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CHIEF GEOGRAPHER'S PLACE NAME SURVEY

1905-1909

X. NOVA SCOTIA

Alan Rayburn*

This is the last in the series of articles on the Chief Geographer's place name survey, undertaken from 1905 to 1909. The first article, in CANOMA, Vol. 4, No. 1, July 1978, was an examination of circulars returned to James White by the British Columbia postmasters. Subsequently, articles were written on the letters received from postmasters in Alberta (Vol. 5, No. 1), Saskatchewan (Vol. 6, No. 2), Manitoba (Vol. 7, No. 1), Northern Ontario (Vol. 8, No. 1), Southwestern Ontario (Vol. 9, No. 1), Central and Eastern Ontario (Vol. 10, No. 1), Quebec (Vol. 10, No. 2), and Prince Edward Island (Vol. 14, No. 1). Circulars returned by New Brunswick postmasters do not appear to be included in the records of the Secretariat of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

In 1905 Nova Scotia had 1 855 named post offices and way stations. That number is almost exactly the same as the total that served all three Prairie Provinces, and is only 200 less than the number for the province of Quebec.

There are only 305 circulars from Nova Scotia postmasters in the CPCGN files. The proportion of returns to the total number of offices is the lowest of the provinces. This low return may have been partly due to the fact that many of the offices had existed longer than those in the provinces to the west, with few of the residents, including the postmaster, having any knowledge of the reasons why a particular name had been chosen.

In some cases, James White returned letters to the postmasters if precise details on the origin of the name were not included. Perhaps, in the days before photocopiers, many of the replies were simply never returned.

When the postmaster of **Lake Ramsay**, between Chester and Kentville, did not explicitly explain whether the community was named for a man who had actually lived there, James White wrote back, and received the answer included here.

Some replies sent to White were quite short. Uriah

* Alan Rayburn, research consultant, Nepean, Ontario.



Post office at Digby, early this century

(National Archives of Canada, C11285)

Roast, the Dickensian-named postmaster of **Lower East Chezzetcook**, east of Halifax, remarked crisply: "I cannot give you much information concerning our small village as it is a very unimportant place..." The postmaster of **Coldstream**, near Stewiacke, northeast of Halifax, omitted his own name

Ottawa, October 12th, 1905

Dear Sir,

Was Lake Ramsey named after a Mr. Ramsey? If so, will you kindly give initials, occupation and whether alive. Thanking you in advance.

Yours truly,

James White
Geographer

No it was not named after a Mr Ramsey. A Episcopal clergyman who came from the North of Ireland named it Lake Ramsey. Because he it reminded him so much of a lake at home. And it was called Lake Ramsey, after that; His name was Ruggles but his initials, I do not know or whether he is living. Yours Truly Postmaster.

Reply to circular: Lake Ramsey (officially Lake Ramsay)

in the following abrupt reply: "Coldstream is only a country Post Office in the Gays River District. there is no natural features worth mention."

Several returns provided interesting snippets of humour, intentional or otherwise. The assistant postmaster at **Judique**, on the west of Cape Breton Island, claimed that the channel into the harbour frequently became blocked with sand, and reopened at different places. The shifting of the entrance, he said, was called in French "jou-jou-dique", meaning "playing channel". This appellation was eventually shortened to "Judique".

The postmaster at **Mount Thom**, between Pictou and Truro, sent in an outrageous tale about the naming of the post office:

"In early days two men were rideing and had one horse between them and when they got to the height of the mountain one said to his companion

now mount Thom. This is all I can say about the way Mount Thom got its name."

On this response is succinctly noted (probably by James White): "Rats?". It is believed that Mount Thom was really named for Thomas Troop, who helped Philadelphia settlers become established in Pictou County.

The postmaster at Malagash Point provided an amusing, but totally fictitious, tale about the naming of **Tatamagouche**, on Northumberland Strait, north of Truro. He said it was named when an Indian shot a goose, and, when a white man went to retrieve it, the Indian shouted: "That's my gouch". "Tatamagouche" is really derived from a Micmac expression meaning "barred across the entrance with sand".

The postmaster of **Cross Roads Ohio** claimed that two travellers from another settlement paused during a journey, and when one sat down, he exclaimed: "Heigh-ho". The other

then responded: "We shall call this place 'Ohio', hereafter". Apparently "Cross Roads" was added around the 1860s, for the location at the junction of four roads. It is believed that this Ohio, and others in the Maritime Provinces, actually recall migrations to the midwestern state.

Geographer. That was from P.J. Doucett, the postmaster at **Concession**, southwest of Digby. He submitted a letter written by Lézin LeBlanc, possibly a local historian. Mr. LeBlanc explained in the letter reproduced here that the Acadian settlers from Church Point on the St. Marys Bay shore moved into the interior after 1819, and founded the settlement on the second "rang" that became known as "Concession".

