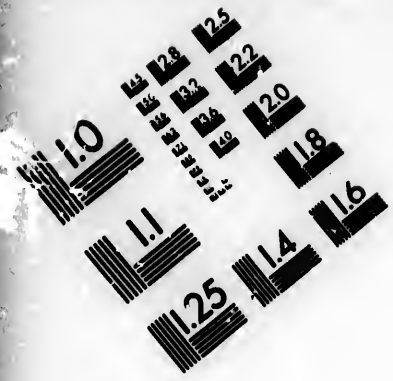

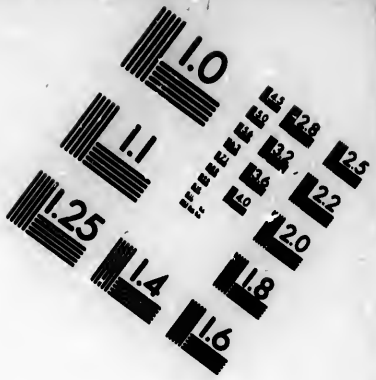

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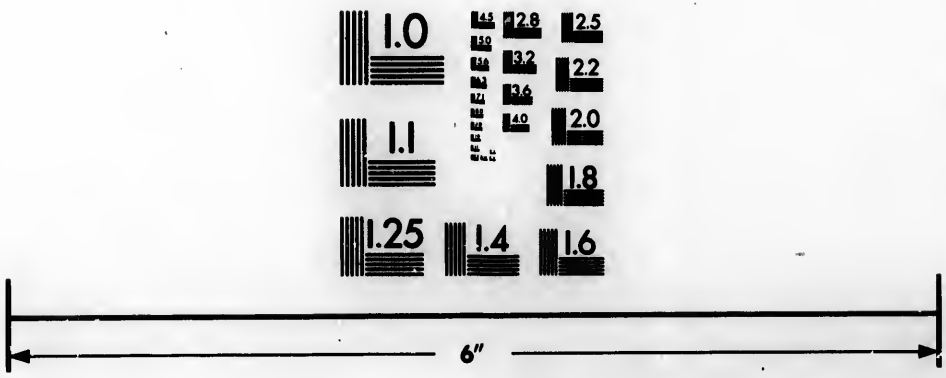

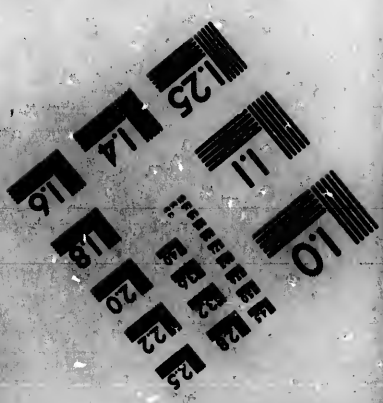

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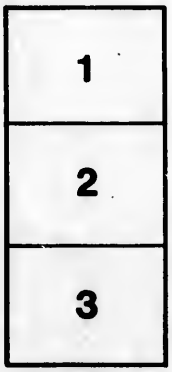

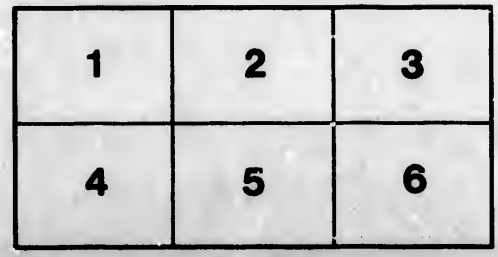

Mr Laight

AN ACCOUNT

OF A

JOURNEY TO NIAGARA,

MONTREAL AND QUEBEC,

IN

1765;

OR,

"'TIS EIGHTY YEARS SINCE."

NEW-YORK:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM OSBORN,
SPRUCE-STREET, CORNER OF NASSAU.

1846.

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Jane (a
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Mary

This little book is from the pen of Ralph Izard by who married Alice deLancey, my grandmother Jane (deLancey) Watts eldest sister presented to me by my dear Aunt, Mrs Henry Laight née Elizabeth Watts, sister of my dear mother Mary Justina Watts deceased

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PREFACE.

