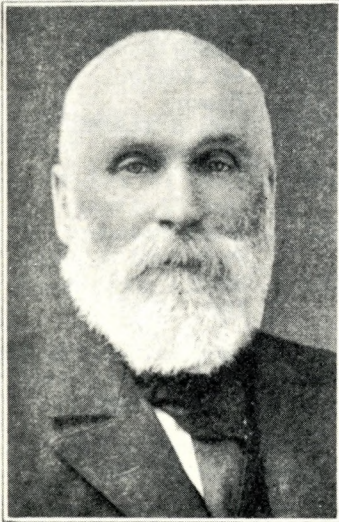


Surveyors of The Past

—BY CHARLES FAIRHALL—



JAMES DICKSON

Reprinted from the 1927 AOLS Annual Report.

ON DECEMBER, 1915, Mr. Dickson sent to the Chairman of the Biographical Committee his autobiography, a most interesting document of about seventeen pages. It is too lengthy to be published in full in this Report and an attempt at condensation would not do justice to the original composition. However, extracts will be made and the omitted paragraphs when relevant will be condensed.

"I was born within sight of the battlefield of Flodden, 'where shrievled was fair Scotland's spier, and broken was her shield,' on the 30th day of October, 1834. While I was an infant, my parents moved to town of Howick. On the 30th of June, 1841, they left that place to emigrate to Canada, along with some other families; the only railroad in Great Britain at that time, was that between Liverpool and Manchester, and we travelled by carriers' carts to the seaport of Annan, and from thence to Liverpool, by one of the small steamships then beginning to ply around the coasts. We were booked for passage to Quebec on a ship of 1,400 tons, named the "Independent," of Belfast, Ireland. We lay two weeks in Liverpool before the vessel put to sea. There was accommodation in the cabin for only three or four persons, who dined with the captain and had the run of the quarter-deck. There were 450 immigrants, among

whom were representatives of all parts of the United Kingdom, and these were stowed away between decks, the whole compartment without a partition so that such a thing as privacy was unknown. The beds consisted of two tiers of bunks, built around the sides of the vessel, one above the other. There were neither chairs nor tables, the only seat was a long bench securely nailed all around in front of the bunks. Each family had to furnish their own bedding and provisions, the vessel furnished nothing except a limited allowance of water, so much per head for each family, doled out every morning.

After two days' delay at Gross Isle quarantine station, the vessel arrived at Quebec exactly eight weeks after leaving Liverpool. From Montreal, Mr. Dickson, with others, was taken on to Bytown, thence thirty miles by wagon, to the home of his grandmother in the Township of Beckwith. His father and two of his father's brothers selected lands in the Township of McNab and began clearing their farms in the spring of 1842. The nearest church was then five miles, and the school three miles distant. Mr. Dickson remained at his father's farm until the end of his twenty-fourth year. Farming did not appeal to him, however, and he accepted a position as school teacher in the County of Carleton at a salary of \$220 per annum out of which he paid \$80 for his board.

"The very first day convinced me that some of the pupils were further advanced than I was myself. Here was a dilemma! But I was equal to the occasion. I had casually learned that my predecessor was in the habit of rushing the pupils too fast, so after a day or two, I told them that they were not sufficiently grounded in the rudiments, and it would be necessary for me to turn them back in some of the branches, and needless to say, I put them back far enough to be on a par with my own qualifications, and I felt confident, that by earnest and close application, I could keep ahead of any of them."

In 1861, he became articled to Wm. J. McDonald, P.L.S., of Arnprior (see Report 1922), but he continued teaching to the end of 1861, joining Mr. McDonald in January, 1862. Mr. McDonald had then moved to the town of Perth. In May, Mr. McDonald's wife died, and he left for Western Cana-

