CANOMA

CHIEF GEOGRAPHER'S PLACE NAME SURVEY
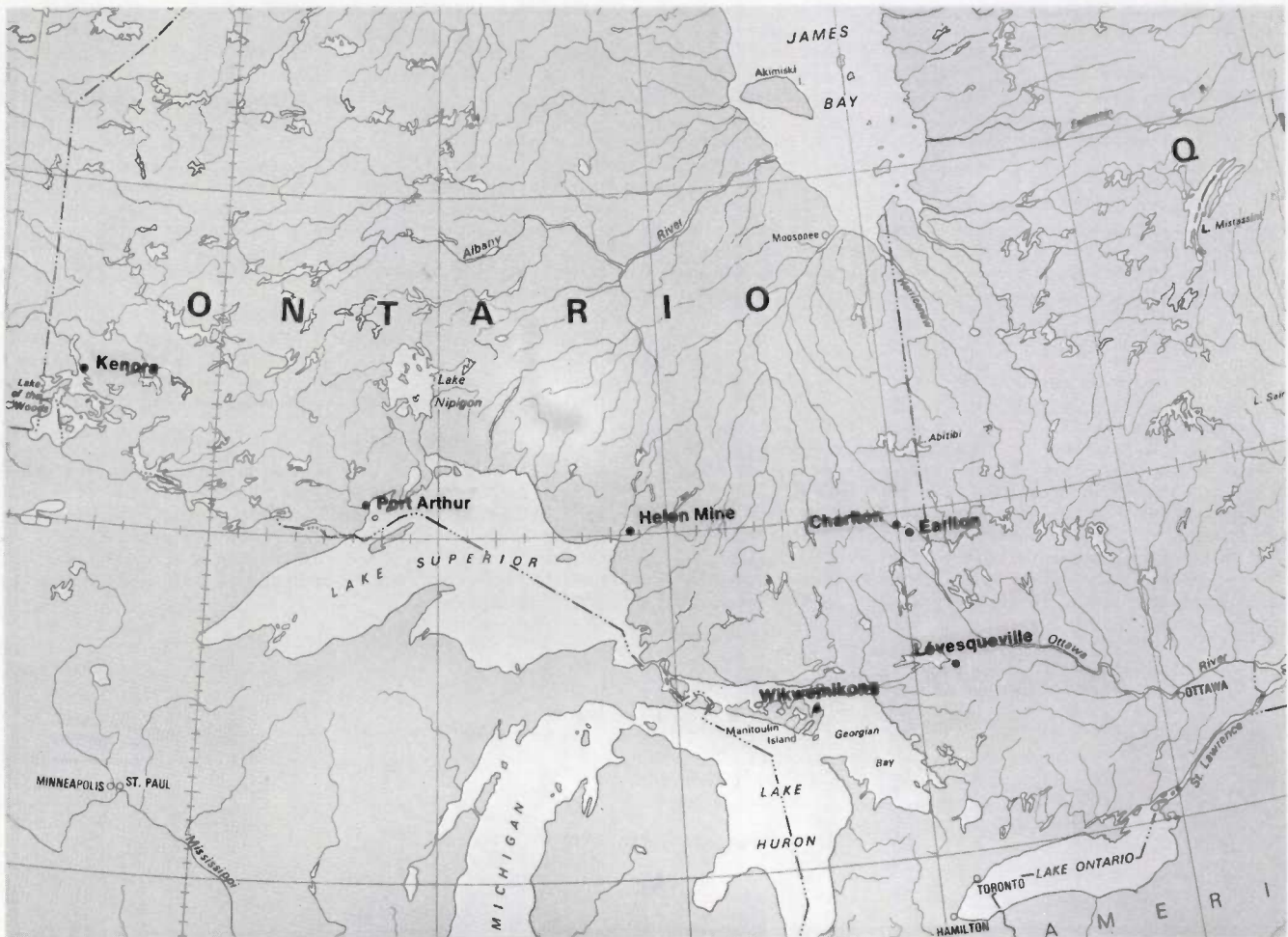
1905-1909

V. NORTHERN ONTARIO

Alan Rayburn*

This paper is the fifth in the series on James White's place name survey of 1905-1909. Earlier papers were published on British Columbia's names in CANOMA, Volume 4, Number 1, July 1978, on Alberta's names in Volume 5, Number 1, July 1979, on Saskatchewan's names in Volume 6, Number 2, December 1980, and on Manitoba's names in Volume 7, Number 1, July 1981.