As THE time has arrived when hundreds and thousands will be gliding smoothly and swiftly along to view the most magnificent of Nature's works, it may not be uninteresting to read the journal of an intelligent gentleman when on the same pilgrimage in the year 1765, and to mark the difference of the undertaking then and now. While some, no doubt, will rejoice in being able to obtain so grand a sight at so small a cost of time and trouble, others (perhaps many) will regret that the facilities afforded to travellers in these days should have deprived the enterprise of all its romance, and wish that they too had lived when indeed it was *something* to have seen the Falls of Niagara.

JOURNEY TO NIAGARA.

Monday, 24th June, 1765. Went with my three companions on board a sloop for Albany —a very hot day, with the wind at south. After sailing about fifty miles through a very rocky and mountainous country, the wind came about contrary and we anchored. Friday, 28th. Arrived at Albany, one hundred and sixty miles from New-York. Albany is a dirty, ill-built Dutch town, of about three hundred houses; stands upon Hudson's River. Dined at Schuyler's. July 2d. Left Albany in a wagon, came to Schenectady. Lay at Sir William Johnson's; he is superintendent for Indian affairs in the northern district. Breakfasted at Fort Johnson, where Sir William's son lives, eighteen miles from Schenectady; good land all the way thither. Dined with Sir William at Johnson Hall. Extraordinary good land about

his house. The office of superintendent very troublesome. Sir William continually plagued with Indians about him, generally from three hundred to nine hundred in number — spoil his garden and keep his house always dirty. 7th. Left Sir William's; lay at Nicholas Failings, a very honest civil Dutchman, who seemed glad to give us whatever he had in his house; it is forty-two miles from Schenectady. 8th. Got to Nicholas Harkimer's, sixteen miles from Failings. 9th. Fort Harkimer, eight miles. The land about it belongs to old Harkimer, excellent land, settled by Germans. During the war this fort was built for the protection of the neighborhood from the attacks of the Six Nation Indians, who live round about it. 10th. Discharged our wagon; went on board a batteau; hunted and rowed up the Mohawk River against the stream, which, on account of the rapidity of the current, is very hard work for the poor soldiers. Encamped on the banks of the river, about nine miles from Harkimer's.

The inconveniences attending a married subaltern, strongly appear in this tour; what with the sickness of their wives, the squealing

of their children, and the smallness of their pay I think the gentlemen discover no uncommon share of philosophy, in keeping themselves from running mad. Officers and soldiers, with their wives and children, legitimate and illegitimate, make altogether a pretty compound oglio, which does not tend towards showing military matrimony off to any great advantage.

Friday 11th. Got to Fort Schuyler, fifteen miles from our last night's encampment. A little block-house, built during the late war, not capable of containing above six, or eight people.

Saturday 12th. Had a disagreeable ride twenty-two miles through a thick wood, with a bad path, to Fort Stanwix built in the year 1759 by General Stanwix. Lieutenant Allan Grant commanded there.

Monday 14th. Went on horseback by the side of Wood-creek, twenty miles to the royal block-house, a kind of wooden castle; proof against any Indian attacks. It is now abandoned by the troops, and a settler lives there, who keeps rum, milk, rackoons, etc., which though nothing of the most elegant, is comfortable to strangers passing that way.

This block-house is situated on the east end of the Oneida Lake, and is surrounded by the Oneida Indians, one of the Six Nations.

Some of our batteaux not being come up, we stayed next day at the block house. 16th. Embarked and rowed to the west end of the lake, which is twenty-eight miles, to Fort Brewington, a small stockade, built last war. The Oneida Lake is twenty miles broad from north to south.

17th. Rowed down Oswego River to the Onondaga Falls, thirty-nine miles. These falls, are so rapid, that the batteaux were all drawn out of the water, and rolled twenty yards, upon logs, made for that purpose below the Falls, where we encamped.

