

# RECOLLECTIONS OF THE FERRY ROAD

Perth Courier, January 24, 1896, Pg-8

## Recollections of the Ferry Road.

For the Courier.

The frequent items in the *Courier* in the last few years relating to the Ferry Road, lead us to imagine that the thoroughfare is frequented by the dainty surrey, the elegant brougham and other vehicles of modern construction, indicating the increasing wealth of the thrifty citizens of the county. Doubtless the modern bicycle is hourly seen on the road, and the new woman, perhaps, exercises her muscles on the popular wheel. The trip to the Ferry now occupies but a short half-hour, or so. Likely new and artistic buildings occupy the places of the rude dwellings of the pioneers. Barbed wire has taken the place of the crooked rail fence, and other evidences of advancing civilization are seen on every hand.

In an early day this road was doubtless the most travelled highway in the county, and altogether out of keeping with the amount of traffic that used the road. The tri-weekly Brockville stage was probably the most elegant conveyance—a vehicle little better than a lumber waggon, which made the bones of the passengers ache for days after they had enjoyed the privilege of a seat in that substantial carriage. Two hours was fast time from Perth to the Rideau lake, but when the roads were bad three hours was not uncommon, and as the frost came out of the ground in the spring, even a longer time was necessary to make the trip.

We have now in our mind this thoroughfare as it seemed in the late thirties. As we left the Scotch Line we passed a small clearing on the left and a somewhat larger one on the right; the latter belonging to one of the McPhersons. Then we went through the original forest on both sides of the road for a short distance to the concession line, where was a log school house—one of the very early ones, with the diamond-shaped roof, and which was more for ornament than use, as it was seldom occupied for educational purposes. To the left was the farm of Mr. Thomas Nichol, a sturdy yeoman and one of nature's noblemen. It was a bad day when he was not in his place with his family at the kirk. Indeed we remember once seeing him, his good wife and a daughter in the spring on a Sunday morning driving up to St. Andrew's Church in a farm cart, because there was no other way of availing themselves of the privilege of God's house. In winter the daughters attended at the old stone school house in the town, always walking, except in very stormy weather, at which times the old gentleman would bring them in the sleigh. Intelligent and worthy girls

were they. There were others of the same class. We mention these as representative individuals. On the west of the road, a short distance up the line, were a family of Riddells, boys and girls, that attended the same school. A little further on were the residences of the Waddells, father and son; and on the west side two log dwellings, the names of whose occupants we do not remember. Passing on the original forest was on both sides. A strip of a few rods was covered with fallen trees in terrible confusion. The tradition was that a number of years previous—perhaps before the first settler came—a tornado passed over that place, and for a number of miles had levelled the forest. Turning to the west we came to Jib's creek. The hill on the south side of that stream was a terror to travellers, and a sigh of relief always accompanied the passage of that formidable piece of highway. The road here passed in sight of Otty Lake. Turning to the east we passed a good frame house, the residence of a man named Oliver. It was in this vicinity that "Black Sam" committed suicide, by hanging himself on a tree. He was a poor and lonely negro, who had escaped from bondage and found his way to the cold north. The unfortunate man found himself in a community that had no use for him, and doubtless put an end to his life, rather than go back to the more genial climate where he would be in slavery. Forest and hills were the features of the road until we came to Capt.

Abel Wright's farm. The Captain was a U. K. Loyalist, who had probably the first orchard in that settlement. The memory of his luscious apples still lingers and carries us back to the time when Uncle Abel and Aunt Sally made us welcome to the privilege of their plantation.

After passing several hills we came to a turn in the road, where was another primitive school house, and in this vicinity a number of McLeans had settled, notably Dr. McLean, who died at an early day, and is not remembered by the writer. From here to the ferry was a dense forest, and the road one of the worst in a wet season. A solitary dwelling, the residence of Widow Campbell, a wharf at the steamboat landing, a few log sheds, were all the edifices that graced the port of Oliver's Ferry.

