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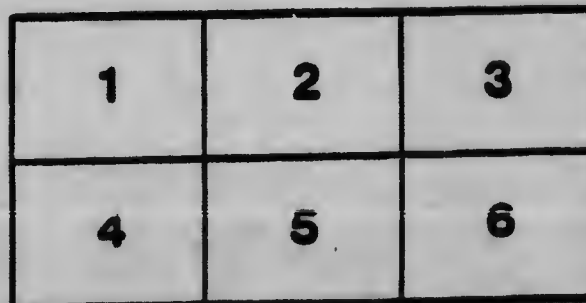
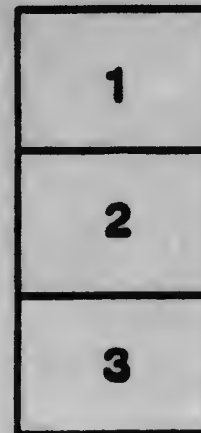
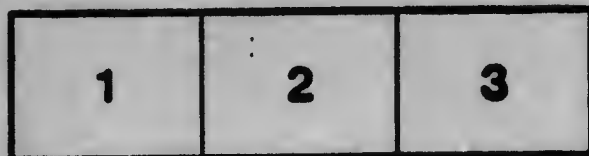
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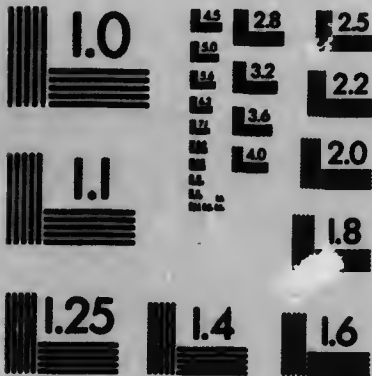
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**Blocking off Land in the  
Peninsula of Avalon**

3

**REPORT**

OF

**JAMES P. HOWLEY, F.G.S.**

for the Year 1885.



ST. JOHN'S, N.F.  
Robinson & Company, Limited, Press  
1917



*P. J. SANDOZ SK*

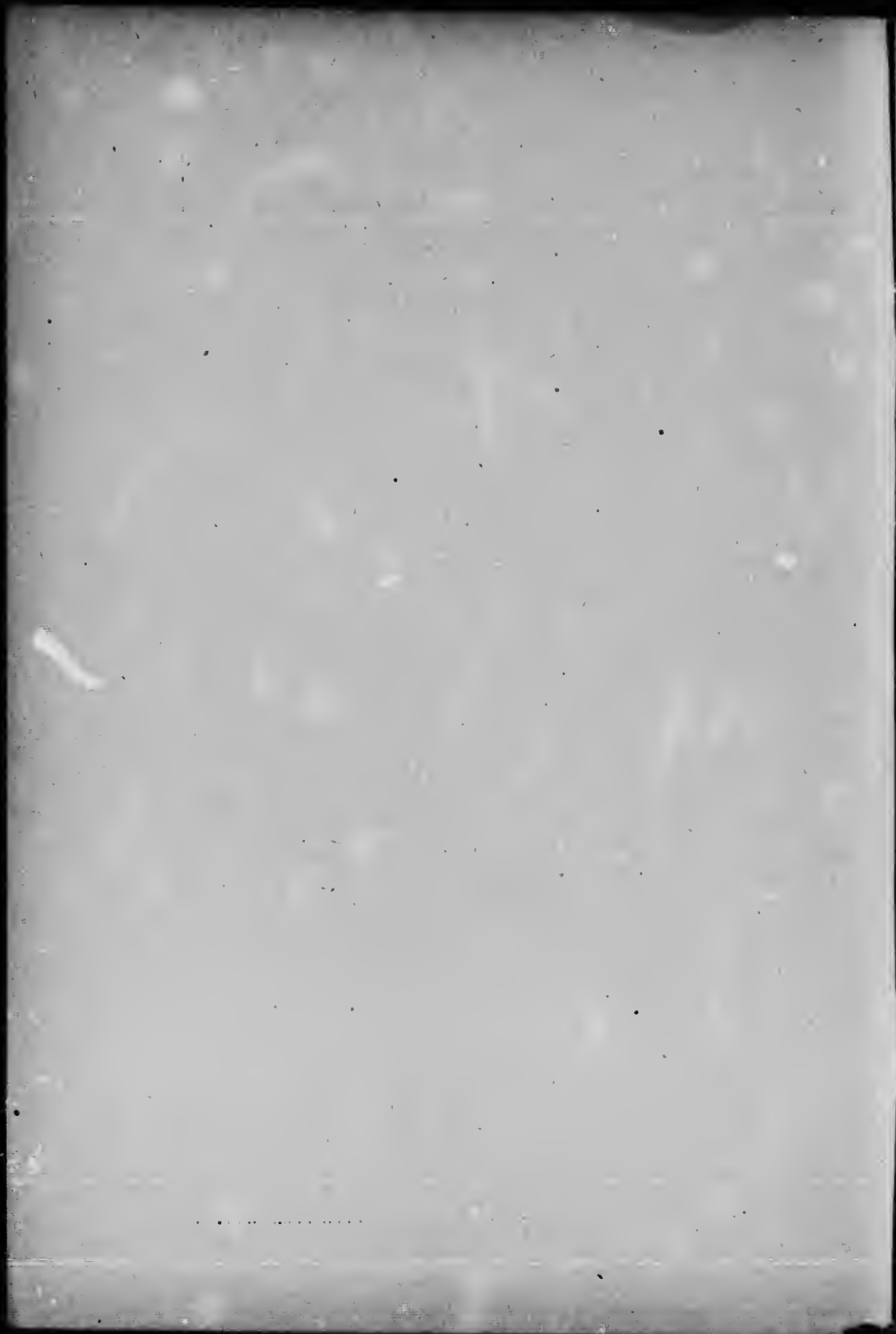
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# REPORT