da. Mr. Dickson then went home for the balance of the year. In February, 1863, he secured a position as assistant to William Bell, P.L.S. (Report 1923), who was then surveying free grant lands on Opeongo Road. This work was completed in ten weeks, and Mr. Dickson again returned home until September. Mr. McDonald had then received instructions to survey the Township of Wylie on the Chalk River, on which work Mr. Dickson acted as assistant. The survey was completed in January, after which he assisted his brother in building a bridge over the Petawawa River at its mouth. He then became acquainted with S. T. A. Evans, P.L.S., and engaged as his assistant. They made a survey of an old travelled road up the Madawaska River from its mouth to Shamrock on the Opeongo Road. They then ran a straight line from Constant Creek, on Calagobie Lake, to Wolf's Rapids, on the Madawaska. This was a compass line, and the land was to be explored for three miles on each side of the line. Mr. Dickson was deputed by Mr. Evans to do exploring. After one week at work, Mr. Evans was taken seriously ill, was moved out to obtain medical aid, and Mr. Dickson was left in full charge.

"The line struck the Madawaska River at right angles, and opposite to a lumbering depot, and when I moved up with my instruments, I saw Mr. Evans talking to the gentleman in charge. He had just arrived an hour or two before. He had a picket in his hand, and called out 'give me the line,' which I did. He planted it in the ground and taking a few steps to the south, to a post, and facing me, he shouted, 'you have done very well, you are not thirty links out.' The party were all discharged except the cook and one man, and Mr. Evans and I, who were one on each side of the line, did the exploring."

In the following June he purchased an instrument and sent to the Board of Examiners his certificates of service from McDonald, Bell and Evans, but was informed that another full year's apprenticeship would be necessary before appearing for his final examination. He then became articled to Mr. Evans for one year, for which privilege he paid a fee of fifty dollars.

In the winter of 1867, Mr. Dickson assisted James Richey, P.L.S. (Report 1922), on a timber berth survey on the De Moine River, Quebec, also Mr. Evans on survey of the Township of Sheen, in the Province of Quebec.

On April 6th, 1867, he passed his final examination and opened an office at Minden, where he remained two years, then removed to Fenelon Falls, where

he resided for the remainder of his life. His integrity, his practical knowledge and experience ensured a wide local practice that he enjoyed for over fifty years.

In the Autumn of 1872 he was engaged by lumber companies in surveying timber limits on the north shore of Georgian Bay, on the Mississaga and Thessalon Rivers, which work was not completed until June, 1873.

In 1886 he surveyed the westerly limits of timber berths between Haliburton and the Jocko River, the object being to tie these lines into the township line.

In 1887 he was appointed Inspector of Surveys by the Provincial Government, a position he held for nine years.

In 1889 he was commissioned by the Government to adjust a long standing dispute in the Township of Kennebec, which he eventually settled satisfactorily. About this time he was also appointed a member of the Commission that established the Algonquin National Park, and he wrote up its topography. He also surveyed some of the larger lakes, and streams in the Park that had not been surveyed.

In 1896 he re-surveyed the town plot of Hilton on St. Joseph's Island, and sub-divided the Township of Harrow in the Lacloche Mountains.

In 1897 he was employed by the Department of the Interior, Ottawa, on a survey in Manitoba, and for seven seasons was subdividing townships in the West, and one season on township outlines.

In 1905 he returned to his old post in Ontario as Inspector of Surveys and for two years following acted as Inspector. In all, he was employed fifteen years by the Ontario Government as Interior.

In 1908 he was employed by the Department of Railways and Canals, Ottawa, to investigate claims for damages, by owners of flooded lands along the River Trent, due to the erection of dams in connection with the construction of the Trent Canal, and try and effect a settlement with the owners. This grievance was occasioned by the water being raised by the dams built during the construction of the canal. The grievance was an old one, and very few of the farmers had received any compensation.

"I was neither to make measurements or take levels, but make an estimate of the number of acres either temporarily or permanently flooded; value the injury done, and have the farmers sign an offer of settlement that they would accept my award, and those who

would not accept such award, would require to appeal to the Exchequer Court for redress.

"I was engaged in this work until a certain date in September, 1911, after which my services were dispensed with, and I have not handled a government cheque since."

