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CHIEF GEOGRAPHER'S PLACE NAME SURVEY

1905-1909

IX. PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Alan Rayburn*

The review of the Chief Geographer's Place Name Survey, 1905-1909, was begun in CANOMA, Vol. 4, No. 1, July 1978, with an examination of circulars returned to James White from postmasters in British Columbia. Subsequently articles have been written about 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) and Quebec (Vol. 10, No. 2).

In the article on the circulars returned by Quebec's postmasters, it was stated that no letters were on file from Prince Edward Island postmasters. In fact, there are 162 letters on the ten 1:50 000 map sheet files relevant to Canada's smallest province. In 1905, there were 429 named post offices to serve a population of 103 000.

Among the characteristics of the P.E.I. returns are the excellent level of literacy and penmanship of many of the replies, perhaps a reflection of the importance of a good education in a society with strong Scottish roots. Several of the replies were two or more pages in length. The postmaster for Bay Fortune submitted five pages of detail on several names (Sailors Hope, Abells Cape, Rollo Bay and Eglinton, all in adjoining Lots 43 and 56), and the postmaster of Sinnotts Road listed the origins of 12 place names in Lots 38 and 39.

The postmaster at **St. Eleanors** referred the Chief Geographer's request to Hubert G. Compton, who provided five pages on the naming of that particular suburb of Summerside. He noted that the community was named by his grandfather, Col. Harry Compton, for his only daughter, Eleanor. She lived at her father's residence, the Pavilion, in Lot 17 from 1804 to 1818, when the Colonel and Eleanor moved to Brittany in France. She died there in 1878.

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"She was possessed of ample means, the greater part she bequeathed to her niece Eleanor, sister of the writer, who occupies the Pavilion farm, that on which his grandfather first settled, is now in his 75 year. Youngest son and only remaining child of the late Major Thos C. Compton".

The elaborate detail appears quite persuasive, but questions have arisen as to whether Col. Compton's daughter was really called Eleanor -- she may have been called Charlotte; and some references point to Col. Compton's housekeeper, Eleanor Sanksey, as the source of the name.

In 1765, Samuel Holland named 191 features around the then "St. John's Island"; 92 of the names remain in official use. Some of the names he assigned were given erroneous origins by the postmasters in 1905, examples
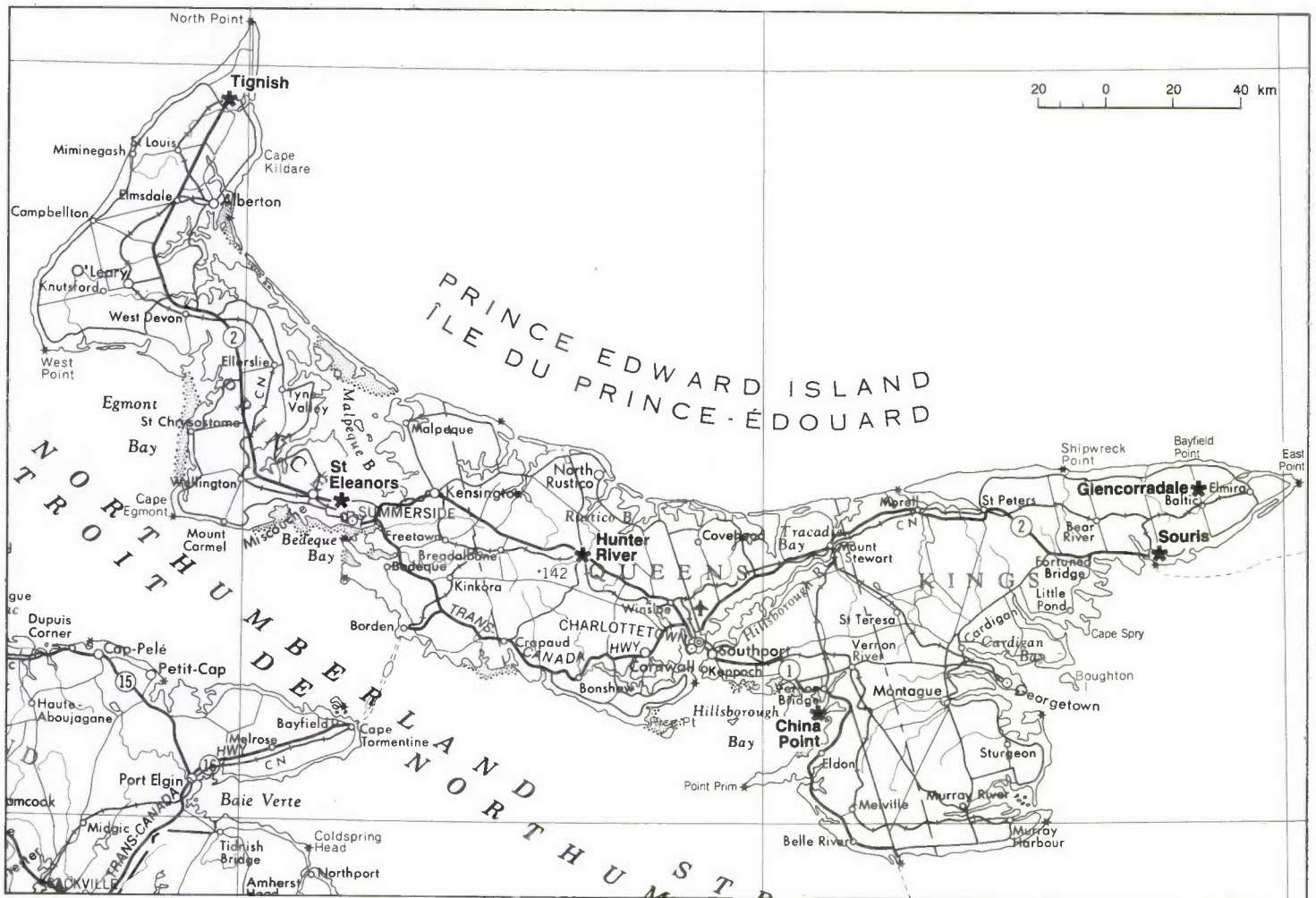

