

Early History of Dorchester and Other Parts of New Brunswick

(By W. C. Milner)

An early map (1779) shows a trail from Sackville to the Memramcook River and from that to Budroes and across the Petitcodiac to at or near Edgett's Landing, Hillsboro. It proceeded from "Veskakchis" (Westcock) through the forest to "Meme-ramkek", above Dorchester Island, to the "Petquechek". A trail was traced from Westcock to Vestkak, in the vicinity of Crane's Corner, which led direct across the Tantramar to Beausejour. French settlements are marked on both sides of the Memramcook and Petitcodiac Rivers. These settlements are marked a quarter of a century after the expulsion, but tradition assigns still earlier settlements by the original lords of the soil. Indian encampments were at Brownell's Brook (called New France); back of Palmer's Pond, on the John Chapman farm and a third one below Johnson's Mills. French dykes could a few years ago have been traced in the marshes adjoining the uplands. After the capture of Quebec, the Acadian revolt against British rule gradually subsided and in some cases the Acadians returned to their original holdings.

THE PORT OF DORCHESTER ISLAND

Communication with the outside world was the first consideration and consequently Dorchester Island, because of its shipping facilities early became an important place. The first highway was not to Dorchester Corner, but to the Island and from there East on the west side of Palmer's Pond. After the arrival of the Loyalists, Speaker Botsford built a stone house at the Island, which on his settling at Westcock he sold to Benjamin Wilson. The latter was a man of many vocations. He was a trader, politician, being at one time a member of the Legislature, and also a local preacher of merit. He was drowned; his vessel was swamped in the Straits. He left three daughters, who married as follows: Andrew Weldon, Rev. Mr. Pickles and James Harris, the eminent manufacturer of St. John. Other good families settled at the Island: Dr. Charles Smith, the McElmons and Wilburs, William Sayre who became owner of the stone house. One of his sons, William, Jr., became Sheriff; another, James, his deputy; Otto, a local trader and Thomas a lawyer, James, when travelling in winter from the Corner to the Island, was caught by a blizzard and perished. His remains were found next day.

The Sayres family—among the Loyalists—were the first that settled at Dorchester Island. The remains of the house they built could be found at a late date. They were followed by the Wilburs and Smiths.