

Early History Of The Shiretown Of Kings County

An Informing Sketch of Early Kentville in Which Many Readers Throughout the County Will Be Keenly Interested

The following very readable sketch of early days in Kentville was prepared by the late Edmund J. Cogswell, a former well known resident of that place, and published in the year 1895. Mr. Cogswell was a barrister and for a long time preceding his death filled the position of Judge of Probate. He was an interesting individual and well versed in local history. THE ACADIAN is indebted to one of its oldest subscribers and most firm supporters, Mr. T. J. Berden, of Greenwich, for the copy which we republish.

I was asked to contribute something in regard to Kentville. I understood it to be in reference to old Kentville, and I am perfectly willing to leave the glorification of new Kentville to others.

Geology furnishes us with a piece of its ancient history that I would like to refer to, for the geological formation of the locality is very peculiar. It would seem that at the end of the Triassic Period, and of the formation of the New Red Sandstone, as the country slowly rose above the waters, that there was a connection between the Cornwallis River Valley and the Habitant river valley by way of the Bill meadows, and the brook running down through Wood's Mills (formerly Bishop's Mills) and that there was also a connection between the Cornwallis river valley and the Canard river Valley by way of the Yoho brook and the Tobin dyke, and that the currents running through them, through the Cornwallis River itself, and through the then large stream of the Smelt Brook met at Kentville making huge, slow whirlpools. These appear to have been interfered with by the hard sandstone ridge running down to the Ford, but the great springs kept the sand loose, and the waters at length cut across leaving the Boar's Back or Sandy Ridge that is now being removed from Kentville. This I presume is the reason why the understrata of Kentville is quicksand, and accounts for the sandy soil of Kentville itself. The mud deposit which Geologists say always forms not far from sand banks appears to have been swept by these currents towards the Basin, and to have assisted in forming the Dyke lands, and the whir's caused by this old "Meeting of the Waters" seem to account for the bend in the bank at Mrs. Lyon's dyke. As the land rose still higher the present soil of K. was formed. These old waterways appear to have existed very long, as the Glacial drift clay has been almost all washed away along their margins often for great widths, and swept down to the sea to assist also in the formation of dykes. It may be interesting to note that the old name for the Cornwallis River was the Habitant, and it was called the great Habitant to distinguish it from the other, or Little Habitant river running through Canning. The name seems to be French and appears to mean "the river of the settlement" alluding I presume, to the villages on its banks. It is curiously entirely in Cornwallis as the boundary is along the south side of the river. It might be interesting to note that the first carding machine in the county was here on the Smelt brook and was run or owned by Gideon Harrington. Before that time the wool was all carded by hand and loom and merrily was the job. In fact what with carding, spinning and weaving, the wool carding roping and spinning and weaving the cotton and spinning and weaving the flax, the amount of labour performed by the women of the old days was almost incredible. There was also a fulling mill a little to the south of Kentville run by a Mr. Lord and the first time I was in Kentville over fifty years ago I went with my mother to this old fulling mill we went up by the old road near Albert DeWolfe's house. The old Kentville and the new Kentville do not resemble one another very much. I am told that the first threshing machines were made by Watson Lane (lately deceased) in a shop at the Goud House near the bridge on Main street before that time all the grain and in fact much of it long after was beaten out with flails, a process much more interesting to look at than perform as I very well know.

In the southern part of the town the sandstone system seems to rest on the upper silurian rocks, but I strongly suspect, that on careful examination outcroppings of the older carboniferous system could be found here, and it seems that the carboniferous system underlies the whole valley. The T. brook iron mines, and the clay iron stone of the south of Kentville demonstrate that coal might once have formed here, but if so it has all been worn away by the waters. What the clay iron stone of Kentville may amount to I do not know, nor its extent, but that it is to be found I am assured a surveyor's compass will often work here. It may be good, but I presume it is clay iron stone of low grade. So much for the history of the area on which Kentville stands, now for Kentville itself.

circumstances, and it has been an important place through all its history. It had no Indian name but it was important even to them as being situated at the principal ford of the Cornwallis River, and Indian roads or trails seem to converge to, and diverge from that place. It was a French village, and the first French bridge over the Cornwallis River was here near the present and not far from the old ford, and there was an old French mill here also on the river on what is now Mrs. Lyons' dyke. The old race way can be traced. The French name for Kentville must for the present remain in obscurity, for although I have a list of the French villages, I can locate but a very few of them but as to most of them cannot tell 'tother from which' and I have never found a person that could.

