

RECOLLECTIONS of LONG POINT

By EDWARD HARRIS

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RECOLLECTIONS
OF
LONG POINT

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RECOLLECTIONS
OF
LONG POINT

BY
EDWARD HARRIS



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RECOLLECTIONS
OF
LONG POINT

Had it not been for the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the war which followed, the Long Point Country would have long remained uninhabited by man.

In 1784, after the peace, Sir Guy Carleton (afterwards Lord Dorchester) took shiploads of American Loyalists to Nova Scotia, many thousand others escaped to Ontario, Jamaica and the West India Islands.

The refugees to Nova Scotia were supported there by England for about ten years when a new home was found for them on the

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North shore of Lake Erie, practically a newly discovered country. What little traffic there was, Jesuits and pioneers, had hitherto been on the American side of the lake.

The story of the hardships of those unhappy men has never been written. It was a journey on foot or in Indian canoes to Lake Erie, Indian trails frequently the only guide. The whole of Ontario at that date is properly described as primeval forest. Albany was then the far West.

What was called the Long Point Country extended from about twenty miles east of Port Dover, to Port Burwell, all north of it then an uninhabited wilderness.

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These refugees had previously been prosperous citizens and farmers chiefly in New York State and New Jersey, but a portion from all the thirteen States which had become free and independent.

The distinguished American historian, Professor Hosmer, in his history says, "The mere mention of calling and station of the banished Loyalists conveys a suggestion of respectability. There were in fact no better men and women in America as regards intelligence, substantive good purpose and piety. Their estates were among the fairest, their stately mansions stood on the sightliest hillbrows, the richest and best tilled meadows were their farms,

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the long avenue, the broad lawn, the trim hedges about the garden, servants, plate and pictures, the varied circumstances external and internal of dignified and generous housekeeping—for the most part these things were at the homes of the banished Loyalists." This correctly describes the ancestry of the Tisdales, Prices and Ryersons. Another American historian describes it as one of the greatest tragedies in the history of mankind.

In one hundred years the great Long Point shooting ground and its twenty thousand acres has largely drifted into American ownership. But its past history and present friendly, Provincial

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and local approval should not be forgotten.

Until about 1850, "To go to Long Point" or "To shoot at Long Point" had no relation to what is now the peninsula famous for ducks. The peninsula had given the name to the mainland on the north shore of the Bay.

DUCK SHOOTING

Until 1850 (and after), the duck shooting was ample and of easier access at Turkey Point and along that shore, George III. muskets and small bore rifles being the usual guns used. The little shooting that was done was to get food rather than for sport. Moreover, until about 1870, quail, ruffed

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grouse, deer and some wild turkeys gave the best of shooting on the mainland, while duck shooting required, even in those early days, time and an outfit which few men could then afford.

EARLY HISTORY

When Joseph Ryerson in 1800 purchased the Island to which he gave his name, he had no thought of duck shooting. His intention was to reside there, as both land and water were bountiful in providing the necessaries of life, ducks, ruffed grouse, woodcock, snipe and deer were plentiful, also fish in endless supply. This he told me—he was my great uncle. I had many talks with him as a

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grown boy. Not many men can now say that they have talked with a man who tried to shoot George Washington. But Joseph Ryerson was a noted young New Jersey sniper from 1776 to 1783. He died, aged ninety-three. He was the grandfather of the present Surgeon-General Ryerson, of Red Cross fame, and father of Egerton Ryerson, hereinafter mentioned.

We first begin to hear of the present "Long Point" in the early fifties. The Grand Trunk Railway opened in 1856. Then came a market for everything edible, game especially, in the American cities. Game in any form had never been a favorite food with the farmers, nor is it now. When killed, money

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in pocket was the object, and netting was a general practice. Ruffed grouse, quail, wild pigeons and turkeys were the first to be exterminated. The duck marshes from Rice Lake and other lakes in Eastern Ontario, to St. Clair flats and Mitchells Bay, in Western Ontario, were soon depleted. Turkey Point and Big Creek Marshes soon followed. Then all eyes and guns were turned towards the present property of the Long Point Company.

DEMORALIZATION

With marvellous rapidity it became an open common and a resort for the idle and dissipated. The place was shunned by sportsmen of

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the better sort. With steamboats and tugs on the American side of the lake and no railway on the Canadian side, Long Point was more easy of access from Buffalo and Erie than from any Canadian City. "Morrisey and Heenan" had their prize fight there and more recently "Dwyer and Elliot." A brothel had a temporary location—the inmates supplied from Buffalo. Rev. Dr. Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Education in Ontario, who had shot there from boyhood, wrote the Government that it was then impossible for a respectable man to go there, and ruin for any young man to shoot there. That immorality, drunkenness, and a low tone was prevalent throughout the place.