Northern Ontario has been historically, geographically and culturally distinct from the more populous and earlier

*   Alan Rayburn, Executive Secretary, Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

Northern Ontario: showing communities for which replies to James White's circulars are discussed

settled southern part of the province. At the turn of the century there were a few agricultural, lumbering and mining communities, widely separated in the almost unbroken forest and lake country of the Canadian Shield, north of Lake Huron and north and west of Lake Superior.

Northern Ontario is defined for this paper as the portions of Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts north of the 46th parallel, all of Manitoulin District and the rest of the province north and west of these districts. In 1906 this part of the province had 261 post offices, distributed as follows according to the present territorial divisions:

Manitoulin District	36
Parry Sound District (north of 46°)	12
Nipissing District (north of 46°)	31
Timiskaming District	20
Sudbury District	40
Algoma District (east of Sault Ste. Marie)	33
Algoma District (north of Sault Ste. Marie)	30
Thunder Bay District	23
Rainy River District	19
Kenora District	17

In 1906 there were no post offices north of Charlton in Timiskaming District. Places like Kirkland Lake, Timmins, Iroquois Falls, Kapuskasing, Hearst and Geraldton were yet to be established, and at that time the only Cochrane post office in Canada was in Alberta.

James White received 93 responses from postmasters to the circulars he mailed in the 1905-1909 period. On reading the letters one receives the distinct image of a window being opened to the hardy and valiant pioneer settlers who had recently gone into the north of the province, to wrest a living from a land with few pockets of good agricultural land and with a harsh climate and short growing season.

Between North Bay and Mattawa a largely French Canadian settlement was established in the 1880s. J.A. Lévesque provided James White with details on the community of *Bonfield,* noting that the post office in Bonfield Township (named for James Bonfield, Member of Parliament for Renfrew) was called *Nosbonsing* for the nearby lake, while the Canadian Pacific station there was called *Calendar*. (To add to the confusion, *Callender* was the post office and Grand Trunk (now Canadian National) station on Lake Nipissing 18 kilometres west of Bonfield; it is now officially spelled *Callander*.). Mr. Lévesque, as he explains in his fine copperplate writing, established the settlement of LÉVESQUEVILLE on the west side of Lake Nosbonsing in 1885 and 1886. The *Levesqueville* post office was opened in 1895, but as Mr. Lévesque notes, Father Astor, the parish priest, persuaded the postal authorities to move the office and to rename it for him. Hence today the community is known as *Astorville*.

Bonfield and Astorville at the east and west ends of Lake Nosbonsing

Lévesqueville:- *Lévesqueville is a small French village, built at the head of lake Nasbonsing, 9 miles west from Bonfield. The place was thus called after the founder of that colony, J. A. Lévesque, a Notary Public, (the undersigned) residing at Bonfield, and who, in 1885 and 1886, took up there, in his boat (the only conveyance at the time), a score of settlers, who have developped into an important settlement.*

The township of Ferris has actually (1905) 350 voters.

The second Agricultural society of Nipissing was established there by J. A. Lévesque, in the spring of 1890, and is flourishing still.

Lévesqueville has a fine church, five schools, and a few other public establishments. "Lévesqueville", was established there about 15 years ago. Since last summer, the parish priest, Father Astor, got the post-office removed next door to his, and calls it "Astorville", while most of the settlers call it still "Lévesqueville", and have their mail matter directed to the latter address.

Respectfully yours,

P. A. Lévesque, N. P.

Bonfield, Ont,
Oct. 12/05.

Reply to circular: from Lévesqueville

Some 175 kilometres north of North Bay the rich soils of the Little Clay Belt were just being put to the plough when James White sent out his circulars to the various postmasters of the area in 1905. The postmaster at *New Liskeard* explained that there had been strife between the founders of *Liskeard* on the south side of Wahbi River (now Wabi Creek) and William Murray, who laid out *Thornloe* on the north side. In 1903 the two sides were incorporated as *New Liskeard,* and the Thornloe post office was transferred to another settlement 20 kilometres to the north. *Thornloe* was named in honour of the Anglican Bishop of Algoma.

