the 8th range, was the property of Bernard and Hugh Cassidy, located there in 1827.

⁶ George Hobs was a Loyalist from Prince Edward Island but was born in New York. The *Quebec Mercury* on 14 April 1836 reported when he died aged 63 that he was "formerly an inspector of flour for Montreal". He was located at 7 / 22 from 1821, with his sons at lots 21 and 23 and other locations.

⁷ In later years, this was area known in the Copping family, of Rawdon, as Blueberry Mountain.

⁸ Robert Brown, a native of County Down, is the author's twice great grandfather. He settled at Rawdon on four adjoining lots in 1824, with three sons and four daughters.