"This work was no picnic. I had all sorts and conditions of men, also maids and matrons to contend with. The value of the land bordering on the water, had gone up by leaps and bounds. As soon as the dams had been erected, those parts which heretofore had been considered not worth clearing at all, suddenly became the most valuable part of the farm. For the most part, the claimants stated the amount to which they thought they were entitled, but some thirty or forty did not do this, but said they would be satisfied with whatever I thought was right. About a year and a half after I began, I was publicly charged in the House at Ottawa, with awarding damages to parties who had sustained no injury, and also with grafting. The speech of the member who made the charge, filled several pages of Hansard, and my capacity and character were handled without gloves. As soon as I learned of this, I wrote to the Minister, asking a public investigation, and a commissioner was sent from Ottawa to Peterborough to take the evidence on oath of all the persons whom it was charged that I had favored. I felt so confident of my position that I did not even consult a solicitor, but conducted my own defence. After the commissioner had completed the work in Peterborough, I and the superintendent of the canal, and several others, were summoned to appear before the public accounts committee in Ottawa, and after everything had been thoroughly thrashed out, it was found that there was not a tittle of evidence in support of the charges, and Mr. (now Justice) Lennox, who conducted the case before the public accounts committee on behalf of the prosecution, said he wished publicly to congratulate me on the result.

"In all, between the village of Hastings and the hydraulic lift-locks, in the township of Carden, I dealt with 626 cases, the total amount claimed, exclusive of those who did not say how much they wanted, was \$201,356, and I awarded damages amounting to \$116,709 I 'turned down' 112, whom I did not consider had sustained any injury whatever, and 15 refused my offer, but not one has ventured to appeal to the Exchequer Court, so that, without being charged, with egotism, I think I am justified in saying that my awards must have been just and reasonable."

Mr. Dickson subdivided the following townships for the Provincial Government:—

- 1878 — Finlayson
- 1880 — Peck
- 1882 — Canisbay
- 1884 — Bishop
- 1896 — Harrow
- 1872 — Lots on Balsam Lake
- 1879 — Ballantyne
- 1881 — Hunter
- 1883 — McLaughlin
- 1885 — Bower
- 1883 — Lots 9 and 10, Concession 11, Scugog.
- 1884 — Lots 18 and 19, Concession 11, Emily.
- 1892 — South boundary, Algonquin Park (and Reports).
- 1905 — Road Concessions 8 and 9, Ops.

He was also employed as Inspector of Surveys in 1887, 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1895, 1897, 1905 and 1906.

For the Dominion Government he made Surveys as follows:

- 1897 — Subdivisions west of Principal Meridian.
- 1898 — Subdivisions west of Principal Meridian, also outlines.
- 1899 — Subdivisions west of Principal Meridian.
- 1900 — Resurveys west of Principal Meridian.
- 1901 — Subdivisions west of Principal Meridian and 2nd Initial Meridian.
- 1902 — Subdivisions and outlines west of 2nd.
- 1903 — Subdivisions west of 2nd and 3rd.
- 1905 — Subdivisions west of Principal Meridian.

James Dickson, Sr., the father of the subject of this sketch, married Margaret Wilson. They came to Canada in 1840. Their children were as follows: James, John, Henry, Thomas, Richard and Agnes. All of the family, excepting the subject of this sketch, went to Manitoba between 1881 and 1884. James Sr., died at Selkirk on September 1st, 1885 at the age of 70 years, and his wife, at the same place on May 11th, 1886, aged 72 years. All of the brothers of James Jr. are now dead, also the sister, Agnes.

James Dickson Jr., O.L.S., married Margaret Halliday in 1873. Their children were named as follows: Catharine McNab, Agnes Isabel, Dorothea Mary, who married E. H. Hand, and died in 1920, and two children who died in infancy.

Mr. Dickson took an active interest in our Association, which he joined in 1887. He attended the meetings and an-

nual dinners regularly for many years, and could be depended upon to give a practical turn to the discussions.

In 1901, he was elected President of the Association, and presided at the Annual Dinner in 1902. He attended the Veterans' Luncheons on February 26th, 1919, also on February 24th, 1921, which was his last appearance at the Association meetings. When unable to attend any of these functions, he invariably wrote an interesting letter of greeting to his veteran brethren. ●