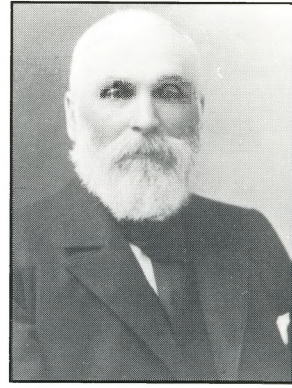


# Surveyors of the Past

## JAMES DICKSON

### 1834-1926



Article appears courtesy of CHARLES W. FAIRHALL, O.L.S.

In 1892, as Canadians celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Confederation, two seemingly unrelated events occurred.

A Bill incorporating the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors, which had been organized since 1886, was passed by the Ontario Legislature. Also, a report by a Royal Commission for Forest Preservation and National Park recommended an area of 3755 square kilometres covering 18 townships, be reserved as public park. The following year the Ontario Legislature passed an Act creating Algonquin Park. The common link between these events was James Dickson, O.L.S., one of the five commissioners, who had conducted extensive surveys in the Algonquin Highlands and recommended it for preservation.

Mr. Dickson was born in Scotland in 1834 within site of the battlefield of Flodden where Scotland's spears and shields were broken by the army of Henry VIII of England. In 1841, the Dickson family emigrated to Canada. The ocean voyage took eight weeks during which the 450 immigrants stowed away between decks without any privacy. Each family had to furnish their own bedding and provisions, the vessel furnished nothing except a limited allowance of water.

After landing at Montreal, the family travelled to Bytown (Ottawa), thence 30 miles by wagons to the Township of Beckwith. His father and two of his uncles selected lands in the Township of McNab and began the arduous task of clearing the land in the spring of 1842. The nearest church was then five miles and the school three miles distant. James remained at this father's farm until the end of his 24th year. However, farming did not appeal to him and he accepted a position as a school teacher in the County of Carleton at a salary of \$220 per annum out of which he paid \$80 for his board.

In 1861 he decided to become a land surveyor and articulated to William J. McDonald, P.L.S., of Arnprior. When Mr. McDonald left for Western Canada in 1862, Mr. Dickson secured a position as assistant with William Bell, P.L.S., who was then surveying free grants on Opeongo

Road. When this project was completed, he was engaged by S.T.A. Evans, P.L.S., as his assistant and became articulated to him (for a sum of \$50).

In 1867 he passed his final examinations and received his license and opened an office in Minden where he remained two years, then moved to Fenelon Falls where he resided the rest of his life. His integrity, practical knowledge and experience ensured a wide local practice that he enjoyed for over 50 years.

In 1887 he was appointed Inspector of Surveys by the

Provincial Government, a position he held for nine years. About 1889 he was appointed a member of the aforementioned Royal Commission that established Algonquin Park. In 1892 he surveyed the south boundary of the park.

Between 1828 and 1885 Mr. Dickson subdivided the townships of Finlayson, Peck, Canisbay, Bishop, Harrow, Ballantyne, Hunter, McLaughlin and Bower. Between 1897 and 1905 he was employed by the Department of the Interior, Ottawa, to conduct surveys in Manitoba outline and subdivide townships.

In 1908 he was employed by the Department of Railways and Canals, Ottawa, to investigate claims for damages by owners' flooded lands along the Trent River due to the erection of dams in connection with the construction of the Trent Canal.

Mr. Dickson married Margaret Halliday in 1873 and had two

daughters. Always interested in the affairs of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors, which he joined in 1887, he attended annual meetings regularly and in 1901 was elected President of the Association. His last appearance at an Association meeting was in 1921.

A stone cairn with bronze plaque erected at the Algonquin Park Museum bears tribute to the memory of Mr. James Dickson, O.L.S.

*The cover of this issue shows the inscription of the bronze plaque at the Algonquin Park Museum.*

