

## Sir Howard Douglas

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(Continued from February)

WHEN in 1824, Major General Sir Howard Douglas was appointed Governor of the Province of New Brunswick and arrived at Halifax, and he sailed around to St. John, where he was received with the usual honors. At this date the population of New Brunswick was about 74,000, all but a sprinkling being Loyalists or their descendants. The condition of the province was quite backward. There were only five roads in the entire province, and they were alleged ones. They were from Fredericton to St. Andrews; Fredericton to Chatham; Fredericton to St. John; Fredericton towards Quebec and St. John towards Halifax.

The previous road between Fredericton and St. John was laid out on the east side of the river, via Jemseg and the Washademoak to the Petitcodiac, where it joined the Westmorland Road. Both of these roads were laid out about 1791. The former was never completed. Both were for many years mere trails without any bridges, the rivers being forded or crossed by ferries. In 1802, there was not ten miles of road in the province fit for wheeled carriages, except on the left bank of the St. John River, through Sunbury. The main highway from St. John to Westmorland had been fenced in by a farmer at Hampton.

Responsible Government did not materialize until twenty-seven years later and in Sir Howard's day the Governor reported to and was responsible to the Ministers at home, instead of the present system of responsibility to the Ministers of the Crown, who are in turn responsible to the assembly. Sir Howard, therefore, possessed real authority which he used with rare good judgement. He first opened a highway between St. John and Fredericton by the Nerepis, greatly shortening the distance, and he worked up inns along the route. He also promoted the establishment of agricultural societies and encouraged the raising of best stock by granting money prizes.

In October occurred the great Miramichi fire. It was a summer marked by long drought. On the 19th of September, the residence of the Governor was destroyed by fire and Sir Howard's personal losses were severe. October came with midsummer sultriness, keeping the thermometer 86 degrees in the shade. The fire broke out simultaneously in Fredericton and

on the Miramichi on the 7th. The trees at the Baillie Mansion above the town were the first to catch, but the Governor saved the house. A breeze had started which rose to a gale, carrying smoke and burning cinders. The house of Mr. Ring on the outskirts of the town then caught and despite the efforts of Sir Howard, who constituted himself fire chief, the conflagration spread. Col. McNair with detachments of 52nd Regiment, were posted at different points by him to work with the firemen and preserve order, but the fire spread until about eighty buildings were destroyed and many people were homeless and destitute. Fredericton caught only one fork of the blaze; a thousand miles of forest were on fire. On the same day the fire commenced to sweep the northern side of the valley of the Miramichi. At Newcastle only twelve buildings were saved out of the two hundred and sixty. At Douglastown only six buildings were left standing out of seventy. Other settlements like Barabog, Nappan, Black River, were also changed to a howling waste. About one hundred and sixty persons were either burned to death or drowned in an effort to escape the flames. The loss of property was estimated at over eight hundred thousand dollars. Hardly were the ashes cold, before Sir Howard was on the saddle. He despatched a leading merchant to Quebec to buy food and clothing on his personal credit. He issued a proclamation, calling a meeting of the people to organize relief. After describing in letters to the Governor General, Colonial Secretary and others in appeals for help, he started to make a personal inspection of the ruined districts on the Miramichi.

The presence of Sir Howard amongst the survivors of this avalanche of ruin and his ready sympathy inspired them with new hope and courage. He arranged for a vessel load of supplies to come from St. John and distributed amongst them one thousand barrels of flour, five hundred barrels of pork and quantities of clothing.

Afterwards Lord Sidmouth wrote him: "Happy was it for the Province that such a person as yourself was on the spot." But the praise of the English authorities for his work was insignificant in comparison to the warmth of the gratitude he inspired in the people he had done so much to serve.