



## Thomas Bailey Speight

BY DON W. THOMSON

Member of the Board of Examiners (O.L.S.) for 27 years, Association President in 1912, T. B. Speight (1850-1945) spent fifty summers and ten winters in surveying activity in the field, much of it in Northern Ontario. In his chosen profession Speight remains unmatched for ability and durability under adverse working conditions over an incredible span of years.

The very embodiment of sincerity and integrity, qualities which helped lift

him to a respected place of eminence among his fellow professionals, coast to coast in Canada, Thomas Speight was born on February 8, 1859, in Yorkshire, England. He attended public school in Bingley in that county until the age of nine at which time his parents decided to cross the Atlantic to take up new careers in Canada. Their pioneer farm house was established near Fisherville, Ontario. But it was a far from easy task for the newcomers to gain a living from the soil. Despite weeks of tuition lost because his help was needed urgently on the farm

young Speight managed nevertheless to keep well up with his fellow students in quality of classwork.

In 1877, at the age of eighteen, Thomas was employed by Silas Jones, D.L.S., P.L.S. Passing his preliminary examinations the youngster articulated to Mr. Jones at a time when the latter was Superintendent of York Roads. Four years later this ambitious, hard-working young man was accepted as a full partner by Mr. Jones. In the following year Speight became a Dominion Land Surveyor. In 1885 a new partnership was formed in the province. This was the Toronto firm of Speight and van Nostrand, a combination that was to become well and favorably known, not only in Ontario, but across the nation.

For many years the term "Thomas Speight the Surveyor" was a household expression in Northern Ontario. For 38 consecutive seasons in that important region of the province he surveyed new townships, timberlands, base lines and exploration lines. At the time he began work in the North where today Timmins and Iroquois Falls, to mention but two, are among the busiest communities, there was nothing on the sites of both except primeval forest. Speaking in the 1930s Speight observed that "At present one can fly to Lake Abitibi in an hour or two but I remember my (survey) party leaving Toronto around the middle of June, some forty years ago, and it took us four weeks to reach that point at the beginning of our survey."

Often surprise developments lightened the load of work and anxiety Speight experienced as chief of party in the field. On one occasion he related to a gathering of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors that "the night before we left Abitibi Post on our survey one of our Indian guides got married. He started off on the trip in rare good humour but the further he got away from his bride the grouzier he became so that after some days of his bad nature, we had to give him some supplies and a canoe. . . for a happy journey back to his bride."

Thomas Speight married Jennie Phillips in 1903. He and his wife enjoyed a most happy companionship for many years in their Toronto home at 224 Douglas Drive. In 1927 the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors awarded Speight an honorary membership in the organization. Just after the conclusion of the Second World War Thomas Bailey Speight died, October 14, 1945. He left a highly useful, indelible mark of achievement on the development of the province, which followed the end of that conflict.