18th. Arrived at Fort Ontario, (commanded by Captain Lieut. Jonathan Rogers of the Seventeeth,) situated on the lake of that name, near a point formed by the lake and Oswego river. Fort Ontario is of wood, has five bastions, built in 1759.

Fort Oswego, which was taken by the French, is on the opposite side of the river, within sight of this Fort.

Pondiach, the famous Ottowa chief, with fifty

head men of the neighboring Indians, were arrived here to meet Sir William Johnson, about matters of consequence.

21st. Sir William arrived.

22d. At two o'clock in the morning, left Fort Ontario, encamped on the banks of Lake Ontario, about thirty miles from the Fort.

23d. Proceeded and encamped. 24th. Arrived late in the evening at Niagara Fort, one hundred and seventy miles from Fort Ontario. Captain Thomas Morris, of the seventeenth regiment, commanded here. Many civilities received from him and the officers of the regiment.

26th. Rode to Fort Schlosser, about fifteen miles from Niagara, which is situated on Niagara River, about two miles above the famous Falls.

Mr Pfister, a German half-pay lieutenant of the Royal Americans, lives at Fort Schlosser. He has made a contract with General Gage, commander-in-chief, to carry all stores, batteaux, etc., belonging to the army, in wagons over land, about seven miles, the Falls of Niagara making the river of that name so rapid, both above and below them, that it is absolutely necessary for every thing going towards Lake

Erie, to be carried that distance by land. Every batteau, besides those belonging to the army, pay him £10, New-York currency, and upwards, according to their size.

Batteaux and all heavy baggage are raised to the top of an high hill on the river, by means of a capstan.

From Fort Schlosser we went to see the Falls, which are two amazing cataracts, divided by an island in the river. We were inclined to go down a steep rock and view the Falls from the bottom, but having no rope with us to fasten to a tree above, the dangerous appearance of the precipice deterred us.

A few days after, we crossed the river from Niagara Fort and rode to the Falls, which appeared much higher and more beautiful than from the opposite side.

We had got a rope, and resolved by its assistance to go to the bottom of the Falls; but some accident happening to the horse of the man who had charge of the rope, he was obliged to stop on the road, and endeavoring to overtake us, he lost his way; so we should have been a second time disappointed of the pleasure of seeing the Falls from the bottom,

had we not resolved to go down at all events, without a rope. Before this resolution could be executed, it was necessary to find out a proper place from which we might make an attempt with some probability of success.

This was no easy matter; and we examined the banks of the river for at least an hour and a half before any such place could be found. Nothing but the bare face of a rock was to be seen. At last an opening appeared between some trees and bushes, which, though dangerous to go down, seemed the most likely place for our purpose of any we had seen. A council was now held, whether an attempt should be made there. We all seemed pretty well agreed, that if any one of us would jump down a smooth perpendicular rock, about twenty feet in height, when he got to the bottom it was likely he might find a place where we might descend lower with ease. Nothing was now wanting but a mouse hardy enough to tie the bell about the cat's neck. At last one of the company, after having made one or two fruitless attempts, fixed a forked pole to the branch of a tree that hung over the rock, and by that means let himself down to the bottom. The fork of the pole

broke as he was going down, and I think it is a wonder he did not break his neck.

After looking about him some time, he found some notched logs, not twenty yards from the place where he had risked breaking his bones, that served as a ladder, by which the whole company went down easily to the place where he was.

We then scrambled down, holding by stumps and roots, and tufts of grass, to the bottom, and a terrible piece of work we had before we got there. Our labor, however, was in a great measure recompensed by a sight of the Falls, which appear much higher and much more beautiful than from above, on either side. We went so near, as to be wet through with the spray. After getting to the bottom of the precipice, our anxiety to be near the Falls was so great, that we forgot to mark the place where we came down; and so, after our curiosity was satisfied with looking, we were obliged to wander up and down for three hours, and scramble over many dangerous places, before we could find our way. The night approaching, gave us a comfortable prospect of staying there till morning; and the appearance of wolves' tracks in many places added much to our pleasant situation. We

were informed that those animals frequently travelled about that place, in companies of about twenty or thirty at a time, and were so fierce as to attack men even in the middle of the day. As we had nothing with us to defend ourselves, nor flint and steel to make a fire, I think the odds were above five to four that no part of us except our bones would have ever got to the top of the hill, undigested, if we had not luckily found our way.

