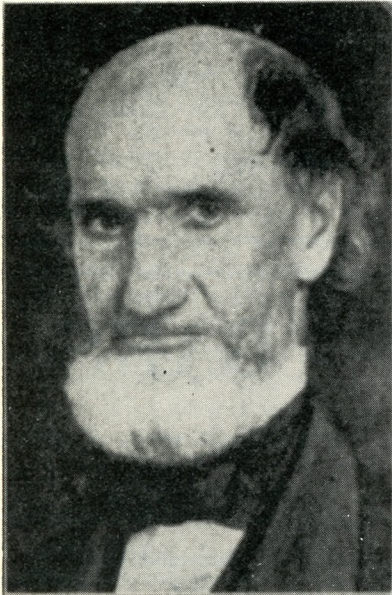


Surveyors of the Past

BY PETER MANSFIELD



GEORGE LOUNT

THE MINOR SURVEYOR

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS of the time indicate that the townships of West Gwillimbury and Tecumseth were originally laid out by Gabriel Lount, while the township of Innisfil was set out by one James Pearson. In fact, all were surveyed by George Lount, a qualified surveyor and the first land registrar of Simcoe County.

Born on February 3, 1799, George Lount was the son of Gabriel Lount, an English-born land surveyor who settled in Catawissa, Pennsylvania. In 1811, Gabriel rejected the republicanism of the day and emigrated to the still British soil of Upper Canada, settling on Lot 84, Concession 1, E.Y.S. near Whitchurch. Later his sons George and Samuel took up Lot 103, Concession 1, W.Y.S. at the top of the hill just south of Holland Landing.

George Lount was bright and ambitious and yet he decided to become a land surveyor, qualifying at the tender age of 19. At that time, contracts were being handed out for the surveying of Simcoe County. (Simcoe County had actually been created in 1798 for military pur-

poses.) George Lount offered his services and immediately ran into a roadblock. He was underage. And if he waited until his 21st birthday, the work would already be done. Lount had to sidestep this problem by using his father, Gabriel, as the nominal contractor.

George surveyed the township of West Gwillimbury in the Summer of 1819, with the help of his brother Samuel. Samuel Lount, though never a qualified surveyor, was a skilled woodsman and proficient blacksmith and a great help to George. In later years, however, he became a reform politician ultimately paying, with his life, for his radical views.

On June 15, 1819, the Lounts received another contract - for Tecumseth Township. Again, Gabriel acted as nominal contractor. The records indicate his payment was some 2368 acres of land. Instructions were elaborate calling for the southeast corner of the Township to be established by running a line west from Yonge Street, 9 miles along the northerly boundary of King Township. Some portions had to be left unsurveyed and were not completed until 1832.

George Lount was also responsible for the setting out of Innisfil Township. In this case, the nominal contractor was James Pearson, a yeoman from Whitchurch and George's brother-in-law. Payment amounted to 3800 acres of land, and was paid out on May 2, 1820.

The surveying was done between February 1, 1820 and March 15, 1820, despite severe winter conditions. The plan, drawn by Richard Birdsall, was deposited in Newmarket on March 24, 1820.

Birdsall's involvement is of some interest. Birdsall was himself a surveyor, trained in England. He was described politely, as being thorough but slow (as opposed to slow, but thorough). It was also his contention that surveyors not trained in Great Britain, were not trained.

Birdsall and the Lount brothers decided to survey Innisfil together and they came to an understanding. The Lounts would look after the chaining, while

Birdsall was in charge of the "compassing". Proceeds would be divided equally.

George Lount first established a base camp on the Essa line. His plan was to survey across one concession line to the lake (Lake Simcoe), set up camp, and then return the following day by surveying back along the next concession line. Thus they would only be out two days at a time. Unfortunately, things didn't pan out as he had hoped. Birdsall turned out to be more thorough and even more slow than imagined. Also, he had a profound aversion to offset lines. He believed in running one line and one line only. The result was 3 or 4 days out at a time.