The French Acadians were taken away in 1755. Cornwallis Township was granted in 1760 and 1764, and its nucleus, or head quarters was Town Plot or Cornwallis Town near Starr's Point and it was settled by people from New England. Horton was settled about the same time by New England people also, and its nucleus, or headquarters was Horton town near Horton Landing. The Court house was there and the Supreme Court sat there, but never seems to have sat in Cornwallis town, probably because there was no Court House there. But three peculiar things happened not very far apart changing all this. One was that the old Court House at Horton town was burned down and never rebuilt and for a time the Supreme Court was held in Wolfville. Another was that after the termination of the American war about 1784 a lot of Refugees and Loyalists settled in what is now the township of Aylesford though Aylesford as a township is rather anomalous and many rules apply to it that do not apply to Horton and Cornwallis. The third was that Parrsboro was originally part of Kings County but it was inconveniently far way, and there appears to have been an agitation to separate it from Kings County and join it to Colchester and Cumberland. This was finally done by a Statute in 1846. Thus the centre of the county was thrown farther to the west. Kentville was near this centre on the old military road. It was then called Horton corner and the famous hostelry the Royal Oak tavern kept by Cyrus Peck once stood on top of the Eaton hill. It was a low rambling old house as old as anything in the county and was only burned down a few years ago. Edward Duke of Kent the father of our present Queen stopped at this house about 1804. So when a new capital for the county was wanted Kentville named for the Duke of Kent was chosen. The old Oak Burying-ground where so many of the first inhabitants of Kentville lie buried, was the gift of Cyrus Peck the owner of this old Royal Oak tavern. He died childless, and Benjamin Peck, the only other Peck living here, moved away to Ohio so the name became extinct in this county. The old town plans do not show who took up the lands where the centre of Kentville now stands, but from the earliest information I can procure, they were in the possession of a Phillis family and Allison's, Hunts, Dennisons, Bards and others. The Phillis house stood near the Jas. E. DeWolfe store, and the Dennison house stood near B. H. Calkin's. These houses have long been down and the oldest buildings now in Kentville are said to be: First the ell part of Melville DeWolfe's house, 2nd, the old Masters house, 3rd, the old Webster house, 4th, the old Dr. Bird house lately occupied by Stephen H. Moore. The Phillis land seems to have passed into the possession of Joseph Pierce, from Joseph Peirce to Dr. Isaac Webster, and from Dr. I. Webster to his sons, Henry B. Webster and Dr. W. Webster. The other lands were partly retained by the descendants and partly passed into the hands of people almost innumerable. The old Kentville families were the Pecks, Terrys, Allison's, Rands, Whiddens, Websters, Harris, DeWolfe's, Marsters, Moores, Dennisons, Ecraggs, Angus, Tupper's, Halls, Hutchinsons, Perkins, Blacks, Mortons and others. When I first knew the town the leader of them whatever they may mean, was Mrs. J. D. Harris, who I think was a Campbell and the widow of James D. Harris. She was renowned for her charity, and I think beloved by everyone.

Kentville for a long time consisted of nothing but the old Horton corner, and was composed of nothing but Main Street or the old military road, and the street from Cornwallis running into it. The centre of business was DeWolfe's corner, and the principal places of resort were first the Royal Oak, and then the Kentville Hotel, and Bragg's Hotel, which was called Mulloney's or the Victoria House afterwards. As I said before, the first Kentville Hotel was the Royal Oak. The next was Kentville Hotel which is still standing. The old Royal Oak was becoming so small, and unfit for accommodation of the public, so it was opened in what I think, Calkin H. Rand was largely interested, built the present K. Hotel. This was a large commodious establishment and was kept successively by George Terry, Thaddeus Harris, James Lyons and others, and was for many years the famous coach house of Kentville and the military road. It was the news centre and before the railway days, and before newspapers were as plentiful as now it was a favorite resort and on the arrival of the coach many of the leading inhabitants assembled there to hear the news. How earnestly Harry Kilcup (still living) with his spanned horses was watched for as he drove gaily up to this hotel! But like Goldsmith's renowned hotel, 'This vain transitory splendour could not all Restrain the tottering mansion from its fall' The railroad came and the glory of the Kentville Hotel vanished away. Perhaps one of the greatest men Kentville ever raised, and the first person who did anything to extend the boundaries of Kentville was Dr. William Webster. He was a tall, thin, pale man who practiced his profession all over the county and was a Geologist of considerable note. His name now appears in most of the works on that subject and he has a fossil or something of the kind named after him, with a latin tail to the name long enough to satisfy any reasonable man. His first move towards the enlargement of the town was to lay out the other two roads which complete Kentville square. One of them started from Main St. near McIntosh's hotel and ran north and north-east across the sand bank till it intersected Cornwallis street at the bridge and was called Church street from the English Church that once stood there, and the other street started from Cornwallis street near the Court House and intersected this street at right angles and is called Webster street. The advent to the Railway changed the centre of the town. Before that time (1867) there were very few buildings on these streets that now make up the principal business part of this town. It would be hard for any person who travels along the now level road from the bridge to the Railway station along Church street to realize how thoroughly Dr. Webster was laughed at for thinking of making a road over an abrupt sand bank 30 or 40 feet high. There has been many changes in Kentville, and many extensions since Dr. Webster laid out these roads, but none of them seem to have been done with so little selfishness, and with the principal idea of the advancement of the town, as these roads laid out by him.