Upon the whole, our jaunt was difficult and dangerous, and although a sight of the Falls from below affords great pleasure, yet it is not adequate to the trouble and hazard necessary to the obtaining it.

The Falls of Niagara have been measured several times by a line, let down from a rock near the top of the Falls. From the best accounts I could get, I think they are about one hundred and forty feet perpendicular. They are extremely grand, and are well worth seeing.

During our stay in this part of the world, we went to Fort Erie, which is situated on the mouth of the Lake of that name. Lake Erie is about three hundred miles long, and about one hundred and twenty broad.

At the north-west corner of Lake Erie is Detroit on the Straits between that Lake and Lake Huron; eighteen miles up these Straits is Fort Pontchartrain.

Niagara seems to be the key of all our northern pessessions in America; yet so fond are the Ministry of the appearance of economy, that this Fort, for want of a trifling annual expense, is suffered to go to ruin. The works are all built of turf; they are very extensive, and very much out of repair. The commanding officer assured me, that if the Fort was attacked it must fall, as he did not think it tenable. There is indeed in the Fort a large stone house, ninety by forty-five feet, which is proof against any Indian attacks, even though they were in possession of the Fort, yet if there were three or four Frenchmen, with these Indians, who could show them the use of the cannon in the Fort, the house would soon be levelled to the ground. This large house was built by the French, under the pretence of its being a trading-house, the Indians refusing then to permit them to build a fort. Soon after the house was built, they raised a stockade about it, and by degrees constructed the regular fortification, which is now seen here.

The officers' fresh provisions were entirely out, and they had not a drop of wine; we luckily had a little which we brought up with us.

When we first arrived we were told that the schooner that carries provisions between Niagara and Oswegachy, would certainly arrive in two or three days; we waited with the utmost expectation for her, but she did not appear until Saturday, 16th August, when to our great joy she arrived.

Thursday, 22d August. At 12 o'clock sailed and arrived at Fort Ontario. 24th. In the morning sailed; in the evening the schooner lay-to, opposite Cataraqui or Frontenac, a small fort at the north side of the entrance of the River St. Lawrence, about ninety miles from Fort Ontario.

The French had their grand magazine of provisions here, from whence they supplied all their back forts. It was taken by Colonel Bradstreet, in 1757. We went on shore and walked about the fort, which is now deserted and in ruins. At night, came to an anchor in the river.

26th. Sailed down the river, which affords many beautiful prospects, from the number of

small islands that are in it. At night, ran alongside a large rock and tied the schooner, which served instead of coming to anchor. Caught some fine fish.

27th. The wind being contrary we still kept fast to the rock. 28th. Set sail, and anchored.

29th. Arrived at Oswegachy, a small fort built for the protection of the provision which is sent there from Montreal, for the supply of the garrisons of Ontario, Niagara, Detroit, &c.

Oswegachy is one hundred and twenty miles from Fort Ontario, and ninety from the first entrance into the River St. Lawrence, from the lake.

30th. Left Oswegachy in a very small wooden canoe. Mr. Madden, who commanded at the Fort, could get us no other. Two savages and a soldier of the fifteenth regiment, were our conductors and guides, and miserable ones they turned out to be.

Nine miles from Oswegachy, is a small island on which is built Fort William Augustus, taken by General Amherst, in 1760. The grenadiers of the whole army, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Massey, of the twenty-seventh regiment, were ordered to storm the

fort, as they had sustained a siege of three days; luckily for both parties, the fort surrendered before they began the storm.

Proceeded over some very bad rapids, some of them several miles in length. Our canoe in passing one of these rapids took in a considerable quantity of water, and was turned round by the current. Got that night to St. Anjuste, about forty miles from Oswegachy, an Indian village of about forty houses. We lodged at the house of one Gordon, a Jesuit priest, who was very civil, and gave us some dried eels and eggs for supper, which was all he had in the house.