The postmaster of *Milberta* explained that the name of his office was derived from the first mill of the community and the name of Berta, the first bride of the area. He also noted that *Uno Park* was derived from its first settler, known as "You Know Parker".

A.E. Brasher provided quite explicit details on the naming of EARLTON for his son, George Earl Brasher, noting that he carried the mail once a week between Earlton and Milberta.

"In the Summer of 1903 I, Albert Edward Brasher was offered a lot to build on by the owner of the S½ of Lot No 7, *a Mr Peter Jones, if I would build a store, and do my best to make a Village of the Corner. I accepted the offer and built a Store. That fall realizing the growing importance of having a Post Office, I applied for the Same and named the office Earlton, after my oldest boy, whose name is George Earl Brasher. Now a young man 18 years of age, and living with me here & at present working on the Railway.*

"The first mail came to us from Milberta, a small village 8 miles south of here & the mail was carried once a week from Earlton to Milberta & Return by my son Earl, on his back, for 6 months or more over very bad roads — later, we got a horse & buggy — and now drive to Milberta but this is to be changed on Nov 1st 1905, the mail then will come by the T & NO Ry. 3 times per week."

CHARLTON, with a population of 218 in 1980, is the smallest incorporated town in Ontario. Its name, assigned when the post office was opened in 1904, honours two Charlton brothers who supported the losing applicant for postmastership. John Charlton (1829-1910) was a federal member of Parliament from 1872 to 1904, and his brother William Charlton (1841-1930) was a provincial member of Parliament from 1890 to 1905 and Commissioner of Crown Lands in 1904. Thomas McLaughlin, who was appointed postmaster, had wanted to call

Charlton, Ont. Oct. 14/05.

Mr. Jas. White, Geographer,
Ottawa,

Dear Sir, The village of Charlton obtained its name in this way. Two parties made application for the Post office here. One of these, the disappointed applicant, was supported by Hon. Jno. Charlton and Hon. Wm. Charlton and as a compromise the office was called Charlton. The name applied for was Auralynn — Aura (greek for golden) and Lynn (Scotch word for a fall). The Golden Falls as a very pretty falls is located at this place — part of which has been developed as a water power. The village of Charlton was a wilderness without a settler up to March 1903, when W. G. Hooey & family first settled there and it is now a rapidly growing village with Saw mill, Hotel, 3 stores Post Office, Telephone office, Black Smith shop &c;

The Lakes here are called Long Lake and Kinogamis-ji-jing the latter of which Mr. Hooey informs me is the Indian word for Long Lake. Hoping this information may be of value to you and that in future when you require any information about this part of the District you will inquire of Mr. C. P. Hooey who is more thoroughly posted in these matters, I am

Yours Sincerely
Thos. McLaughlin
Post Master
Charlton.

Reply to circular: from Charlton

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the place *Auralynn*. In 1905 Charlton represented the furthest post office in the agricultural penetration of Ontario's northland wilderness.

Some names in Northern Ontario were given as a result of misinterpreting the local geography or native languages. The community of *Whitefish* received its name through an error of the Canadian Pacific when it assumed that the nearby Vermilion River was a branch of the Whitefish River. In fact, the Vermilion River flows south and west to the Spanish River, whereas the Whitefish River is located further south and flows west and south into the North Channel of Lake Huron. Similarly *Creighton*, near Sudbury, was mistakenly assumed to be in Creighton Township when it was named, but it was really in Snider Township. The postmaster of *Heron Bay* pointed out that the origin of his office's name was the Indian "Kokewis-wikwet", meaning "little fish bay" or "herring bay". He also noted that *Pic River* was known in Ojibway as "Madid-tigo-sibi", meaning "big long river" in reference to the fact that one could paddle upriver from its mouth for 70 miles (112 km) without making a portage. As noted by André Lapierre in "Quelques vestiges toponymiques du régime français dans la région du lac Supérieur"[1], the name *Pic River* is almost certainly of French, rather than Indian, origin.

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1   CANOMA, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 6.

