

Surveyors of The Past

BY CHARLES FAIRHALL



**COLONEL WILLIAM CHEWETT
1753-1849**

In 1791, the Constitutional Act was passed and the old, extensive Province of Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada. Colonel John Graves Simcoe was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. Simcoe arrived at Quebec in November 1791 and before leaving to take up his duties, he asked Surveyor-General Samuel Holland to provide him with the names of duly qualified deputy surveyors then available in Upper Canada. Among others, this list contained the name William Chewett.

Mr. Chewett, born in London on the 21st December 1753, was educated as a hydrographical engineer for the East India Company's service. He received his appointment to an East Indian towards the close of 1770, but shortly before sailing, he was taken with small-pox and his place supplied by another. On his recovery, rather than wait for another ship, which in those days were few and very far between, he embarked on a small vessel bound for Quebec, where he arrived in 1771, and commenced the practice of his profession.

On the 20th May 1774, a little past the age of twenty, he was taken into the office of the Surveyor General of the Province of Quebec, and afterwards served in the Quebec Militia from the latter end of September 1775, to the 6th May 1776, during which time the place was besieged by the rebellious Americans.

After the defeat of the Americans,

Mr. Chewett was appointed acting Paymaster of Works for the posts of St. John, Isle aux Noix and their dependencies on Lake Champlain; to the Engineers, Quarter Master General and Naval Departments, and remained in these appointments until 1783, when he was recalled by Lieutenant Governor Hamilton to Quebec, and again placed in the Surveyor-General's Department.

The population in what is now eastern Ontario was divided among four original districts named Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nassau and Hesse after branches of the Hanoverian dynasty. Deputy surveyors, appointed by the Surveyor General, were attached to each district.

In 1786, Mr. Chewett was sent by the Surveyor-General, Major Holland, to take charge of the district of Lunenburg, formerly the eastern Townships of Upper Canada, and now comprising the easternmost counties of Ontario. Here he was employed for several years surveying and laying out lands for the disbanded troops and loyalists.

Mr. Chewett married in 1791, but before doing so, he wrote the following letter to his friend, the Hon. John Collins, to procure him a marriage license:

“Cornwall, 22nd April, 1791

“The Honourable JOHN COLLINS,
Esq.”

Dear Sir, — Having found out a girl whom I mean to make a partner for life, and without which it is impossible to exist in this settlement, having no settled place to retire to after the fatigues of a survey, or take care of the little property I have (this, I hope you will not think unreasonable at the time of life I am come to, as it does not proceed from motives of folly, but of a mature and deliberate consideration), I therefore must pray you as my friend, to obtain a license for me and Isabella McDonell (she is of the family of Major Archibald McDonell of the Long Sault) to be sent by the first opportunity; and in doing so, you will oblige an old servant who is, with the greatest respect,

Your Most Obedient, Humble Servant,
W. CHEWETT”

In 1791, Governor Simcoe accepted the recommendation that Mr. Chewett take charge of the Surveys Department of the upper country and Mr. Chewett was ordered to report to Quebec.

The following are extracts from his daily journals which provide insight as to his day to day duties:

March 6, 1792 — Set out from Point aux Trembles and arrived at Quebec. Waited on Governor Simcoe— promised employment — present him my plans — very well received — engaged to dine with him the next day”. He appears to have been in attendance upon Governor Simcoe till the 18th, when he “waited on Governor Clark, when I am informed there is a requisition from Governor Simcoe to the Surveyor-General's office for my departure.

March 19th— The Surveyor-General has sent Governor Simcoe's requisition to Governor Clark to know how he is to act.

March 20th — Governor Clark's answer is that since the separation of the Province, he does not conceive there can be any outfit from his Government, therefore Mr. Surveyor-General says he can give no orders. But the Surveyor and Deputy Surveyor-General have given me the strongest recommendation as the most proper person to carry the business into execution. So, far, so good.

March 27th — Applied to Major Holland agreeable to the order of Governor Simcoe to know in what manner the town lots were given away in New Johnstown, now Cornwall, and he says there was no settled mode of locating them, 'twas optional with the Surveyor-General, therefore Major Gray's 'ipse dixit' correspond with Major Holland's.

April 15th — Waited on Governor Simcoe. He wishes me to go off as soon as possible, and I am to enter into his pay from the 10th April at the same pay I usually had, with permission, when not employed for Government, to work for the public. He wishes to have the plan of the River Rideau by Mr. French.

April 21st — Carried the plans from the Surveyor-General's office to Governor Simcoe, with a receipt for the same. Dined with Governor Simcoe. He wishes to have the plan of Cornwall in its present situation; the plan of Kingston in its present situation; the harbor of Catarqui and surroundings and Mr. Kotte's survey from the 8th of the Township of Elizabethtown with the Thousand Islands.