As it was our custom always to rise very early when travelling, we were under some uneasiness lest we should disturb the priest, but he assured us that he was up every morning at four o'clock. He came into our room the next morning at that hour; soon after we saw him upon his knees praying. We offered him some chocolate, which we had brought with us for breakfast, but he declined it, telling us he ate very little on Sunday.

After thanking him for his civilities, we embarked in our vessel, and soon came to some

terrible rapids, which we were just going down, but luckily saw an Indian trader, who assured us that if we attempted to go down in so small a canoe, we might depend upon being cast away; and if that had been the case, every man of us would certainly have been drowned; the stream ran so violently, that swimming would have availed us nothing.

The only chance we had, was to go ashore, unload our boat, and carry every thing on board to a point about a quarter of a mile distant, which we did, and the trader, with several savages he had with him, assisted in dragging our canoe over the rocks, down to that point, by a long rope fixed to her head. After giving him two piasters for his civility, we reëmbarked and proceeded over some disagreeable rapids (but not near so bad as those just mentioned,) to the Cedars, where we lay that night.

What is called the Cedars is a range of French settlements, about three or four miles long; the only houses we have seen since we left Cataragui, except Oswegachi, Fort William Augustus, and St. Anjuste, which is about one hundred and forty miles.

The man at the house where we lay assured

us that what the trader had told us was very true, for had we but gone twenty yards farther than where we landed, the consequences must inevitably have been fatal.

The behaviour of the poor French inhabitants of this part of the world is extremely different from what is met with in any of the British settlements in America; the Frenchmen affable, civil, and always ready to do any thing in their power to oblige. On the contrary, a Briton, piquing himself on his liberty, (which in my opinion is nothing more than an insubstantial vision, and like the colors in a prism entirely deceptive,) will treat you with haughtiness and effrontery, and though you pay him liberally for every thing you have of him, thinks you are more obliged to him than he to you. It is said that the good behaviour of these poor Frenchmen is owing to their having been ruled with a rod of iron when this country was in the hands of its former masters; it is very probable. I am sorry that so good an effect should be produced by so bad a cause.

Monday, 1st September. Left the Cedars on horseback, and had all our baggage carried in a cart three leagues. This was absolutely

necessary, as there were three or four very bad rapids, down which our canoe could not go, otherwise than very light. We got the man of the house where we lay (whose business it is) to pilot her down. Embarked; got to La Chine about two o'clock. After dinner rode nine miles to Montreal, which was no small comfort to us after all our difficulties.

The town of Montreal stands upon an island of the same name; it is forty miles long and fifteen broad, surrounded by branches of the river St. Lawrence.

Saw the troops reviewed by Major-General Burton, commander-in-chief in the northern district. The soldiers looked and performed their exercise well; afterward a cold collation under a tent; French ladies there, very agreeable and chatty; English country dances on the grass. Madame Landrieve my partner; the prettiest woman and the best dancer in the set.

4th. Sailed on board a sloop with a fair wind for Quebec; got seventy miles. The pilot, afraid to sail in the night on account of the rocks, anchored.

Breakfasted with Col. Massey of the Twenty-Seventh Regiment at Trois Rivieres, a town

ninety miles from Montreal, so called from the river St. Maurice having three mouths near it. About one hundred and fifty houses.

Wind still contrary; lay here; no wind in the morning; beat down with the tide thirty miles; went on shore, rode by the banks of the river to Quebec in machines called callaches, an humble imitation of a buggy, or one-horse chaise, though much inferior; very little better than a cart.

7th. Arrived at Quebec, the capital of Canada, a fine situation on the river St. Lawrence, one hundred and eighty miles from Montreal; the finest river I ever saw, the banks on each side entirely cleared from Montreal to Quebec; as thickly built to appearance as the sides of the Thames from London to Richmond.

The north side of the river looks like one straggling village for upward of one hundred miles.

Eighteen leagues from Montreal is a broad part of the river St. Lawrence, which is called lake St. Pierre. This lake is nine leagues long, and in some parts three, four, and five leagues broad.