Perhaps the next man that should be mentioned was Daniel Moore who represented the county in the Legislature for many years. He was a small man and the friend of every one. Always liked and always respected he made several fortunes and by favouring everybody lost them and a though respected by every one he lived to be so old that he died almost forgotten. Then, Stephen H. Moore. He was a large awkward looking man, but it will probably be found when people take pains to hunt it up that our county never produced a greater man than Stephen H. Moore and Silas T. Rand. Mr. Moore was a lawyer and a good one, but his sympathies lay so much with the people of this county that he was much more renowned for helping people out of law suits than for getting them into them. He died at a good old age very much regretted and very much missed, but I fear like many others who have had the interests of other people more at heart than their own, not very wealthy. I think the next we should mention is Winkworth Chipman. He was the last of the old gig builders, and afterwards a carriage builder. His structures might not have had much reference to the lines of beauty, but they never came to pieces, and I think some of his carriages are running yet. At the earnest solicitation of the Hon. John Morton, then Custos of the county he undertook (though with misgivings) the office of J. P. and whatever may have been his defects in regard to a knowledge of the Law, his proceedings were marked with great discretion and honesty and it was felt to be a great loss to the town when he became too old to do business. One of the curiosities of his career was the once famous case of the Queen against George Bear for selling intoxicating liquor without a license. Mr. Chipman and B. H. Calkin Esq. sat at the Court. Mr. Bear, an old colored man was called upon for his defence when he arose and delivered himself as follows: "Your Worship I have been summoned here for selling intoxicating liquor. Now your worship the people in England gets this liquor from the West Indies, and they makes it one quarter water, and they makes it one quarter water, and now your Worship I would like to know where the 'toxication comes in.'" Old George evidently thought he had shown that there was no intoxicating liquor sold by him at all. The Justices seemed to think that there might be a little, but they were not prepared to say how much, so they adjourned the court to take time to consider, and they considered so long and so carefully that George Bear died, as did a so Mr. Chipman before judgment was given. I intimated to Mr. Calkin once that if he still considered himself a Quorum for the benefit of Jurisprudence he should go on and settle the knotty question. But he also went on considering until he too died and the case is still Sub Judice without any Judge.

perhaps the next thing I should speak of is the Court House. The old Court House stood on what is now the Railway track. It was burned down in 1849. Our Supreme Court is rather anomalous and the trials are all at what is called, at Bar. Originally the whole court and all the judges got up Holus Bolus and went from one county to another. Afterwards two judges were made a Quorum, and finally one. It was while two Judges were a Quorum that in this old Court House and in a certain case they charged the Jury square against an another. The jury went with Wiswell. It must have been an interesting business for the jury, and have given them a high appreciation of the

certainty of the law. The present Court House was built by James Neary lately deceased. The Court House and Gaol were then separated. They had previously been together. In the older time the meeting of the Supreme Court was a high day. The Judge was looked upon almost as a God. The gentlemen from all the county around assembled. The Justices were in their bench and the Court House was thronged. Now all is changed. The legislature with the connivance of the lawyers has so interfered with the Jury that the lawyers great school of eloquence is destroyed. Ichabod seems to be written upon the Court House doors and its glory has departed. A new Court House has been talked of, but I do not see why one should be necessary for it looks as if the great Supreme Court would soon be reduced to a mere Master office to take evidence.

In the old Court House also sat the Sessions Court. This was an assembly of the magistrates of the county. What a great thing it was to be a Justice of the Peace in those days. What an amount of business did they have to do and how earnestly was the office coveted. But what with politicians of both sides of politics making their friends Justices the court at last came to have over two hundred judges and was found to be unwieldy, so it was abolished for the present municipal system. But whether it was a good move is doubtful as the assembly of the justices had a good effect. All the county was thoroughly represented and it would be very hard to find a more respectable number of gentlemen than the members

of our old Court of Sessions. There (Concluded next week.)

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