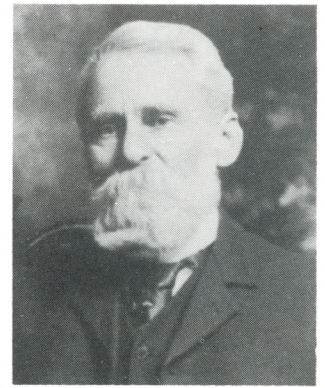


# REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD SURVEYOR

{continued from Winter '91 issue}

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(Reprinted from the 1897 Annual Report)



## 1860-61

In surveying the townships of Esten, Spragge and Salter in 1860-61, I had occasion to cross a lake about 1-1/4 miles wide. We made a raft and my cousin (F.L. Foster), an axeman and I went across on it all right enough, but when we had completed our work the raft had soaked so much water that it would bring only two back again.

There was a small island about a quarter of a mile from the southerly shore, and Foster, who was an excellent swimmer, said that he would swim the quarter mile. He did his part like a duck, but I lost heart altogether when I attempted my part, and had to lay hold of the raft. So long as I could just touch it I felt safe. However, we all arrived safely in due time.

There were several rather interesting circumstances connected with this survey. One of the men, a Mohawk half-breed, was very fond of whiskey, as was also the cook - a great friend of his. The Mohawk frequently pleaded illness and unfitness for work. I noticed at the same time that my supply of liquor was diminishing very fast, and suspected the cook and Mohawk of helping themselves in some way or other. My first chainman thought he would try an experiment, so put some tartar emetic in a bottle of whiskey one morning when the Mohawk pleaded sickness, and placed it so that there would be little difficulty in these worthies finding it.

When we returned at night we found that Mr. Mohawk had been really very sick, and was not at all well pleased with the trick that had been played upon him.

Knowing that Indians do not like to work long at one job, I had made those hired by me on this survey sign an agreement that they would remain and

work faithfully until the end of the survey or forfeit whatever money was due them.

One man, an elderly one, named Esquemeaux, a man I frequently sent to La Cloche for letters and provisions, did not return when sent on his last trip, and when paying off the party at Little Current I requested the interpreter to give him a good fright and tell him that there was no money coming to him as he had left without leave before the end of the survey. The poor fellow was well frightened and promised never to serve any other surveyor such a shabby trick. He was highly delighted when he got his money. I have heard since that Mr. Niven, one of our ex-Presidents, had Esquemeaux afterwards and found him an excellent man.

During the time of this survey H.R.H. the Prince of Wales visited Canada, and my provisions getting short and money for obtaining more being exhausted, I determined to visit Toronto, raise the wind and get a fresh supply. I killed two birds with one stone, for I saw the Prince and also got my fresh stock of provisions, amongst them being a barrel of home-made mixed pickles, which were much appreciated by the party.

On returning to my survey I met three of my party at La Cloche and with them started off for camp, calling at store camp for supplies. One man reached the camp that night, but I was too much played out and remained out all night a mile or more from camp. It was a beautifully moonlit night, but too decidedly cold to sleep without blankets and we had none with us, so were very glad when it was light enough for us to proceed on our journey.

After finishing the townships of Esten and Spragge we started from

Serpent Bay, on the ice, about three p.m., walked about three miles and camped for the night, which was an awfully rough one. On getting up in the morning we found about four inches of snow on our blankets. After breakfast we started and walked to the mouth of Spanish River, a distance of about eighteen miles, with snow and sleet in our faces nearly all the way - and oh! how cold! We had to drag our provisions and camp equipage on roughly made hand-sleighs. Several of us were pretty well played out and were more than pleased when we saw the mast of a schooner that was frozen in at the mouth of the river. It put new life into us.

There was only one man, if I remember rightly, on the schooner when we got there, but he was afterwards joined by two others who were bringing a barrel of whiskey from the Bruce mines to trade with the Indians. I think I may safely say that we all sampled that same barrel.

In the morning we started off for La Cloche and made arrangements with the Hudson Bay factor there for such supplies as we might need for the survey of the Township of Salter.