There are seven hundred houses and two

nunneries in Quebec; one about two miles from the town, called the General Hospital. The nuns here are chiefly employed in curing the sick. Each nunnery has between thirty or forty nuns.

Saw the famous plains of Abraham, where General Wolfe was killed, 13th September, 1759. Inspired with courage by riding over the field of battle; wished to be a soldier. At night grew prudent, and altered my opinion by thinking of Falstaff's honor.

Wolfe's body buried in Westminster Abbey. No monument or obelisk to his memory here. Scandalous!

Rode eight miles by the banks of the St. Lawrence to the Falls of Montmorency, one hundred and fifty feet perpendicular, twenty yards broad; very curious.

Remains of the French entrenchments all along the side of the river; fine scene for a contemplative military man. Saw the Falls of the Chaudiere River, about eighty feet high.

Nine miles from Quebec. Went to the Isle of Orleans, where the English first landed in Canada. Went to Point Levy. The Island of Orleans is fifteen leagues long; the River

St. Lawrence on each side of it. Great civilities received from Major Brown, of the Twenty-eighth regiment. The officers of the Twenty-eighth and Forty-fourth regiments very civil to us.

The cold is so intense at Quebec, that all the meat and poultry which is used during the winter is killed in the beginning of December, and kept frozen till the beginning of April. If the meat is frozen immediately after it is killed, it will be as tough when thawed at the end of three or four months as the day it was killed. If it is kept four or five days, till it is grown tender before it is frozen, it will be in the same state when thawed; and suffers not the least degree of putrefaction by being kept any length of time frozen. Frozen meat is cut with an axe; will fly into chips, like a block of ice. The neatest and most frugal method of cutting frozen meat is with a saw; the saw-dust makes excellent soup. Milk is brought to market frozen in bags.

Quebec was terribly shattered during the siege by the English batteries on Point Levy, which is on the other side of the river, opposite to the town; the river is eleven hundred yards across here.

There are about seven hundred houses in Quebec. Met Lord Adam Gordon here, just come from Niagara.

Went to Lorette, an Indian village about eight miles from Quebec. Saw the Indians at mass, and heard them sing Psalms tolerably well. A dance. Got well acquainted with Athanase, who was commander-in-chief of the Indians, who defeated General Braddock in 1755. A very sensible fellow. About one hundred fighting men in this town.

Left Quebec. Next day got to Trois Rivieres; spent a day with Colonel Massey. Fine fields of wheat and other grain between Quebec and Montreal.

The stages between these towns are: St. Foix, Carrouge, St. Augustin, Point aux Trembles, Jacquatier, Cape Sante, De Chambault, Bas Grondines, Haut Grondines, St. Ann, Batiscan, Champlain, Champlain Haut, Cape Madelain, Trois Rivieres, Point du Lac, Mashish, Riviere Deloup, Maskenongé, Bertié, Doutr y, Valletree, St. Sulpice, Arpentini, Long Point, Point aux Trembles, and then to Montreal; altogether about one hundred and eighty miles.

Rode ten miles up the River St. Lawrence,

and crossed over to Cocknewaga, an Indian village. About two hundred fighting men here; fine strong looking fellows.

Went with General Burton to the top of Mount Royal, about four miles from Montreal, which takes its name from the mountain.

Frequent tea drinking, and dancing with the French ladies; some of them pretty, others try to make themselves so by paint. In the time of the French government of Canada, no ladies but such as were of the noblesse, were suffered to wear ribbands or aigrettes in their hair; this custom is abolished now, and it is as common here to see women of all sorts bedecked with flowers and ribbands in their hair as in South Carolina, the country of pompoons. Noblesse does not imply being related to a nobleman only, but likewise to an officer. If a woman's fourth or fifth cousin happened to be married to an officer, she became immediately ennobled, and was suffered to decorate herself with a ribband. It is a great mortification to these ladies, that now every creature may ornament her hair as she pleases.