Only one response in French was returned to the Chief

Monsieur

Quand les Acadiens se fussent établis le long de la Baie Ste Marie après le grand dérangement de 1758, le gouvernement provincial leur octroya des terre et on arpenta naturellement d'abord un premier rang le long de la Baie, puis il fallut arpenter un second rang en arriere du premier les gens le denommèrent les "Delicieuses Concessions" plus tard le troisième rang fut nommé les "Troisièmes Concessions"; dans la suite on abbrevia, le deuxième rang fut nommé "les Concessions" le troisième rang; les troisièmes.

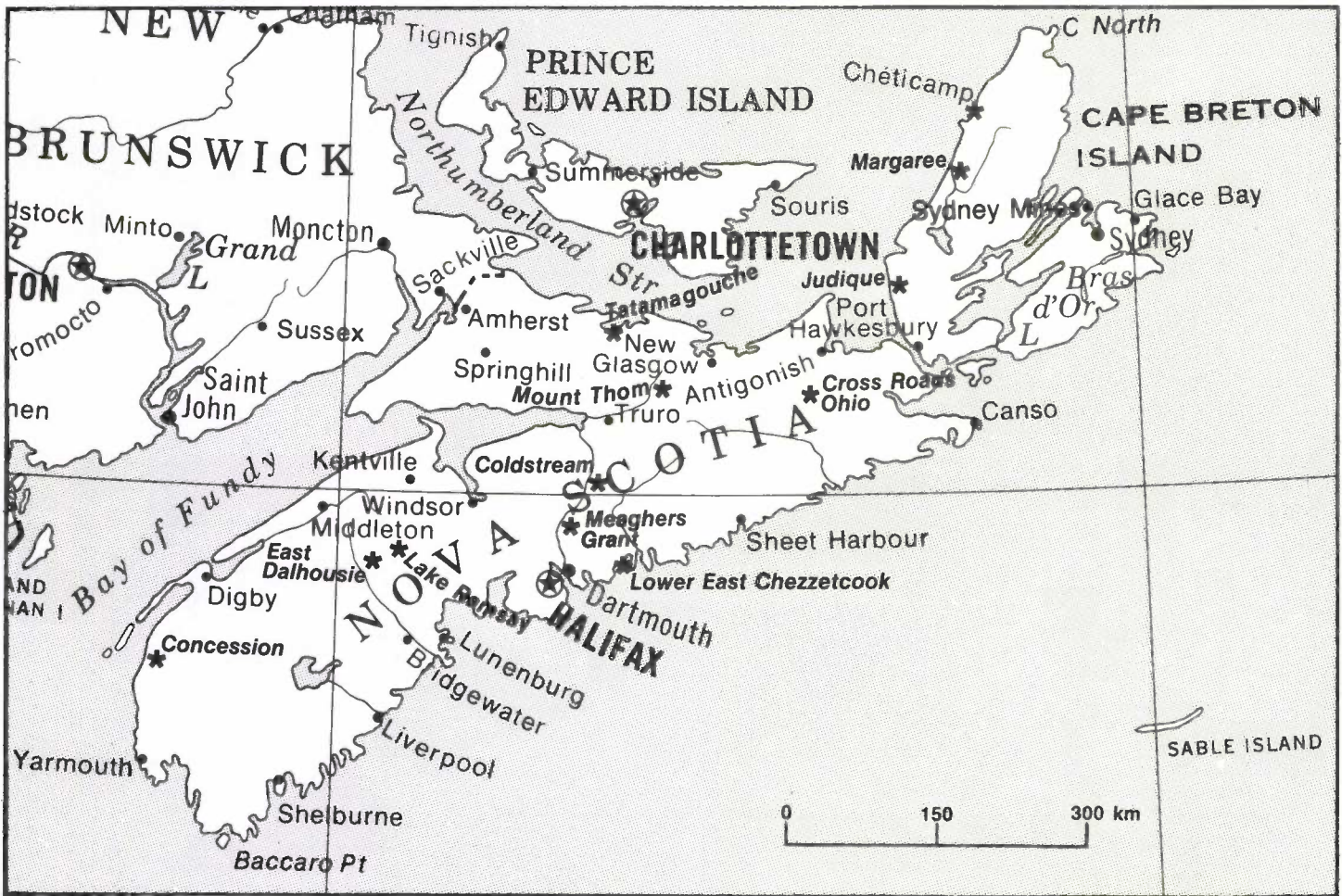
Le premier habitant du deuxième rang fut Athanasie à 1826 Sédore Gaudet vers 1819, Jean Baptiste Leslone le suivit vers 1828 puis beaucoup d'autres s'établirent peu d'années après, à partir de l'arriere de Meteghan jusqu'à l'arriere de la Chicabene (Pointe d'Eglise): cette partie du deuxième rang qui se trouve en arriere de Comauville jusqu'à en arriere de la Pointe d'Eglise étant la plus établie a retenue le nom "des Concessions" les autres parties furent désignées sous divers autres noms, actuellement, "Saulmierville Station" en arriere de Saulmierville, "Meteghan Station" en arriere de Meteghan River et quand les gens de Meteghan vont au deuxième rang ils disent qu'ils vont à la Back line. Les troisièmes rang n'est guère habité; seulement neuf famille en arriere de "Concession".