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WELL DOING

Dr. Ryerson, after the formation of the Company, having built his own cottage, made it a practice, when shooting, to read prayers in the Club House dining room. The punters and members attended. There was then no tug for an easy Sunday run to Port Rowan. Shortly after the Doctor's death, the Company decided to do its own catering instead of being served and fed by the proprietor of the Port Rowan Hotel. It was found all but impossible to get a female cook and servant for the season. The excuse given was that for two months they could not go to church. The reputation of the

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place also had not been wholly forgotten. For this reason one of the members for several years read prayers in the Club House on Sundays. There was always a good attendance. Subsequently, good servants were more easily obtained. It is worthy of note that there has not been an accident or a scandal at Long Point Marsh since the formation of the Company. Prior to its formation, the shooting was continuous from Spring until the freeze up, from daylight until midnight and on Sundays, ending in the sundown flight, often followed by moonlight shooting.

The marsh was being rapidly destroyed as a property of any value.

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THE BIRTH OF THE LONG POINT COMPANY

About 1860 Mr. William Hunter of New York (a Canadian tea merchant), several Hamilton merchants (all Scotch) and Samuel D. Woodruff of St. Catharines, advised and aided by Colonel Tisdale of Simcoe, made an effort to get the marsh under discipline. For that purpose cottages and a punters' shanty were built at what is now known as "Harry's." Six guns at a time with punters and decoys could be accommodated. There Harry Woodward, Leary and Monte reigned supreme. They practically controlled the shooting of the



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marsh, with the exception of the Rice Bay section, long before the preserve of Peter Price (Colonel Tisdale's uncle). A waiting game was played to obtain a freehold title from the Government of the whole of Long Point. Prior to this the Government had made two unsuccessful efforts to sell by auction, not being able to protect the timber. Wherever it was cut the Point washed away.

No doubt, at the suggestion of the gentlemen above mentioned, a third sale by auction was tried. This resulted in the promoters of the Long Point Company becoming the purchasers.

Peter Price gave his allegiance to the Company for a life right to shoot.

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Dr. Ryerson still continued to own Ryerson's Island, the key of the whole position. He was subsequently well paid for the island and also given a life right to shoot for self and son. For some time he refused to sell unless headquarters were made upon the island. The present location was a concession to Port Rowan, being more convenient for the punters, all of whom resided there. In the winter the cottages at "Harry's" were removed on the ice to the present location. So hopeless was it generally considered to protect Long Point, that for about three years after the formation of the Company, six hundred dollars was the price fixed for a shooting right. In

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1866, a license for one week's shooting let for five dollars, two weeks for eight dollars.

THE LIQUOR HABIT

The first Directors had many difficulties to contend with. Whiskey drinking at that date appears to have been an all but universal habit. To calm local opinion, a public bar was opened at Headquarters, now called "The Cottages," Charley Brown, the first caretaker in the employ of the Company, being the liquor dispenser. He also had a hotel on the mainland. The Long Point bar, however, had but a short life. Every punter employed had a quart bottle of whiskey a day given

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him in addition to his pay. The punter shot, as well as his employer. That had ever been the custom.

The new members were all but helpless during the shooting season. The best punters who knew the marsh and were skilled in placing decoys, were in the employ of the directors and older members. There were also a number of friendly life rights to shoot, now extinct.

The custom then was to line up in the creek in front of the Club House after breakfast. At 8:30 the bell rang, then a mad rush, often fifteen punts, was made for the marsh. No new member's punter dare or did follow a punt

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with a promoter or director in it. This resulted in one location being named by the punters.

THE BATTLE GROUND

On a Sunday in October, 1880, ducks swarmed over the locality since called the Battle Ground. On Monday morning, at breakfast, it appeared to be understood that Mr. Hunter was to shoot there. Edward Harris, a new member, (4th year) in his canoe with lateen sail raced for the bunch. When within about 100 yards of it and about twenty yards ahead, Hunter's punter threw out his decoys not with the intention of shooting there, but to claim the 400 yard limit for the nearest gun. Harris

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placed his decoys in the proper place notwithstanding. Hunter's punter then lifted his decoys and replaced them in another part of the bunch at a distance of about 100 yards. They shot all day, shot often falling in each boat. Instead of one punt returning with a bag of 100 or over, each boat succeeded in getting from eighteen to twenty birds.