Soon the Lount brothers objected. They wouldn't make any money at this rate. An altercation ensued with Birdsall challenging Lount to do his own compassing if he thought he could do better. Lount indicated that he certainly could and Birdsall was relegated to tail chainman and note-keeper.

The work progressed much more quickly after this.

In proving his work, Lount chose to run the line between Lots 25 and 26, from the south side up to Big Bay Point. There, on a snowy March day, having calculated where the lot corner ought to be, he positioned himself accordingly, poked in the snow with his staff and found the stake on his first try.

In addition to being a surveyor, George Lount was a tinsmith, a merchant, a farmer and the first postmaster of Holland Landing. More significantly however, he was Simcoe County's first Land Registrar, holding that position from 1826 until his retirement in 1872, when he handed the reins over to his son.

Occasionally, George Lount was overcome by a surveyor's primal urge to "get out in the field" and he would undertake another surveying project. One such project was his survey of the Town of Amsterdam. On December 23, 1836, he received instructions from Thomas Ridout, the Surveyor-General, to lay out a new town on the south side of the Holland

River, to be named, appropriately, Amsterdam. The town was to develop around a planned storehouse to be built in connection with the heavy traffic of boats on the lake. Street names were "Hollandic" - De Ruyder, De Witt, Van Dyke, Rubens and Keyser. In the end, the town was never built. The coming of rail travel diminished the importance of lake travel. In 1869 Thomson Smith obtained the patent to the Town of Amsterdam and built a saw-mill.

During the course of the Amsterdam survey, George Lount suffered great personal loss as a result of the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion.

In 1834 his brother Samuel was elected to the Upper Canada Legislature as the member for Simcoe County. He was a reformer who took issue with the ways and means of the "Family Compact" which ruled covetously, raising patronage to a form of religion. On May 28, 1836, Sir Francis Bond Head dissolved parliament and called a snap election. Determined to rid himself of Samuel Lount, Head began distributing land patents to half-pay officers and soldiers with the understanding that they would return the favour on election day. (In the five weeks

preceding the election, some 55 patents were distributed in Medonte Township. This compares with 24 in all of 1835 and just 13 in all of 1837.)

The votes were bought successfully and Lount was defeated. In the months that followed, however, disaffection for the system grew amongst much of the population. In Holland Landing, Samuel Lount began to train an "army" of south Simcoe farmers. Arms were forged in his blacksmith shop. In December of 1837 Lount led them down Yonge Street to North York, where they joined up with rebel leader William Lyon MacKenzie at Montgomery's Tavern.

On December 7, 1837, the one day revolution took place ending when a cannonball crashed through the wall of the tavern where the 700 fighters were holed up.

Samuel Lount tried to escape to the United States, but was captured trying to cross Lake Erie in an open boat. He was condemned to death for treason along with Peter Matthews, another rebel. George Lount organized a well-signed petition urging the Governor, Sir George Arthur, to commute his brother's sentence. The petition was presented to his Lordship by

Samuel's wife who begged on her knees for her husband's life. The governor's only comment was, "This petition seals his death". Samuel Lount was hanged on April 12, 1838, behind the Adelaide Street Courthouse in Toronto.

These tragic events did nothing to improve George Lount's opinion of politicians. He often found himself at odds with them. In 1842, he proposed that a road be constructed from Barrie, on Lake Simcoe, to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River (Wasaga Beach) on Georgian Bay. The county council turned it down flat on January 2, 1843. Lount was unperturbed. That summer, working with Henry Creswicke, the county surveyor, George Lount surveyed the proposed route **at his own expense**. The following year, council reversed its decision on the road and used the Lount/Creswicke survey in the by-law description.

In 1846, the Simcoe County seat moved to Barrie and George Lount had to do the same. (Commuting was somewhat slower in the 1840's as the 400 had yet to be built.)

Lount continued as Land Registrar until his retirement in 1872. He died in 1874. ●