

Mohawk Lands and Township Orientation

BY J. E. HIETALA

The preciseness of the bearings shown on the plans of the 1000 acre sectional system townships undoubtedly has piqued the curiosity of many surveyors as to their origin, especially those who have used the bearings so often as to have memorized their natural trigonometric functions. The origin can be traced in the records of the Ministry of Natural Resources to the earliest settlement history of Ontario.

Subsequent to the American Revolution, Mohawk Indians moved to the Bay of Quinte area from the United States and settled on lands that had been purchased by the crown in 1784 from the Mississauga Indians.

By 1787, pressure for settlement of United Empire Loyalists, other settlers and discharged soldiers necessitated further subdivision of land west of Kingston. On December 19, 1787, John Collins, Deputy Surveyor General reported to Governor Guy Lord Dorchester that the boundary between the Mohawk Settlement and the lands proposed to be subdivided for the Loyalists had been agreed on between himself and Sir John Johnston, Superintendent of Refugees. Captain John, the Mohawk Chief, and others of the village were allocated a tract of land twelve miles in width fronting on the Bay of Quinte by fifteen miles in depth. This tract is now the Township of Tyendinaga.

Alexander Aitken, Deputy Surveyor was instructed to survey the Township of Richmond for the loyalists beginning on the north bank of Mohawk Bay at a point on the easternmost boundary of the Mohawk Indian lands and thence along the boundary north 16 degrees west magnetic. The concession lines were surveyed easterly from the boundary on a bearing of north 74 degrees east magnetic. In the same year of 1787, he surveyed part of the Township of Thurlow respecting the fact that the west boundary of the Mohawk Indian lands was parallel to its east boundary and laid out the concessions in Thurlow Township westerly from the boundary on a course of south 74 degrees west magnetic.

In 1790, Alexander Aitken, Deputy Surveyor, laid out certain concessions and part of the boundaries of the Township of Sidney which is situated immediately to the west of the Township of Thurlow. The concessions were also run on the bearing of south 74 degrees west and the township boundaries on a course of north 16 degrees west.

Under instructions from John Collins, Deputy Surveyor General, dated February 22, 1791, Augustus Jones, Deputy Surveyor, laid out certain concessions and part of the boundaries of townships extending westerly from the Township of Sidney to the Township with the proposed name of Dublin but later named York. Only one concession line was run across each township and it was run on a bearing of south 74 degrees west. Also those portions of the boundaries established between the intervening townships were laid out on a bearing of north 16 degrees west. The concession line defined in the Township of York is known today as Queen Street in the City of Toronto.

The foregoing townships were subsequently completed and the subdivision of the province continued northerly laying out townships in the single front system and later in the double front system along with two 2400 acres sectional system townships. The boundaries and the interior fabric of these townships which lie southerly of a line drawn roughly between Lake Simcoe and the Township of Palmerston were established in most part on the courses of the prevailing bearings of north 16 degrees west and south 74 degrees east.

During this time numerous district boundaries were surveyed in conjunction with or prior to the survey of the townships to subdivide Upper Canada into Administrative areas. These boundaries were run on the course of north 16 degrees west. One such boundary was the westerly extent of the District of Bathurst which was established in the course of survey of townships in that district between 1816 and 1842 beginning with the Township of South Sherbrooke and ending with the Township of Stafford. The district boundary was common with the southwesterly boundaries of these townships.

The significant aspect of this boundary is that it is in part common with the northeasterly limits of the townships of Brougham, Gratton and Wilberforce which were the first 1000 acre sectional system townships surveyed by the Crown in 1851. The survey instructions specified that certain northerly and southerly boundaries of these townships were to be run south 69 degrees 08 minutes 20 seconds west from points on the district boundary a distance of 727 chains and that the westerly boundaries were then to be run on a course of north 20 degrees 51 minutes 40 seconds west.

The apparent intent was to establish the southwesterly boundaries of these townships parallel to the district boundary and thus maintain the orientation of the townships. Projected plans illustrating the design of the subdivision which accompanied the instructions show the southwesterly boundaries of the three townships to be in alignment.

The deduction may here be made that astronomic equivalents of the magnetic bearings of north 16 degrees west and north 74 degrees east had been determined prior to 1851 although no documentary evidence to the fact has been found.

The 1000 acre sectional system of survey of townships was adopted to subdivide lands immediately north of the double front system townships. This system of survey terminated at the French and Mattawa rivers.

The positioning of the limits of the Mohawk lands not only affected the orientation of townships in a large part of Ontario but also determined the layout of the Town of York and of countless other towns and cities where original road allowances and lot lines control street patterns.

J. E. Hietala, O.L.S.
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Poem for Burns' Day

LINES WRITTEN UPON FIRST TASTING A HAGGIS

Auld Cloutie cuiked ye, no mortal can,
Vile chieftain of the pudding clan.
I wouldna feed ye to an Englishman,
Ye blastit bag.
Your brimstane reek I canna stand,
A man maun gag.

Tae think an inoffensive sheepie
Was sacrificed for such a heapie.
Plucked frae the heather, ye eldrich
creepie,

Hae ye no shame?
Her puir wee lambs left cauld and weepie,
Without a hame.

At Bannockburn the wily Scot,
Had haggis made before he fought.
It made him savage on the spot,
Wi' flaming breath.
Wi' sic a breakfast, piping hot,
Wha' fears death?

A. Gibson