BIRTH OF THE FIELD RULES

That evening at dinner was stormy, but it resulted in the framing of Field Rules which placed all members on an equality. Not only that, but there followed an unbroken peace which has continued to this date.

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Those Field Rules were original, there being no other shooting club to copy from. In fact, for some years after, the Secretary of the Long Point Company was asked by other clubs in their formation for copies of the Rules, and similar applications have been made until a very late date.

The promoters and first directors of the Long Point Company were an exceptionally brainy lot of men. In those days the "big bag" was a craze. The punters shooting had no doubt much to do with the early troubles of the Company. Nor is it surprising that they made a vigorous struggle for its continuance. The punter's reputation was made by a return with a boat load

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of ducks, the greater portion of which he usually claimed fell to his gun.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

The old members and promoters had never realized the future possibilities of the Company. The new members had exhausted every device to get their rights. A map of the marsh was made by a new member with all the shooting locations marked. This map has been recently presented to the Company. Canoes with lateen sails were introduced for speed. A new member, during a crisis caused by the effort to prohibit punters shooting, had a hint from Dr. Ryerson which saved him from being

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thrown into the creek when going to dinner, a ballot having been taken by the punters for that object. A member suspected his punter of preventing ducks from decoying. This resulted in his shooting without a punter. Another reformer had never been taken more than half a mile from the Club House. This gave the name "Phin's Corner" (Phineas Reeves one of the best of the old punters, but not in the ring).

Following the new and equitable rules, channels were opened and staked, a reform which had been strongly opposed on the plea that it would make poaching easier. Even then it was only "carried" after a punters' strike. It became

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absolutely necessary with an influx of new punters.

VALEDICTORY

A few years after the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railway, grants of land and free transportation were obtained for some of the discontented employees who had been accustomed to shoot with their employers. This was accomplished largely through the influence of the late Colonel Tisdale, M.P. It is a pleasure to state that this migration to the Great West resulted to their advantage and that of their families.

Harry Woodward was a handsome, vigorous man, a Wiltshire Englishman, quite the best duck

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shooter ever at Long Point. He became keeper of the lighthouse at the east end of Long Point.

William Leary, for many years headkeeper for the Company, was one of a well-to-do Jamaica family ruined by the abolition of slavery. He and his family benefitted greatly by their removal to Manitoba. One of his sons became the Winnipeg City Auditor.

Morris Fitzmorris (Monte) came from Ireland in the forties, arriving in Hamilton when the cholera was raging. Then he drifted to Port Rowan, then to Long Point. He lived a punter and fisherman for over fifty years. He had a knowledge of the ways and habits of wild ducks which

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may be described as "uncanny." The large bags usually made by the late John T. Lord were always considered the result of Monte's skill in locating a hide and placing decoys. In that respect Monte was unequalled. He had also a full supply of Irish wit and humor. He brought up and educated a fine family and left them a comfortable home. When Lord Lansdowne shot at Long Point, in 1887, he was told that Morris Fitzmorris was to be his punter. "Why!" Lord Lansdowne said, "That is my name, too!" Monte's skill as a punter was so generally admitted that some one suggested that "*Ducks et praeterea nihil*" would be a good motto for him. But "Monte" was

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a great deal more than "ducks." He remained true to the Company until the end.

Deer were placed on the Point in 1874. In the early days it had been famous for deer, but all destroyed. Grouse had also abounded and should again, now that fox, coon and mink skins are so valuable. The cover and the food are both there. Leary's feather-beds were largely stuffed with grouse feathers. They are now well protected by the Ontario Game Laws.

The credit for civilizing Long Point must be largely given to the late Louis Cabot, of Boston. He had seen the destruction of other Canadian marshes and was a highly cultured gentleman.

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The late Samuel D. Woodruff was an early President of the Company. It is to be regretted that he left no account of his experiences with the "oldest inhabitants" of the marsh. But he knew the punters and their ways. On one Sunday evening I went to his cottage, by appointment. On the table was a large bottle of "Warner's Safe Cure." "Well," I said, "you are the last man I would have suspected of drinking a quack medicine." "I never drink any quack medicine, or any medicine. If I don't put my whiskey in one of those bottles, the punters will get at it." He might be described as a Canadian "Bismarck," brainy and with long experience in the man-

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agement of men leading a rough and independent life. He and all his brothers were born sportsmen and pleasant in their lives. In 1881, when he retired from the Presidency, the Company was safe for the reforms which followed.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

After visiting Long Point, in 1887, Lord Lansdowne, then Governor-General of Canada, wrote the President:

“I can find no words to thank
“you and the Company for the
“kindness which has been shown
“me. I never enjoyed shooting
“more than I enjoyed yours, and I
“always think myself fortunate in
“having been allowed to enter

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“such a sportsman’s paradise as
“that of which I have been an in-
“mate for the last few days. Pray
“give my kindest regards to the
“members who did so much to
“make our visit, in all respects, a
“delightful one.”