OF

**James P. Howley, F.G.S., for the Year 1885, on Blockading of  
Land in the Peninsula of Avalon**

St. John's, Feb. 4th, 1886.

*The Hon. Surveyor General.*

SIR.—

The following Report of the season's field operations for 1885, under my direction, is respectfully submitted:

It was the intention, as you are aware, in the early part of the season that my services and those of the party under my charge should again be devoted to the St. George's Bay District, the scene of our previous year's labors. The more urgent demand however, for the speedy completion of the Peninsula of Avalon Survey, commenced by Mr. Harvey in 1883, seemed to call for the efforts of all the available staff connected with this Department, accordingly I was instructed to prepare for a season's work in the Peninsula.

We left St. John's on the 10th of June last by Rail, and pitched our first camp at Peddleton station at the junction of the R. R. line with the New Harbor and Spaniard's Bay road; here a few days were occupied in final preparations for work in the bush.

Our first move was along the road towards New Harbor, and thence Northward to Mr. Harvey's most Northerly parallel of last year. On the 16th of June a commencement was made at the N. W. corner post of Township 17, Range XXI. East, when two lines were started, one running due North, the other West. The former was entrusted to Mr. A. White, my assistant, while the latter was under my own immediate supervision. This line was carried out to the shore of Trinity Bay at New Harbor, a distance of four miles and forty-seven chains, over a fairly wooded but uneven rocky piece of country. It forms the Northern boundary of Township 17, Range XX., East.

During the remainder of the month of June and part of July.

the entire party were engaged in outlining and partially subdividing Township 16, Range XXI., the most Northerly of the series as yet blocked off. Beside the regular boundary lines the central meridian and parallel were each cut out six miles, thus subdividing the Township into four blocks of nine square miles each. By this means a good idea of the general character of the entire Township was obtained. It cannot be said to be of a very favorable nature, by far the greater portion of the surface is occupied by barrens, marshes and ponds, with frequent outcroppings of the bare rock.

The soil is poor, thin, and more or less encumbered with boulders, while the timber supported upon it is generally unfit for any purpose but for firewood. The only exception to these characteristics pertains to the extreme N. W. corner of the block, within about two miles of Witless Bay, Trinity Bay, where a ridge of very fine land, supporting a heavy growth of yellow birch, fir and spruce, occurs.

The country north of this Township presents altogether such a bleak, barren appearance, including as it does the great Heart's Content barrens that it was deemed a useless waste of time to continue the blocking off in that direction; accordingly we moved back to Harbor Grace Junction to refit for further work.

The sub-division of Township 19, Range XX., was next commenced, of which the central meridian and parallel were each run out six miles, and the Eastern, Southern and Western side lines completed, making a total of twenty-eight miles. Later on in the season Mr. W. B. Reed continued the sub-division of this Township, running out the three remaining meridian lines. To complete the sub-division only four parallels now require to be cut out. This is in all probability the finest Township of the entire series blocked off. The proportion of good land and fine timber will, I believe, exceed any of the others. It is intersected by the Railway from East to West, and by the Hodgewater and Big Barren Pond branches of the Rocky River from North to South. Harbor Grace Junction (now Whitbourne) is situated in the 33rd Section, while South from the Junction several picturesque lakes, all closely connected, spread out over a considerable area, reaching into the heart of the Township. Again, on the Eastern side the waters of Big Barren Pond, with several smaller lakes, extend down to its South-

ern boundary line, thus rendering almost all parts of it easy of access by water. Of the thirty-six square mile Sections six are covered by water, and six more by marshes and barrens, leaving at least twenty-four square miles or 15,360 square acres available for agriculture. So far from being a hindrance, the ponds are in every respect an advantage, affording as they do facilities for penetrating almost every Section within the Township. The soil here is frequently of excellent quality, and the timber, especially the yellow birch and fir is of fine growth.

The greater part of the months of August and September was occupied in outlining and partially sub-dividing two new Townships 18 and 19, Range XIX., E. The western portion of the principal base line from Salmon Cove, which forms the dividing line between those two Townships, was produced to Long Harbor, in Placentia Bay; the total length of this line being twenty-nine miles, two chains and seventy-five links. Thirty-six miles of line were cut out and measured in this section of the country, forming the South and West boundary lines and central meridians and parallels of the two above-named Townships.

