

Surveyors Of The Past . . .

SAMUEL PETERS

by *Mary Smith Scott*

Samuel Peters was a pioneer land surveyor who practised in Southwestern Ontario in the mid 1800's. His diaries are a treasure of historical material. His books are filled with careful figuring and neat sketches, and the spirit of this man lives in his works.

A map, surveyed and drafted by him, is currently displayed in London, Ontario, as a part of the "London In The Bush" exhibit. It is as pretty as a picture, with artistic printing and finely drawn lines. Many happy hours can be spent studying it for familiar landmarks.

The map is so interesting that I wanted to learn more about the man who had drawn it. My search took me to the archives of Farncomb & Kirkpatrick Limited, Land Surveyors of London, where I hunted for facts about his personal life.

Deep inside a Diary, written in 1885, was this entry: "July 20: 2 pounds given to Ann".

Later diaries and accounts showed that Ann was his wife. Samuel Peters had a brother, W. H., who worked for him when he was surveying for a railway in England.

There was a nephew, Samuel Peters, an architect, who drew the plans for the Peters' home. There are entries in the 1852 accounts ledger to pay for this service.

The Peters family moved in 1854 to their new home, located at Western Road and Platts Lane, London. It was called "Grosvenor Lodge", and today it is a worthy monument to a "Chief" among land surveyors. It is in yellow brick, and in good condition. It has been placed under the supervision of the London Library Board, and when the home is readied for its new use, the Samuel Peters' Diaries will be available for the citizens to see.

The Resource Centre at Farncomb & Kirkpatrick Limited has other volumes written by Samuel Peters which tell about his community interests. He worked for the establishment of churches, schools, and even surveyed areas for cemeteries. He wrote: "October 5, 1856, surveyed the Wesleyan old burying ground for W. L. Glass and Smith: a piece of land 300 feet back on Great Market Street". Today we call this Central Ave.

He was active in the Wesleyan Church, and wrote: "1854: Moved by S. Peters, seconded by . . . that the rents of pews in the new Church be as follows (vis) those fronting on the centre aisle and extending to 12 seats back from the altar \$16 each. The side seats

\$10 as far back as 12 in centre aisle; square pews \$32 each sitting, pews rear end of Church to be \$2 less than the prices herein stated, in all cases payable quarterly in advance."

A fieldbook written at the same time records laying out of buildings for Huron College and Chapel, located at Talbot, St. James, College Avenue, and Grosvenor Streets, London, close by the North branch of the Thames. He tabulated his figures neatly: "Excavation for area at College, 25 yards long . . . run \$1 per yard \$25.00 . . . Stone work, \$78.75 . . . 75 feet drain, \$18.75".

Some of his Diaries are filled with surveys for private citizens such as: "Survey west side of Ridout Street for E. W. Harris July 30, 1868; begins at North Street and past Fullerton, past Hitchcock, and on up Ridout in a continuous chaining". Telling the story now, we would say that Mr. Peters made a survey that began at Queens Avenue and past Fullerton, past Maple Street and on up Ridout in a continuous line, in the vicinity of Eldon House, London.

Recently a crew of land surveyors set up their instruments at the corner of Adelaide and Dundas Streets, London, and made a survey. It would be interesting to compare their data with the measurements of Samuel Peters, for he wrote about a survey he made at this corner.

"Survey of land in the block bounded by Dundas, William, East North, and Adelaide Streets was made by me on Saturday, 24th April 1852. COMMENCING on northerly limit of Dundas Street 2 chains 46 links westerly from Adelaide Street . . . in continuation of the division lines across Mr. Cronyn's block. Middle portion containing two acres and one rood."

The works that Samuel Peters began are still going on. His surveys are referred to with great respect by his peers. His land holdings are drawn on the map in "The Historical Atlas of Middlesex County 1878" and contain a large block of land off Hutton Road, marked "Samuel Peters". Also there is a section of land called Petersville, on the west side of the Thames River stretching from the Forks of the Thames northward towards the branching of the Western Road off the Wharncliffe, and it is likely this was owned by him.

We are grateful to Samuel Peters for the legacy he has left. His name is revered today for the integrity and diligence with which he carried out his land surveys, and his home "Grosvenor Lodge" is a worthy monument to this outstanding man.