April 22nd — Breakfasted with Governor Simcoe and received from him Point Henry Frederick in order to have a title put to it. Also the Town of Toronto to know whether it has ever been laid out, and a letter to Major Holland upon business. Went to Major Holland's lodgings, but he is in the country.

May 12th — Ordered before a committee of Council with the several surveyors now at Quebec in order to give in an estimate of the number of days it would require to run the out-lines of a Township of ten miles square on a river, and gave the following, viz:

"Running the front on a river ...	days 15
"Running one side line	days 10
"Running one rear line	days 10
"Returning to the first station in order to finish the closing line	days 1
"For the closing line	days 10
"Allowance for bad weather and other casualties	days 14
TOTAL DAYS	57

"1 Surveyor, 10s. per diem	10s.
"2 Chain Bearers, 2s. per diem each	4s.
"8 Axe Men, 1s.6d. each	12s.

"Provisions for the party to be allowed the same as the Deputy Surveyor-General was allowed, 1s.3d. per day for each man. Implements:—

- "6 New England axes
- "4 Tommy-hawks
- "1 Oil cloth
- "1 Batteau or Canoe, and all the contingencies to be sworn to.

(For the daily quarter dollar allotment, the Deputy Surveyor was obliged to deliver to each person employed on his party 1-½ lbs. of flour, 12 ozs. of pork and ½ pint of peas.)

May 20th — Breakfasted with Governor Simcoe and told him Mr. Collins was to settle with me after the levee. Waited on Mr. Collins, who put it off until 9 o'clock a.m. on Monday, as he must have reference to the council books and to the account current book in the office. Packed up my little baggage ready for departure.

May 22nd — Waited on Mr. Coffin with Mr. Collins and obtained a letter of credit for my balance. Finished the whole of my business at 1 p.m. Waiting for Mr. Angus McDonell. He came in the evening after the tide had turned and going down, so that it was impossible to go off, and I am therefore forced to delay my departure until the morning. At 9 p.m. went to bed in order to be ready for departure.

May 23rd — Rose at 4-½ a.m. Called up Mr. Angus McDonell. Got our baggage on board. Breakfasted at 6 a.m. Paid my account. Set out at 7-½ a.m. and arrived at Sillery at 8-½ a.m. It being the turn of the tide the boat got on ground. Took out its load and launched her into the water. Made up a square sail of a cotton main sail. Waiting for the turn of the flood. At six p.m., Mr. Angus McDonell having all his chemical

apparatus on board, embarked and made Cap Rouge at 8 p.m., the wind being from the S.W. very strong against us.

May 24th — At 6 a.m. Left Cap Rouge, the wind from the S.W. against us and arrived at 10-½ a.m. at Pt. des Ecu-reuils. Waiting for the turn of the tide. At 7-½ p.m. the tide turning. We embarked at Lotbiniere, opposite to Deschambault, at 10-½ p.m.

May 25th — At 7-½ a.m. the tide and the wind coming about from the N.E., got under way and came opposite Grandines' Church. Very squally with thunder and lightning. When about three miles further Mr. Angus McDonell was very much panic struck, let go the halyard, broached too the boat and frightened the crew, who lay on their oars and all I and Mr. Grant could say — we were telling them there was no danger, which in fact there was not — they would not row a stroke and we drifted to Grandines. When about 100 yards from the shore he was in so great a fright that he attempted to get out of the boat, and when I asked him what he was about to do, he said he did not think there was much water at the place. We arrived at 10-½ p.m. and lay up the boat as snug as it was possible.

May 26th — Went down to the boat and found her full of water, which the people, by their negligence, had left last night, although ordered to bale her. I reprimanded them severely and one of them took it into his head to desert. Mr. McDonell went after him. At 10 a.m. Mr. McDonell not returned, the tide making very fast and I am afraid if he does not come soon that we shall lose it. At 11 a.m. Mr. McDonell returned with the deserter and sat down to breakfast. The wind continuing strong, we determined to reach Three Rivers. When we were abreast of Cap la Magdelaine, McDonell, seeing the church and one house, wanted to go in, let go the sail and made the people take to their oars, and as the boat came to shore, made a leap and ran as if the devil was after him, not waiting to secure his own baggage. The boat immediately filled, and Mr. Grant and myself did what we could to those articles that belonged to ourselves. When the business was over we found him (McDonell) sitting by a fire, and said he could not endure the cold.

May 27th — A vessel from London passed Cap la Magdelaine at 3 p.m. Another ship from London at 6 p.m. We got out our boat, biled and broken to pieces. We endeavoured to stop the leak, but could not, and forced to send over to Three Rivers for pitch and oakum, and to get a carpenter.

