

*The Address—Mr. Blais*

[English]

That is "the Ottawa river" for those who are not too familiar with this historical background.

[Translation]

—we crossed several lakes, the savages carrying their canoes, until we entered the lake of the Nipisierinj—

[English]

The first time it was used as a written word.

[Translation]

—at a latitude of forty-six degrees and a fourth. And on the twenty-sixth day of the said month, after travelling both over land and through the lakes twenty-five leagues, or thereabouts, we reached the huts of the savages, where we stayed with them two days. They received us very well and were in a goodly number; they are people who till the earth very little.

[English]

I should like to make a little comment on that. Perhaps that was the best way of dealing with government in those days. Certainly, we would not need a minister of agriculture and would be able to save ourselves a great deal of trouble, I suspect.

[Translation]

The said people were seven to eight hundred in number, who ordinarily live on the lake, where there is a great number of very pleasant islands. The north side of the said lake is very attractive, with fine meadows for the grazing of cattle and several small rivers flowing into the lake.

They did their fishing in a lake abounding in a variety of fish, among which one is excellent, having a length of one foot—

[English]

I take it he is referring to the very popular northern Ontario pickerel which abound in Lake Nipissing.

[Translation]

The lake is some eight leagues in width—

[English]

That is approximately 24 miles.

[Translation]

—and twenty-five in length—

[English]

He was overshooting by about 10 miles; it is not 75 but only 65 miles long.

[Translation]

—and into it flows a river coming from the north west—

[English]

That is the Sturgeon River.

[Translation]

—which they take to barter the goods which we give them in exchange for pelts, and that with the inhabitants who make a living out of hunting and fishing in a country abundantly stocked with wildlife, birds as well as fish.

This is what he said.

• (1220)

[English]

I should like to indicate that he was well received when he returned, but we do not have any record of what he said then. I would advise you all to do as Champlain did,

[Mr. Blais.]

as shown by history, and visit Nipissing, each and every one of you individually, not all at the same time.

The period from 1881 to 1891 was a period of railway construction. Another thing that never ceases to amaze me about the ignorance that is manifested concerning my riding, is the lack of knowledge that Nipissing was the jumping off place for the transcontinental railroad. It was in Nipissing that the great ribbon that tied British Columbia to the rest of the country was commenced. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that there was debate as to whether the railroad should go through a portion of the United States to gain access to the great northwest or whether it should take a northerly route. The hon. member for Sudbury (Mr. Jerome) and the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), along with everybody in northern Ontario, are very thankful for this decision to follow the northerly route, otherwise we might not even exist there.

At any rate, as the railroad proceeded, it touched North Bay which is now a city of 50,000 people. It proceeded west through the western regions of my riding and in its path it created many small, charming villages including Cache Bay, which is on the lake, Verner, which straddles the Veuve River, one of the lake's tributaries, and the village of Warren. It also created the town of Sturgeon Falls, that town closest to my heart. I mention this town because I am sure that name has not been mentioned too often in the debates in this assembly. The town of Sturgeon Falls is the town in which I was born, and also the town which saw the birth of my parents. It is a lively town on the banks of the Sturgeon River. It was at one time one of the major posts of the Hudson's Bay Company in that particular area, and I speak now of the early 1800's.

Throughout the history of Canada, Nipissing has been a point of reference. At the time of that faux pas, which in the history books is referred to commonly as the battle of the Plains of Abraham, all of that area including the southern reaches of Lake Nipissing was ceded to England. The rest was kept by France.

The next reference to Nipissing in the history books occurs after the revolutionary war, when the Americans decided they wanted to establish the boundaries of the United States at the southern limit of my riding. The British commissioner of that time agreed, indicating the depth of his interest in York. However, the British Parliament refused to ratify that agreement. I often wonder whether that was not an error on their part, because if that agreement had been ratified we might have been rid of that pesky York area which has now reached Torontonian proportions. We would, of course, have lost something in tourist revenues as a result of the absorption of Niagara Falls by the United States, although the advantages might have greatly outweighed the disadvantages. Perhaps we would now have more attention paid to us, as North Bay might then have become the major port of entry into Canada. Of course, we would not have the problem of redistribution we are now facing.

As an aside, if I might speak to redistribution at this time, the commissioners have indicated that northern Ontario will lose two seats and Ontario will gain five because, as we speak of it, Ontario is everything south of North Bay. I suggest that this is something of a paradox.