Much of the country included within these boundary lines is barren and rocky, particularly over the Western portion of the area, which includes the bare elevated ridge known as the Northeast mountain of Placentia. The more Northerly township also includes Spread Eagle Peak and another high ridge west of it. There is, however, one redeeming feature in the shape of a long, narrow, densely-wooded valley, extending in a due south line from Chapel Arm almost up to the parallel of the N.E. Mountain. This valley averages about one mile wide, the soil, particularly over the Northern part of it, is of a superior quality, and the timber supported upon it some of the finest observed during the season. The Chapel Arm River flows through it, and exhibits frequent patches of excellent interval land along its banks.

Having again returned to Harbor Grace Junction to refit for the Autumn, all our provisions, &c., were next moved by rail to Big Barren Pond, up which we proceeded, and by means of portaging and rafting over the ponds reached the most Southerly base line. From this line several meridians were produced south sufficiently far to include all land within eight miles of the Rail-

way track, and a new base line established bounding the whole on the south side. This latter line was extended eastward to meet the first meridian line produced south from Salmon Cove, which terminated the season's work. The total number of miles cut and measured reached one hundred and thirty-seven and ten chains, (137 m., 10 chs.), inclusive of some minor measurements. The country east and west of Colinet River, as far as our survey extended, is generally well wooded, in some parts even densely so; but our lines were interrupted by an interminable network of ponds, some of considerable extent, which were met with on all sides. Towards the extreme eastern end of the base line, on approaching the Chisel Hill Range, the country becomes more open and extensive tracts of barren and marshy land intervene. Many considerable patches of good land were met with in running out these latter lines, especially in the neighborhood of Colinet River, and around the shores of some of the numerous lakes. The timber is frequently of fine size and quality, being as yet little culled out.

The vast amount of valuable timber still available over the central parts of the Peninsula, cannot fail to become a source of wealth when rendered accessible from the Railway track. There can be no doubt also, that much of the land in the region can be easily reclaimed when once the timber is removed. As a rule, it is superior to any in the vicinity of St. John's, and there seems no reason why, in course of time, it should not become the home of a busy thriving population.

I was much impressed during this season with the fact that a large portion of the country hitherto looked upon as useless marsh or swamp, could, by a judicious system of drainage, be converted into the very best hay growing lands. The surface of these marshes is generally covered with a spongy moss or coarse grass. The subsoil being composed of a soft yellow mud resembling river silt. To account for these deposits, their sites would appear to have been once occupied by shallow ponds, which gradually became silted up by the materials carried down by the rivers from the higher levels, which process is going on at the present time in many places. As a matter of fact they are alluvial deposits, and as such differ materially from the usual and more common peat

bogs, which were formed by vegetable accumulations grown in situ. My attention was particularly directed to this matter during the past season by Mr. Francis Peddle, a settler upon the New Harbor line of road, who was about to make a practical experiment of cultivating such land. This man has spent many years in the Western States, particularly in Oregon and Washington Territory, where the system of drainage is much in vogue. When the surface is rendered sufficiently dry and solid to support the weight of cattle, by well placed and properly constructed drains, the plough is immediately brought into requisition, there being no rocks, stones, or other obstructions to contend with. The mossy surface is then turned down, and allowed sufficient time to rot, helping thereby greatly to enrich the soil. The land is finally cross-ploughed, harrowed and otherwise prepared to receive the first crop, which is generally oats. Though the process of preparing and cultivating this character of land is tedious at first, the after results amply repay the labor. To demonstrate the truth of his theory, while I was in the neighborhood last June, Mr. Peddle removed the moss from a small portion of one of those marshes, and having turned up the soil, scattered broadcast some oats and turnip seed. The result was marvellous; in the space of one week the seed was all over ground, and when I saw it, looked healthy and vigorous. It left no doubt on my mind that his conclusions are correct, and that the soil in question, when thoroughly cultivated, will prove exceedingly fertile. Mr. Peddle certainly deserves every encouragement in his enterprise, which is calculated to throw much new light on the value or otherwise of our wild lands. He also considers the thinner and poorer soils, especially when encumbered with boulders, not improved by the usual mode of tillage, and hardly repaying the amount of labor expended upon them. The best of such soils, he contends, is merely the surface layer, which is only covered up, or otherwise impoverished, by bringing up from beneath the more sandy unproductive gravels. It should not be disturbed at all, but when the timber is cleared away and the brush burnt, hay seed should be scattered over it which soon takes root. Then by allowing cattle to roam at will, the soil becomes sufficiently enriched from the droppings, to furnish a constant supply of nutritious grazing. The success of these experiments is, I believe, fraught with much importance to the

future farming interests of this Island, and might be applied with advantage to every district where similar conditions prevail.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed), JAMES P. HOWLEY, F.G.S.