Among the men, none but those of the noblesse were allowed to ride with saddles. I ex-

perienced the bad effects of this, having been thumped upon a blanket.

Went with Lord Adam, General Burton, and several officers to Seneville, the end of the island of Montreal, thirty miles from the town; crossed the Ottowa River, about seven miles to Canisadaga, an Indian town. About three hundred warriors in it, very formidable looking fellows. Saw them in chapel at prayers, kept in the greatest order; the chapel a very good building, ornamented within with scripture pictures. A fine altar-piece, gilt.

All these Indians educated in the Roman Catholic religion, some of them great bigots.

Had a very elegant supper given us by Monsieur Montgolphié, the head of the St. Sulpician priests here, who have the management of these Indians.

Monsieur St. Luke La Corne, a Croix de St. Louis, the French partisan, was with us.

Next morning walked about three miles to the top of Mount Calvere. Four little chapels upon the ascent of the hill, about five hundred yards from each other, and three at the top. Paintings in each of the sufferings of Christ.

Fine prospect here, of the Island of Montreal, and of the rivers Ottowa and St. Lawrence.

The St. Lawrence is navigable for large vessels, up to Montreal, one hundred and seventy leagues from Anticosti, an island in its mouth. Great plenty of fish in it, particularly salmon, which is as good as any in England.

Canada contains one hundred thousand inhabitants, exclusive of the troops in it.

Passed my time very agreeably with Col. Massey, who commanded, Captain John Maxwell, Captain William Prescott, both of the Fifteenth, and several other officers whom I had been acquainted with before.

16th. Left Montreal; crossed the Ferry at Longuel, where we got callaches to convey us to La Prairie, dined there, and after dinner went to St John's, eighteen miles from La Prairie.

17th. Left St. John's with seven stout Canadians to row us over Lake Champlain. Met Sir Henry Moore, Governor of New-York, Lient. Col. Irving, President of the Council at Quebec, Lieut. Col. Reid, of the Forty-second Regiment, Philip Schuyler, of Albany, and two

or three surveyors, who were taking observations to find out the forty-fifth degree of north latitude, which is the settled boundary line between the provinces of New-York and Canada.

By their observations at Windmill Point, (twenty-five miles to the southward of St. John's) they thought the line must be about three miles nearer to Montreal.

Lay that night in our batteaux upon the Lake; ran the boat aground, and rested our Canadians for three or four hours. At break of day proceeded; rowed hard all day against a contrary wind. Encamped on the east side of the Lake, within fifteen miles of Crown Point.

19th. Got to the Fort, dined with Captain Hamilton of the Fifteenth. The fort at Crown Point surprisingly decayed since last year; built of wood at the expense of £50,000, when they were obliged to blow up fine lime-stone to make a foundation, which would have answered both the purposes of stone and mortar. The fort extremely beautiful to the eye, yet no great credit to Col. Dyers, the engineer who built it.

Went in the afternoon sixteen miles to Ti-

conderoga. 20th. Got a fresh batteau, and with our Canadians crossed Lake George, thirty-six miles.

Captain Lieut. Rogers, of the Seventeenth, who commanded at Fort Ontario when we were on our way to Niagara, was removed to this fort. It is a great hardship to those officers, who have but little interest, that they are bandied about from one post to another, at the arbitrary will of the commander-in-chief, while others have leave to stay at New-York, go to England, and do what they please. The expense and inconvenience of moving hundreds of miles from one fort to another, cannot be conceived, but by those who have travelled over this country, and must be severely felt by the poor subalterns.

21st. Rode fourteen miles on horseback to Fort Edward, which is now abandoned by the troops. A settler still lived here, and with him we dined. Got fourteen miles that night to Saratoga. 22d. Breakfasted at Stillwater, fourteen miles from Saratoga. Crossed London's Ferry, twelve miles, and dined at the Dutch Ferry-house. At night got to Schenectady, fourteen miles. 23d. Dined at Schenec-

tady. In the afternoon rode to Albany, eighteen miles. 24th. At night went on board an Albany sloop. 28th. In the morning arrived at New-York.

THE END.

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