Hunter River, June 1909.
R.W. Brock, Geological Survey of Canada

(National Archives Canada, PA-45217)

being Enmore, Montague and Vernon River. The most interesting example is **Hunter River**, which the postmasters of both Hunter River and Hazelgrove claimed was named for a Mr. Hunter, who died during a storm. In reality, the river was named by Holland for Thomas Orby Hunter, Lord of the Admiralty in 1761. The death of Fred Hunter some 50 years later may have coincidentally reintroduced the name for the river, since for many years in the 1800s the Scottish settlers had called it Clyde River. The idea that the name was connected to a particular local person even introduced the possessive form, Hunter's River, used for the post office from 1901 to 1967. The letter from the postmaster, J.H. Van Iderstine, provides extensive details on the man's death, and notes that the river flows into "Clyde or New Glasgow river". However, the original application by Holland, of Hunter River for the watercourse from the village of Hunter River to North Rustico Harbour, is now both official and local usage.

The postmaster of **China Point**, W.S.N. Crane, related the story that the place was named for a man called "Chaney", and because the local people called China tableware "chaney", the name of the point was spelled "China". Mr. Crane stated that the "*man referred to must have been an old French settler, but there is a possibility perhaps a strong one that the name is merely a corruption of the French word 'chene' (an oak) as the land on the point was covered with oak a generation or two ago*".

Prince Edward Island: showing communities for which details of replies to James White's circulars are discussed

Hunter River
Sep. 2. 05

James White Esq

Dear Sir: In reference to your inquiry respecting
derivation of place names in Canada I may say that
this Village Hunters River takes its name from a man
called Hunter whose body was found on the banks
of the stream which is now called Hunters River
and where the Village is situate.

Of the history of Hunter very little appears to be
known by the oldest inhabitant now living except that
he was supposed to be a traveller or trapper that
perished here when the country was a forest and
only a path through the dense woods to travel
by Year of death unknown, but thought to be about
60 or 70 years ago. It is however a known fact that
the body was found and buried in a spot that
was known by the older inhabitants, and in excavating
for a building about 15 years ago parts of the skull
and were unearthed and placed in the Cemetery
situated on the banks of the River.
The River which takes its name from Hunter is
a fresh water stream, which flows into Clyde or
New Glasgow river and thence into the Gulf of
St Lawrence. About 35 years ago the Railroad
was opened through the country and of course the
Station was called Hunter River and also Village
So far as I can learn this was the first name ever
applied to the place Trusting the above information
is as full as desired I remain Yours truly
J. L. Van Iderstine Post-master
Hunters River P.E.I

Reply to circular: Hunter River, September 2, 1905

The tale of the naming of **Bear River**, a small stream northeast of Souris, provides an example of an incident name. It is believed to have been in 1820 that Roderick MacDonald single-handedly subdued a 600 pound bear after, as the postmaster stated, a four-hour fight.