May 28th — Employed the carpenter,

examining and repairing her, which detained us until 4 p.m. Embarked and made a little river about half a league beyond Three Rivers 6-½ p.m. The wind being from the S.W. so strong that we could not proceed further.

On July 5, Mr. Chewett arrived at Kingston, where he remained until July 12, when he departed for the Grand Remous. Here, as commanded by Governor Simcoe, he appears to have been busily engaged in making and copying plans and closing up his work in this part of the country before handing the district over to his successor, Mr. Hugh McDonell. He was then to join the Government at Niagara and take charge of the surveys of Upper Canada as Surveyor-General. Closing up his affairs occupied a month, for we read that on the 28th August, he was "waiting the opportunity of batteaux" to take him up the river. On the 29th, a "brigade of batteaux" passed and taking passage, he arrived at Niagara at 8 p.m., September 4th.

On September 17, the Governor came to the House of Peers and made a speech to the members of both Houses. The Commons then were ordered to return to their House to be sworn in and to choose a speaker. After this until the 30th, Mr. Chewett does not seem to have seen anything of the Governor or to have had anything to do except to describe some boundaries of townships at the request of the Chief Justice in order "to make them into patents."

Mr. Chewett was disappointed in his hoped-for appointment. For reasons never made known, David William Smith, Captain of the garrison regiment at Niagara, apparently untrained in land surveying, was made Acting Surveyor General of Upper Canada. Chewett was appointed Deputy Surveyor General. This rejection of Chewett was not the only reversal experienced by him in his hopes for advancement.

In 1804, when Smith retired to England to be created a baronet, Mr. Chewett discovered to his chagrin that although he had been promised the Surveyor Generalship, Smith had been succeeded by Charles B. Wvatt. After the latter was suspended in 1805 on charges of conspiracy, Chewett was appointed to the post jointly with Thomas Ridout. This dual occupancy continued until 1810, when Ridout was accorded the full and undivided title, holding it until 1829.

May 31. 1793 — Both Houses being assembled at one o'clock p.m., and on the appearance of the Governor, the garrison of Niagara fired a royal salute, a compliment to him as the representative

of the crown. The Governor being seated, an order was sent to the Commons for their attendance. The passage to the bar was so crowded they could hardly come up to it, owing to the sergeant-at-arms being out of the way. Methinks there should be a pale to the bar for the Commons to enter, in order to be separate from the populace. The Governor was then pleased to make a most noble and gracious Speech from the Throne, which made the heart of every true Briton jump for joy.

June 4, 1793 — Being the anniversary of His Majesty's birthday, attended the levee, but being dressed in boots was told by the sentries that none but military men were thus admitted. Returned in order to dress myself accordingly, but was too late. In the evening an elegant ball and supper was given for all His Majesty's loyal subjects, and the ladies made a splendid appearance, though not very numerous. After supper, a number of loyal toasts went round, suitable to the good humour, and a few of the gentlemen spent the evening all night!

June 5, 1793 — Employed by His Excellency the Governor making a reference

to a plan of Toronto by Joseph Bouchette. Shortly after this date, Mr. Chewett set out with a surveying party, going up the Niagara river, transporting his batteau round the falls, and arrived at Fort Erie on the 18th. From this point he proceeded westward, and was engaged in surveying the county, its shores and harbours, the rest of the year.

Mr. Chewett settled in Toronto when the Government was moved from Niagara and occupied a log house near the north-east corner of York and Wellington Streets, afterwards converted into a root-house when he built a residence for family on Market Street (now Wellington).

On the 1st of January, 1800, Mr. Chewett was appointed Registrar of the Surrogate Court for the Home District and retained that office upwards of forty years.

During the American War of 1812-14, Col. Chewett commanded the 3rd Regiment of West York Militia, and upon the reported landing of the Americans near the Humber on the night of 26th April 1813, Major-General Sheaffe withdrew his troops, believing he could

not sustain an attack, and (leaving instructions with Col. Chewett and Major Allen, residents of the town, to treat with the American commander for terms) retreated for Kingston.

The next day, the 27th, the Americans advanced on the town, and the Canadians, seeing the capture of the place inevitable, blew up the powder magazine to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy. Unexpectedly, the force of the explosion caused the stones and debris of the building to be discharged directly amongst the American soldiers drawn up in the square of the Fort, killing General Pike and over two hundred American soldiers. The terms of capitulation were signed the same day, by which, among other concessions, two hundred and ninety-three Canadian militia were surrendered prisoners of war.

In 1832, Mr. Chewett was permitted to retire on full pay, after a governmental service of over fifty-eight years. The remaining period of Mr. Chewett's life was passed in an uneventful manner.

On September 24, 1849, Mr. Chewett quietly passed away.