In walking up Spanish River I was bringing up the rear and was carrying my tripod, the men who preceded me all carrying loads. They had all got safely over a bad place in the ice where there was quite a current. When I came along I broke through. One of the men called out, "Save the tripod." Another more considerate one sang out, "Damn the tripod; save the man!" However, both were saved, and the man was not sorry to reach the store shanty he had made on the bank of the river and in which he had something to keep out the cold.

# REMINISCENCES cont'd

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## 1880-81 MANITOBA

I left Toronto on 29th July, 1880, to re-survey two townships on the Riding Mountains. Taking the steamer "Frances Smith" at Collingwood we had an exceedingly pleasant trip all the way from Toronto to Duluth. Our jolly travelling party consisted chiefly of relatives of one of my surveying parts, Mr. Edward Gooderham, who when writing home afterwards said: "I can get through all my work and manage the food, but at washing I am a failure." The steamer called at Owen Sound and took on board a Miss Webb, a school teacher, and a brother - a young boy of about twelve years - who were on their way to Rapid City. Miss Webb informed me that she was going to keep house for her brothers who were out there. "Take my word for it," said I, "you will be married before the year is out." "Oh, no," she said, "I am going to keep house for my brothers." Nevertheless she was married inside of six months.

I left Miss Webb and her young brother at Winnipeg to wait for an elder brother who was to take her to Rapid City. They overtook me, however, two days after I left, just as we were having breakfast. I persuaded them to join us in our matutinal meal for they had not had theirs, and I advised Miss Webb to leave her ox-cart and take my buck-board, being more comfortable to ride in. Thus we travelled together for several days to the ever-to-be-remembered music of the Red River carts.

The first township which I re-surveyed was a fearfully rough one, and if

the surveyor who took the original contract took it at anything less than a good round figure I don't wonder at his scamping his work. It was while moving camp in this township that I learned of the marriage of my late travelling companion, and strange to say, my informant was her new father-in-law, and he drove the team with my camp equipage.

One of the longest tramps of my life was on the 14th of January, 1881, travelling from my first township to the second. We had a double team and a single horse; the team consisted of a horse and an ox yoked together; the single "horse" was an Indian pony, which gave out before we got half way to our destination. Although the distance was only about 30 miles it took us from 5 a.m. till 10 p.m. to accomplish it. When we started it was beautifully bright and clear, the moon was about at the full, but it was bitterly cold. We had to keep moving for there was no place to stop at until we reached a settler's shanty, our objective point. Certainly we stopped once or twice on the road to boil the kettle and have a meal, but were mightily glad to get to the shanty, have a good supper and go to bed - although the bed was on the floor of the said shanty. A tramp of 17 hours with the thermometer at 20 degrees below zero gave me all I cared about having.

After completing my survey we made for Minnedosa, where I hired a horse and buggy, on May 2nd, and drove to Grand Valley to see a friend who lives opposite where Brandon now

stands. After spending the night at my friend's, I returned to Minnedosa in the morning. In August, 1880, when I first saw the site of Brandon there were no houses; only the tents of the C.P.R. were standing there. To-day it is a populous city. It was supposed by many that Grand Valley would be chosen for the town plot. It was then a stirring little place containing 10 tents and 15 wooden buildings. While at Grand Valley I visited the grave of my old friend, Archie McNabb, who had died shortly before whilst on a Government survey in the neighbourhood. He lies buried in a school section near the village. We left Grand Valley on the 16th of May by the steamer "City of Winnipeg," at 3 a.m., arriving at Winnipeg at 5 p.m. on the following day, and in Toronto at 6:30 a.m. on the 22nd, in good time for the Queen's Birthday.

Dear Queen! - she who has for nearly 60 years reigned over so vast an empire and in whose crown our own dear country, "Fair Canada, Land of the Maple Leaf," shines so bright a jewel - may she be long spared to occupy in health and strength her glorious throne, and when she is called home by the King of kings may her natal day, known to us all so well as "the 24th," our most charming and best enjoyed outing day, coming, as it does, in a month which in this Dominion is so fresh and fair and sweet, continue to be celebrated as a public holiday in perpetual remembrance of so noble and so good a woman and so greatly beloved a sovereign as is our Supreme Lady Victoria the Good, whom God preserve!