Wikwemikong April 10th 1906

The Geographer
Department of the Interior
Ottawa

Dear Sir

In response to yours of 26th ult re name of "Wikwemikong" I beg to state - The litteral translation is, Beaver Bay and according to the genius of the Indian Language it has the following meaning — at - in- near - by-on- upon- about Beaver Bay - The word is thus composed Wikwe -Bay. Amik Beaver with the termination ong rendered by above given prepositions The origin of the name is selfevident viz. the presence of large numbers of Beavers in former times.

The village Wikwemikong is sometimes called "Holy Cross Mission" It having been founded by R. C. Missionaries the first of whom died some 30 years ago at Toronto where he was well known as Revd Father Proulx His successors at Wikwemikong build about the fifties of last century a large stone church at Wikwemikong which church is named after the "Holy Cross" hence the above given name.

The Bay is also called "Smith Bay" after a former trader about these regions, who died some 15 or 20 years ago at Owen Sound I believe.

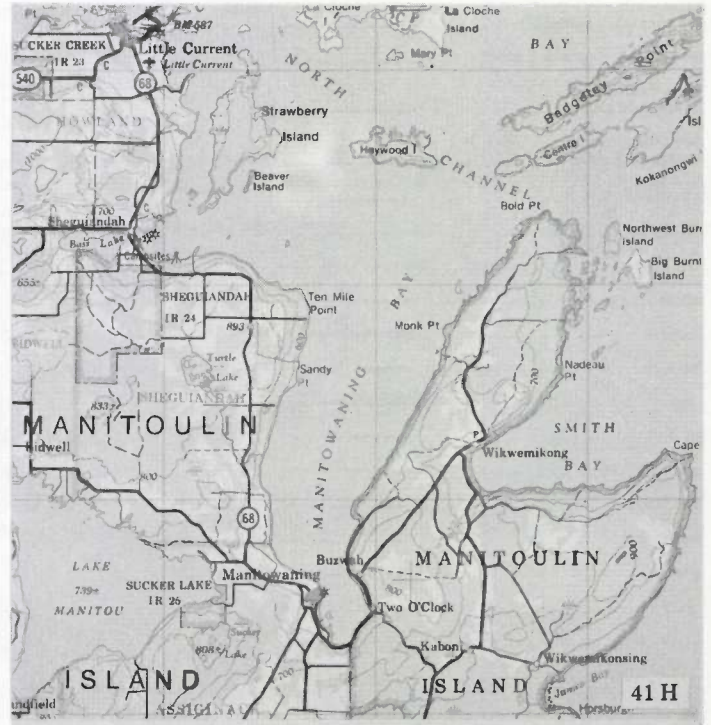There is also a small Village some 8 miles distant from Wikwemikong called Wikwemikonsing which simply means - the lesser Wikwemikong. - the small Beaver Bay   I hope these informations will answer your purpose

respectfully yours

J. Kochmstedt

Reply to circular: from Wikwemikong

In 1906 Manitoulin Island had 36 post offices. The island's name itself was derived from the Ojibway for "place of the Great Spirit". Among the communities on the island were several with attractive names of Ojibway origin: *Manitowaning,* "home of the Great Spirit", *Sheguiandah,* "place of grindstone", and WIKWEMIKONG, "bay of the beaver".

While most names of Amerindian origin are derived from characteristics of the local geography, there are occasionally some names taken from another element of an Amerindian language. Such an example is *Keewatin*. In 1880 John Mather suggested *Keewatin Mills* in place of Rat Portage, but it was soon after changed to Keewatin. As R.A. Mather pointed out in his letter of May 2, 1906, the name was derived from the native (Cree) description of the cold winter wind blowing north from the Lake of the Woods. Prior to the establishment of the post office, the name Keewatin had already been assigned in 1876 to a district of the Northwest Territories.

Keewatin also figured in the naming of the adjoining town of KENORA. The town clerk of Kenora explained in his letter how the acronym had been created from the first two letters of Keewatin, Norman and Rat Portage. The name *Rat Portage* had been earlier applied by the Hudson's Bay Company from a Cree description of the place, and is still retained in the name of the northern bay of the Lake of the Woods, on which Kenora is located. The post office and community of *Norman,* midway between the town centres of Keewatin and Kenora, were named in 1886 for Norman Macally, a son of one of the owners of the M & O Lumber Company. Although neither the community name nor the post office still exists, an adjacent body of water is called Norman Bay.