In 1892, the late Lord Derby, then Lord Stanley, when Governor-General, shot at Long Point. He wrote the President:

“I have had a good deal of shoot-
“ing in my time, but I never en-
“joyed any expedition more than
“that to your hospitable domains,
“and in the way of sport, I never
“saw anything to equal it. I shall
“long look back to those days as
“the very pleasantest which I have
“spent, even during my five very
“happy years in Canada.”



LONG POINT, 1880

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The Duke of Argyle, then Lord Lorne, wrote in the same pleasant and enthusiastic way. An incident occurred when he was at "The Cottages" worth repeating.

On the way to the Point, he called at St. Thomas, having to address the great Scotch settlement there, largely the "Clan Campbell." Being anxious to get to "The Cottages," he and his Aide-de-Camp left without revising his speech. A special messenger was to follow with the newspaper containing it. The late Sir Henry De Winton was the Aide-de-Camp. He and the President remained in with Lord Lorne. When reading the newspaper we saw his face turn pale and his hands drop. "Oh!"

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he said, "Such a mistake. Oh, this is too dreadful." Lord Lorne in his speech had attributed the great prosperity and success of the Scotch settlement to their industry and respect for law. The enthusiastic reporter had taken this down "industry and respect for Lorne."

When Prince George, now King George V., shot at the Point, he was eighteen and a "middy." He shot with a light sixteen. His elder brother was then living. Prince George wrote his father, King Edward, then Prince of Wales, that the most charming holiday of his life was at Long Point, and fully described the shooting. This the President heard indirectly.

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The late Lord Minto, who had shot the world over, was enthusiastic in his praises of Long Point.

THE WASTE IN ONTARIO

It is a circumstance so remarkable as to be all but beyond belief, that in old Ontario (nearly as large as England), where at one time game and fish abounded, there is scarcely a river, creek, lake or farm where a fish can be caught with rod and line or game killed with the gun. This is an exaggeration, but a very mild one. Even a well paid guide seldom has a second application for his services to shoot in the same locality. Long Point is the one and only shooting ground in Ontario where from

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year to year the expectations of a sportsman are fully realized. This is the result of limiting the number of guns to the capacity of the marsh and the abolition of spring shooting and shooting after sundown. These reforms were made many years before being adopted in the Ontario Game Laws. The first of October was made the opening day for shooting. This has not yet been adopted by Ontario.

WILD GEESE

The best Ontario wild geese flight was at one time to the Long Point marsh. That long since ceased. The recent wonderful performance (one might call it discovery) of Mr. Jack Miner, in the

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County of Essex, about 80 miles west of Long Point, is worthy of mention. There he now has thousands of wild geese resting during the summer months on ponds on his farm. There they feed and are fed unmolested.

SHOOTING LOCATIONS

The various names of the shooting locations, with two or three exceptions, ante-date the formation of the Company. That there should not be one Indian name is remarkable. Indians had been in plenty before, and some after, the White Settlement in 1800.

"Harry's" and "The Battle Ground" have already been described.

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"The Doctor's Bunch."—Dr. Ryerson invariably took his holiday on the island he had inherited from his father. He had for many years before the formation of the Company a room in a shanty he built there for old man Bantam. He always shot in that bunch. He was on very friendly terms with the punters and guides of the early days, having known their fathers and mothers. The punters named the Bunch. They never went there or disturbed him in any way. He continued to shoot until in the eighties, in 1882. He told me his reason for going to that Bunch was, because, from that point, he could see the old family homestead, west of Port Ryerse, where

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he was born. Ryerson and Ryerse are the same name. Dr. Ryerson's father and the writer's grandfather were brothers. "Se" means son. The younger branch modernized it. The old and famous family name of Phillipse on the Hudson is an instance.

"Drinking Place."—Before the formation of the Company, when the marsh was overrun by sports, often idling as well as shooting, this Bunch was a recognized meeting place at midday. Every man having his bottle, it fairly earned the name. It was everybody's "birthday," and so they went on treating until the bottles were empty. In those days there was good wood duck and rail shooting

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in July and August. There was barely a remnant of that shooting left in 1870.