Sir

To give you what Information I can about this Place I Live at Bear River Staton P E Island a small villiae it is situated Three an a half miles from shore of the Gulf of St Lawrence Fifteen miles for East Point Bear River is named after a Bear that attacted a man by the name of Captain Roderick MacDonald about 80 Eighty years ago The Captain and the Bear fought for Four hours The Capain Killed the Bear after Four hours fight with Nothing but his Bare Fists The Bear Weighed six hundred Pounds Bear River Rises at St Charles Staton in Lot 43 Four miles from the shore and runs on a North East Direction in to Township or Lot 44 and runs North About one mile into the Gulf of St Lawrence This Information is Reliable and True

Respectfully yours

Laurence McDonald
                    Post Master

        Bear River P E Island

Reply to circular concerning Bear River

The name **Glencorradale**, designating a small rural community 12 kilometres northeast of Souris, reveals much about Scottish history and oppression by authorities, as the letter from the postmaster in 1905 outlines. The place in Scotland where Prince Charles hid out after the battle of Culloden in 1746 was Glen Caradal on the Isle of Skye.

"Glencorrodale"

"Glencorrodale" is situated in Lot 46 Kings Co. P.E.I and is so named after a place of the same name in the Isle of Skye, Scotland; where Prince Charles Stuart was hiding after his defeat at Cullodden; until he found an opportunity to embark to France. "Glencorrodale" was settled by emigrants from Inverness County Scotland in 1846. At this period a strong effort was made by the Liberal Party in the Government of P.E. Island to escheat the title of the Landlords, who claimed to have received their title from the crown of England, and who were heavily oppressing the first settlers by heavy rents and eviction. At this time a man by the name of "Haney" living at Souris Line Road, was evicted by his Landlord. The people of the surrounding districts undertook to reinstate "Haney" against the officers of the Landlord, which obliged the Government to send a detachment of soldiers to punish the rebels, who fled before the soldiers; and hid in Glencorrodale until the soldiers were recalled. And as the two events coincided it was considered very appropriate to have the place called Glencorrodale.

Reply to circular: Glencorrodale

The Name Tignish
Comes from the Indian name of Taguèneche
Witch means Broken Paddle.

Tradition tells us that an Indian Canoe
Was comming up the river When Paddling
With great exertion against the Strong
Current the indian gives a Stronger Stroke
then usual broke is Paddle Causing
the Skiff to drift Seaward When he
(the indian) raised a Waile Calling for
Taguèneche hence the name of the River
Name that the Whole Village Was named as
at that time the acadiens the first Settlers
here arived In the Year 1789 an took up the
Name the Indian had given the river and
Called their first Settlement Taguèneche
Witch the English Made afterwords Tignish
as the a nearest to the pronuncialtion of the
indians

Reply to circular: Tignish

Tignish harbour. In <u>Notman's Photographic Series</u>, Vol. IX, Montréal, 1910

(National Archives Canada, C-37554)

Prince Edward Island has very few names of native origin, with less than 40 of its 2 200 names being either adaptations or translations of native names. One name of Micmac origin is **Tignish**, which the postmaster there explained meant "broken paddle". The noted natural historian, W.F. Ganong, believed such naming to be uncharacteristic of the native people, and suggested that Tignish River (and Tidnish River on the New Brunswick-Nova Scotia boundary) really meant "straight across", in reference to the direct entrance from the sea into the river.

The postmaster of **Souris**, Marshal Paquet, recounted a story told to him by his father of an infestation of mice, which in the 1820s stripped the wheat and potato fields. The following year, a newly-arrived Catholic priest, Fr. Beaubien, banished the mice from the village. *"The village which up to that time had been called Grand Haven or big Harbour was ever since called Souris which is the french for Mouse. I may say that this is no fable but the naked truth, there are Several person living here now that will Substatiate this Statement"*. There is no question that the area of Souris was frequently overrun by mice in the 1700s and 1800s, but the name Havre à la Souris (on Bellin's map of 1744) may be a mistake name for Havre à l'Echouerie, "barred harbour".

James White received a number of replies from postmasters in Nova Scotia. These circulars will be examined in Volume 15, Number 1.

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