M. Placide Gaudet du département des Archives ayant passé 2 ou 3 ans à collectionner des notes sur notre passé, vers 1896 peut vous donner des renseignements précis sur tout ce qui regard le passé des centres acadiens de la Baie Ste Marie

Bien à vous

Dr Lézin LeBlanc

Jerome P. J. Doucett P. M.



Nova Scotia: showing communities for which details of replies to James White's circulars are discussed.

James White wrote back to the postmaster of **Chéticamp**, on the northwest coast of Cape Breton Island, to enquire whether the name was derived from an Indian word. The postmaster replied that:

"Cheticamp means a bad camp. When the first settlers came here they found an old rotten camp with this inscription on it the date of the year that they were leaving their bad camp what means in French Cheticamp. The inscription was written in French and it was Cheticamp."

The postmaster at Belle Côte, southwest of Chéticamp, gave the following origin for **Margaree**:

"According to the older generation here the name Margaree originated thus: About 200 years ago, a french vessel was wrecked on our coast, and the

crew was obliged to pass the winter in this village. During the winter, some of them died. When the remainder of the crew left in the following spring, they said that they had stayed here "magré eux" (against their will). (This should be malgré eux in good french). Then the name Margaree was formed from the word margré. It should also be noted that, during the winter, they nearly starved."

How ironic that one of the most beautiful pastoral areas of Canada has a name drawn from an experience of deprivation by early settlers.

Many of the postmasters were quite knowledgeable about the history of their particular communities. The accompanying reply written by Mrs. Hutchinson was returned by the postmaster of **Dalhousie East** (now officially East Dalhousie, northwest of Bridgewater). It provides considerably

Dalhousie East

Is a village nine miles in length — that is from bound — having homes on all the different roads running North and South As I have endeavoured to show you in the annexed rude plan from memory

In 1816 Sir John Coape Sherbrooke Governor of Nova Scotia was promoted to the Governor Generalship of Canada. George Earl of Dalhousie immediately followed him as Governor and in time as Governor General

It so happened that the Earl travelling from Annapolis thro' the then forest over a road only blazed out met Sir John coming from Halifax. They met on the spot that is now spanned by what is called the big bridge over the Sherbrooke river and shook hands Hence that became the boundary between what was then named Sherbrooke and Dalhousie In 1862 or 3 the name of Sherbrooke was changed to New Ross partly in honor of Capt. Ross' family and partly as the second title of the then Lieut. Governor (Earl Mulgrave) was New Ross Capt. Ross arrived in Sherbrooke with 192 disbanded soldiers and on the 7th Aug. 1816 the first tree was felled (a beautiful maple) which was the first stem towards the future homes of Sherbrooke now New Ross But it is our Province to hold to Dalhousie East The first Grant of Land was given to Jost and Lelain (800 acres) signed by the Earl of Dalhousie & dated April 1817 In 1820 the first settlers arrived (disbanded soldiers of the 98th Prince of Wales regiment) and the forest was felled to make homes for those and the future people of Dalhousie East

W^m H. Mulgrave
Chatham Dalhousie East

more detail than that found in "**Place names and places of Nova Scotia**", edited by Charles Bruce Fergusson, and published by the Nova Scotia Public Archives in 1967.

Fergusson's book is not free from possibly misleading information. It states that **Meaghers Grant**, northeast of Halifax, was a 5000-acre grant made to Martin Meagher on June 7, 1783, and the settlement then became known as Meaghers Grant. However, two postmasters independently reported that Martin Meagher received 4000 acres of land after he lost a vessel during the War of 1812 and while he was employed by the Nova Scotia government. My inclination from the evidence provided by the postmasters is to believe that the actual place called **Meaghers Grant** was not granted

to Martin Meagher, nor named after him, until after the War of 1812.

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In the first review of the letters returned by the postmasters, it was noted that James White was generally disappointed with the quality of information he was provided. However, after examining all the returns from British Columbia to Nova Scotia, I must conclude that the "White letters", as they have come to be called, comprise a very valuable toponymic legacy for Canada, providing interesting details on many communities and place names in the early years of the twentieth century.