Sheguiandah, Manitowaning and Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island

Reply to circular: from Kenora

Business Section of Kenora, c. 1904

(Photo: Public Archives Canada, PA 26020)

Mr. White's request for information from the post-master in PORT ARTHUR failed to elicit a reply in 1905, so he wrote again in 1910. Richard Hunter responded on behalf of the postmaster with details on the naming of the place after Prince Arthur, with the notation that he believed Prince Arthur had returned to England a year or two before *Prince Arthur's Landing* had been named by Colonel Garnet Wolseley. In Hunter's letter he referred to *Thunder Bay* as though it were the name of the populated place; this, of course, is a forewarning of the actual event that took place 60 years later when Fort William and Port Arthur were amalgamated as the city of Thunder Bay.

"Previous to Col. Wolseley naming the place, on our way west, we were told that we were going to 'Thunder Bay' or 'Fort William' or 'Dawson's Landing' or the 'other end of the lake'.
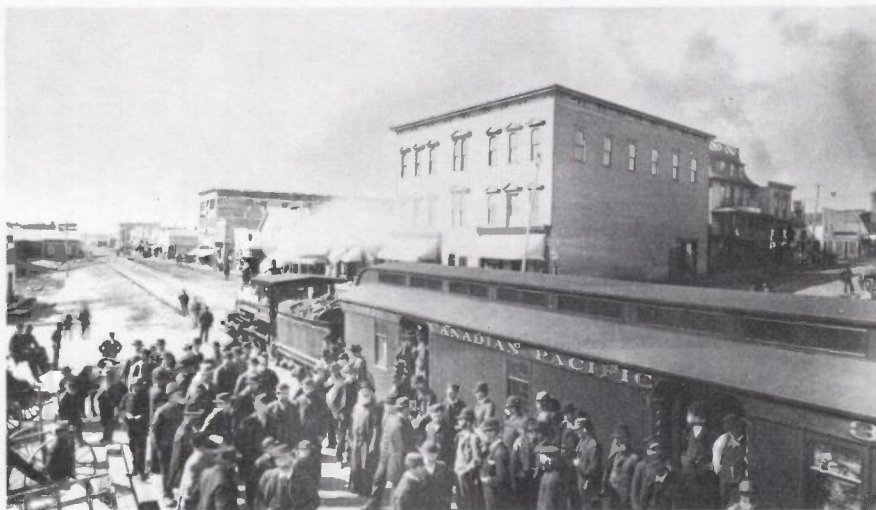
"'Dawson's Landing' seems to have been the proper name of the place before Wolseley's arrival. It was there that Dawson had a small wharf, and it was there that the 'Dawson' Road commenced. At that time the only building[s] were those of the Public Works Department. One general store and a couple of small dwelling houses, all erected within a year or two."
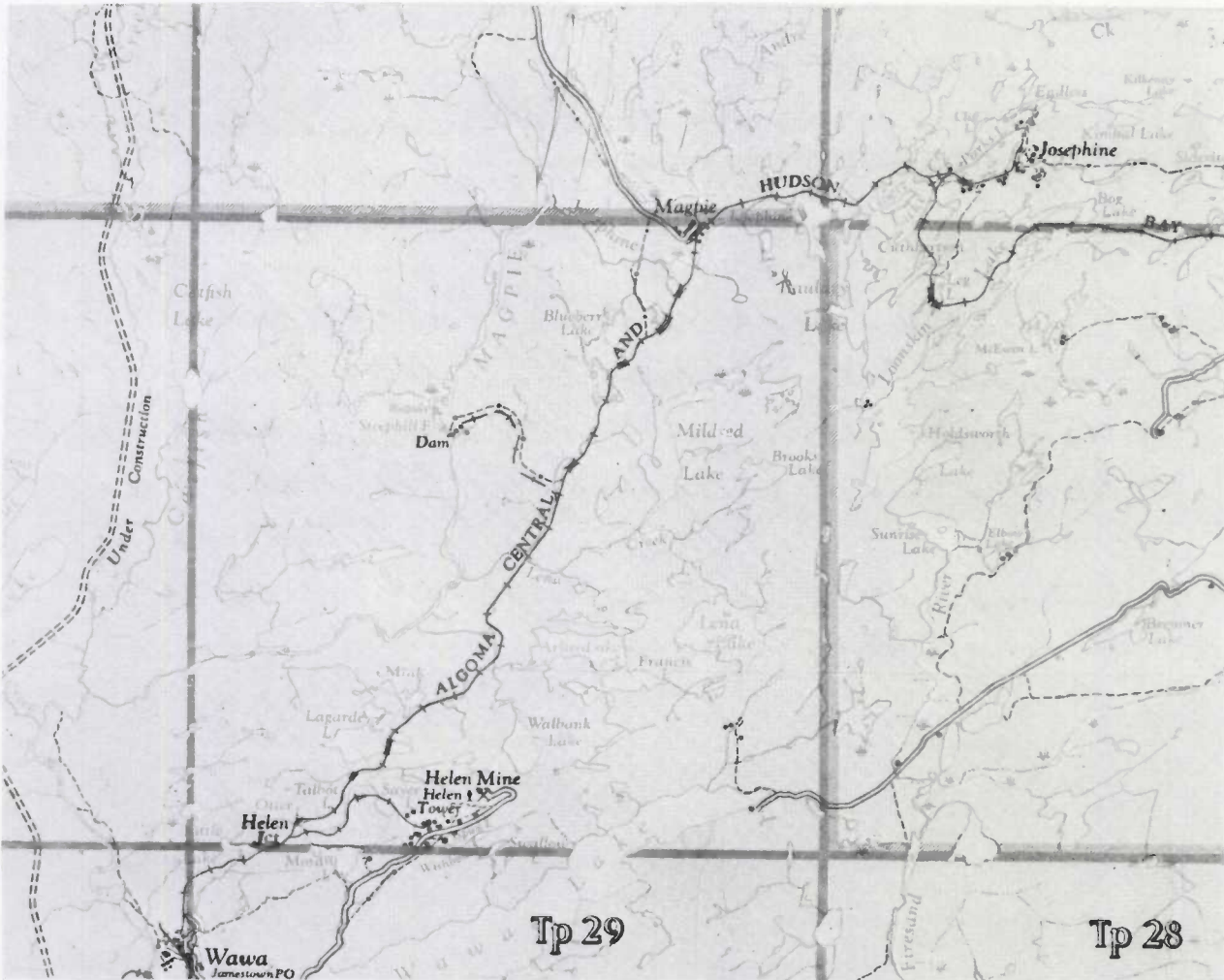
R.H.H.
[Richard H. Hunter]