"Irish Channel."—This name was a compliment to Leary and Monte, who secretly made a passage for skiffs. This was not discovered by other frequenters for a considerable time. It was regarded as an Irish "pull."

"Saw Log Creek."—Clarke & Little had, in the fifties and sixties, a license to cut timber on Long Point, chiefly red cedar. Here they did their rafting. It is said one winter's cutting sank and is now in the mud at the bottom of it. The timber cutting ceased in 1873. It was not only unprofitable, but wherever a cutting was made, the

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Point washed away. This may account for various shallow stretches of water. Second Island, and all that coast, had been heavily timbered.

"Helmets." — The Company built a house here for Helmer, an underkeeper. It was accidentally burned in 1878. Helmer had a wife and family. They then went West and prospered.

"Learys." — William Leary was made headkeeper shortly after the formation of the Company. He was a superior man and very intelligent, good education, etc. A substantial house was here built for him. He had a wife and several children. When he went West, and a keeper found useless there,

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the house was pulled down and converted into several small shanties at different points for keepers during the open season.

"Burst Up Bunch."—Here Bill Price's powder flask burst, when loading his gun. It is not certain whether he had been using brown paper for wadding or smoking his pipe at the time. Before the accident he had a very handsome face. This was Peter Price's favorite son. He might have reached any position in Ontario had he not been so devoted to the marsh.

"Pearson's Pond."—An American gentleman of that name was accidentally shot here by his punter.

"Jeremy's Creek."—Jeremy was the first husband of Abigail Beck-

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er, the heroine of Long Point. He had a shanty there and lived by shooting and fishing before Company days.

"Thoroughfare Point."—The short cut for skiffs coming from Port Royal and Rowan to shoot in Rice Bay.

"Slaughter Bunch."—To newcomers in the early days Harry Woodward usually pointed to this Bunch, where "he had shot fifteen ducks at one shot." In time, this yarn became stale and doubted. Seven canvas-backs have been shot with two double barrel guns.

"Sunk Marsh."—No bottom, nothing ever recovered once dropped there.

"Dennis Bog."—Dennis, Leary's

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brother-in-law, suicided there. He was buried on Courtwright Ridge.

"The Boat Channel."—During high water and a storm, a schooner (in the lumbering days) passed through this channel. The water of Lake Erie has fallen to about two feet below the normal (at this date).

"Burnett Bunch."—Here Burnett was shot by a man named Bull, from Hamilton, a very good sportsman. He never took a gun in his hand afterwards.

All the shooting accidents were the result of two men shooting at the same time.

ANECDOTIC

There was an ideal freshness

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among the punters of "other days," which added to one's enjoyment of life.

Franklin (called Shoolty) an excellent man, big and vigorous, and by no means intemperate, but always expected his quart bottle of whiskey.

A new member not approving the liquor habit ventured to reduce the quantity by placing a soda water bottle of the "stuff" under the stern of the skiff with the lunch pail. At noon, Franklin said, "I guess it is time for lunch." "All right," said the sportsman. Franklin brought out the pail. Then he said, "I don't see no whiskey here." "Oh, yes," said the sportsman, "I put it there." Franklin

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looked again, brought out the soda water bottle, took the cork out, stood up, six feet high, smelt it, and then looking at his victim said, "My G——, has it come to this?"

Long Point became "dry" nearly forty years before Ontario. It was accomplished at Long Point, firstly "by example" and by giving the punters an extra fifty cents a day to buy their own whiskey. In a very short time they became content with tea, coffee or soup at lunch time.

Carver, the expert shot, told me if he took a drink of whiskey during the day he could do nothing with the gun. Both he and Bogardus were total abstainers. At this date, that is the universal opinion of sportsmen.

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Jack Baker was the highly respectable Port Rowan blacksmith. Work was usually slack in October and Jack Baker occasionally punted, and not bad either.

On the dock, shortly after sundown, shooting was heard near the Ridges. There was a general opinion that it was a poacher. "No," said J.B., "it ain't no poacher, I was down there. It's that"—here J.B.'s memory gave way—"It's that 'scriptural cuss.'" This was Mr. Manuel's first day in the marsh and before the sundown rule.

Long Point, upwards of 20,000 acres, being so valuable a property, is worthy of continuous thought and development. The unparal-

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leled success of the Company, for
the one purpose—shooting—keeps
it steadily in the limelight.

5 Clarendon Ave,
Toronto.
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