

Surveyors of The Past

BY CHARLES FAIRHALL



REUBEN SHERWOOD
Deputy Surveyor

Thomas Sherwood, the first actual settler in the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, located on lot No. 1, in the first concession of Elizabethtown, in June, 1784.

At the commencement of the Revolutionary War he remained loyal to the British Crown, and escaping to St. John's, Lower Canada, via Lake Champlain, was employed in the Secret Service, going into the States and enlisting men to serve His Majesty King George III. His two brothers entered the Continental Army.

Soon after his settling in Elizabethtown he was appointed a magistrate and a captain in the militia, and being a man of education was called upon to run the side lines of the lots for the first settlers, and to show them the location of their land. Though not a legalized Surveyor he had the instrument and understood its practical use.

His son Reuben was born in 1775. He studied with Ephraim Lay in the State of New York, then a British Province. There is no record of when he was appointed a Deputy Surveyor, but he was conducting surveys of townships in 1799.

From 1809 to 1820 he was employed in Government Surveys, subdividing into township lots (on the single front concession plan) the whole or part of each of the following townships, viz:

— Augusta, Bastard, Bathurst, Beckwith, Burgess, Crosby North, Crosby South, Drummond, Elizabethtown, Escott, Kit-ley, Lansdowne, Leeds, Marmora, Nelson, Pittsburgh, Sherbrooke, Storrington, Nassagaweya, and Yonge.

In later years some of the surveyors who served their apprenticeships under Reuben Sherwood included John Stoughton Dennis, later to become Canada's first post-Confederation Surveyor General, Richard Birdsall, John McNaughton and W. Harry Kilborn. Excerpts from Sherwood's diary, an account kept during his surveys of Nelson and Nassagawega townships, afford revealing glimpses of surveying conditions at the end of the second decade of the 19th century:

Extracts from the Diary of Reuben Sherwood, D.P.S., on the Survey of the Townships of Nelson and Nassagaweya.

SURVEY PARTY

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Alexander Robertson | Chainmen |
| Charles McLean | |
| Alexander Hamilton | Axemen |
| Henry Glennon, | |
| Nathaniel Gilchrist | |
| J. B. Pichette | |
| Francis Pichette | |

Monday, 25th February, 1819. — A snowy morning, the party all employed in arranging for bread, axes, pease, etc. Mr. Hopkins not at home. Mr. Chisholm also away. Gave men one quart of whiskey in the morn, and gave them one quart of spirits on the road up. Purchased from Ostrander, blacksmith, four axes, ready helved and ground, at eleven dollars.

Thursday, 4th March. — It snowed mostly all night and I could not get the stars in my telescope, in the morning opened and proved Wilmot's line.

Saturday, 13th March. — Snowing again in the morning. I go out with the party and finish the 2nd concession line to 15 and road. Return again at 7 p.m.; find Hudson arrived. An exceeding cold night; about fifteen inches of snow on the ground. Broke my compass-glass in coming home.

Sunday, 14th March. — A cold day. The boys go out and bring three packs of biscuits in, and all get drunk.

Sunday, 21st March. — Hamilton and Baptiste leave me. I go out to Hopkins. See Mr. Merritt in the evening with Capt. Chisholm. Go in search of snowshoes, and travel all night, and next day breakfast at Ancaster.

Monday, 22nd March. — Obtain four pairs, and return by the way of Dundas. Meet McLean and Gilchrist on Dundas Street with a keg of whiskey, and sent out three pairs of the snowshoes. I sleep at Hopkins.

Tuesday, 23rd. — Go out and find all my party squibby, having drunk up my whiskey and their own, and they had not moved the camp.

Saturday, 27th March. — The snow having frozen last night, we mount the snowshoes and move to No. 6 in the 5th concession, and run said line to No. 11, all good land. A fine creek in No. 8 runs easterly.

Friday, 9th April. — A fine day. We move down to the east angle of the township again to commence the town-line. Robinson being in rear of us, the ice left him on the other side of the creek, and he could not get to us till I sent an axeman to him. The low lands all spash, and all the flats afloat, so that I could not make any headway. I prepared for the meridian again and took it.

Thursday, 22nd April, 1819. — Commence the new township. Mosquitoes bite some to-day.

Sunday, 25th. — A fine day. I go out with McCollum. Find the men asleep in the road.

Monday, 3rd May. — Start to York on old buck, and arrive at 7 in the evening.

Tuesday, 4th May. — Meet the Surveyor-General in the morning, and draw my lands in Nelson and Nassagaweya.

Friday, 14th May. — Come out, and all hands squibby, nearly. I settled my accounts thereabouts.

Memorandum of "camp furniture" used on the survey of Augusta in 1810, as given in Reuben Sherwood's notes:—

- 4 axes.
- 1 hatchet
- 6 tin cups
- 4 iron spoons
- 2 wooden spoons
- 1 tin pan
- 1 camp kettle
- 1 tin pail
- 3 bags
- 8 blankets
- 1 gun
- Pouch, horn and shot-bag
- 1 compass and chains
- 1 marking-iron
- Old case of protracting instruments.