The Canadian Pacific Railway at Port Arthur, 1885

(Photo: Public Archives Canada, PA 118764)

Country north of Wawa. Jamestown Post
Office is labelled and Helen Mine and
Josephine are indicated.

(From 42 C/SE, published in 1957)

At the turn of the century, mining activity in
Northern Ontario was very much in its infancy. One important
iron mine, HELEN MINE, was just outside the present community
of Wawa. The mine remains a major source of iron ore for the
Algoma Steel Corporation in Sault Ste. Marie. In Mr. Mills'
letter, in which he mentions Helen Mine, there is a reference
as well to Josephine. This name still exists in the names of
a mining site, a lake and a creek some 15 km northeast of Wawa.
Although *Wawa* itself figured prominently in the post World War
II period, when the Algoma Central Railway persisted in having
the station and post office named *Jamestown* for Sir James Dunn,
the name Wa-Wa had been established as a post office as early

as the 1905-09 period. Unfortunately, the postmaster there did
not respond to Mr. White's circular letter.

The details in this paper represent a selection from
the letters returned to James White from postmasters in North-
ern Ontario during the first decade of this century. They re-
veal the opening of a wilderness to agricultural, mining and
forestry pursuits, and the establishment of supply centres to
service the pioneer settlements of the vast northern portion of
the province.

'Helen Mine

The Post Office bears the name of the Mine to which it owed its existence

Helen Mine is the largest producing Iron Mine in Canada today. Once called "Hematite", (the product being that kind of ore) it was renamed Helen Mine after by Mr Francis H Clergue after his sister Helen.

Another Iron Mine near by, though not yet a product, is called the Josephine after his sister of that name.

Yours very truly

D K Mills
R.M.

Reply to circular: from Helen Mine

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