Your readers will pardon us for the free use of names, which we may not always have quoted correctly. An absence of over forty years is apt to obliterate the memory of many friends. Their names often come to us, but are not always at hand when wanted. Likely some of the families of the original settlers occupy the old homesteads. Your people are not as migratory in their habits as the people of the United States. We know many places in the west settled long after the vicinity of Perth that you may travel for twenty miles and not find a farm in the hands of the original settlers or their families.

Mac.

For the *Courier*

The frequent items in the *Courier* in the last few years relating to the Ferry Road, lead us to imagine that the thoroughfare is frequented by the dainty surrey, the elegant brougham, and other vehicles of modern construction, indicating the increasing wealth of the thrifty citizens of the county. Doubtless the modern bicycle is hourly seen on the road, and the new woman, perhaps exercises her muscles on the popular wheel. The trip to the Ferry<sup>1</sup> now occupies but a short half hour or so. Likely new and artistic buildings occupy the places of the rude dwellings of the pioneers. Barbed wire had taken the place of the crooked rail fence, and other evidence of advancing civilization are seen on every hand.

In the early day, this road was doubtless the most travelled highway in the country, and altogether out of keeping with the amount of traffic that used the road. The tri-weekly Brockville stage was probably the most elegant conveyance – a vehicle little better than a lumber waggon, which made the bones of the passengers ache for days after they had enjoyed the privilege of a seat in that substantial carriage. Two hours was fast time from Perth to the Rideau Lake, but when the roads were bad three hours was not uncommon, and as the frost came out of the ground in the spring, even a longer time was necessary to make the trip.

<sup>1</sup> Then known as 'Oliver's Ferry', later renamed 'Rideau Landing' and then 'Rideau Ferry'.

We have now in our mind this thoroughfare as it seemed in the late thirties<sup>2</sup>. As we left the Scotch Line, we passed a small clearing on the left and a somewhat larger one on the right; the latter belonging to one of the McPhersons<sup>3</sup>. Then we went through the original forest on both sides of the road for a short distance to the concession line<sup>4</sup>, where was a log schoolhouse – one of the very early ones, with the diamond shaped roof, and which was more for ornament than use, as it was seldom occupied for educational purposes.

To the left was the farm of Mr. Thomas Nichol<sup>5</sup>, a sturdy yeoman and one of nature's noblemen. It was a bad day when he was not in his place with his family at the Kirk. Indeed, we remember once seeing him, his good wife, and a daughter in the spring on a Sunday morning driving up to St. Andrew's Church in a farm cart, because there was no other way of availing themselves of the privileges of God's house. In winter, the daughters attended at the old stone schoolhouse in the town, always walking, except in very stormy weather, at which times the old gentleman would bring them in the sleigh. Intelligent and worthy girls were they<sup>6</sup>. There were others of the same class. We mention these as representative individuals.

On the west of the road, a short distance up the line, were a family of Riddels, boys and girls<sup>7</sup>, that attended the same school. A little farther on were the residence of the Waddells, father and son<sup>8</sup>; and on the west side two log dwellings, the names of whose occupants we do not remember.

Passing on, the original forest was on both sides. A strip of a few rods was covered with fallen trees in terrible confusion. The tradition was that a number of years previous – perhaps before the first settler came – a tornado passed over that place and for a number of miles had levelled the forest.

Turning to the west we came to Jib's Creek<sup>9</sup>. The hill on the south side of the stream was a terror to travellers, and a sigh of relief always accompanied the passage of that formidable piece of highway. The road here passed in sight of Ottay Lake<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Because the writer mentions that Dr. John McLean (1788-1840) had "*died at an early day and is not remembered by the writer*" the described journey along the Rideau Ferry Road may be set in the 1840s not the 1830s.

<sup>3</sup> Peter McPherson (1773-1844) settled on North Elmsley Township C-10/L-27(W). His will divided his property equally among his sons William (1797-1859), David (1808-1873), Malcolm (1806-1893) and James (1811-c1880).

<sup>4</sup> North Elmsley Township Concession-9.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Nichol, with a wife and four daughters, purchased North Elmsley township C-8/L-25 in 1829.

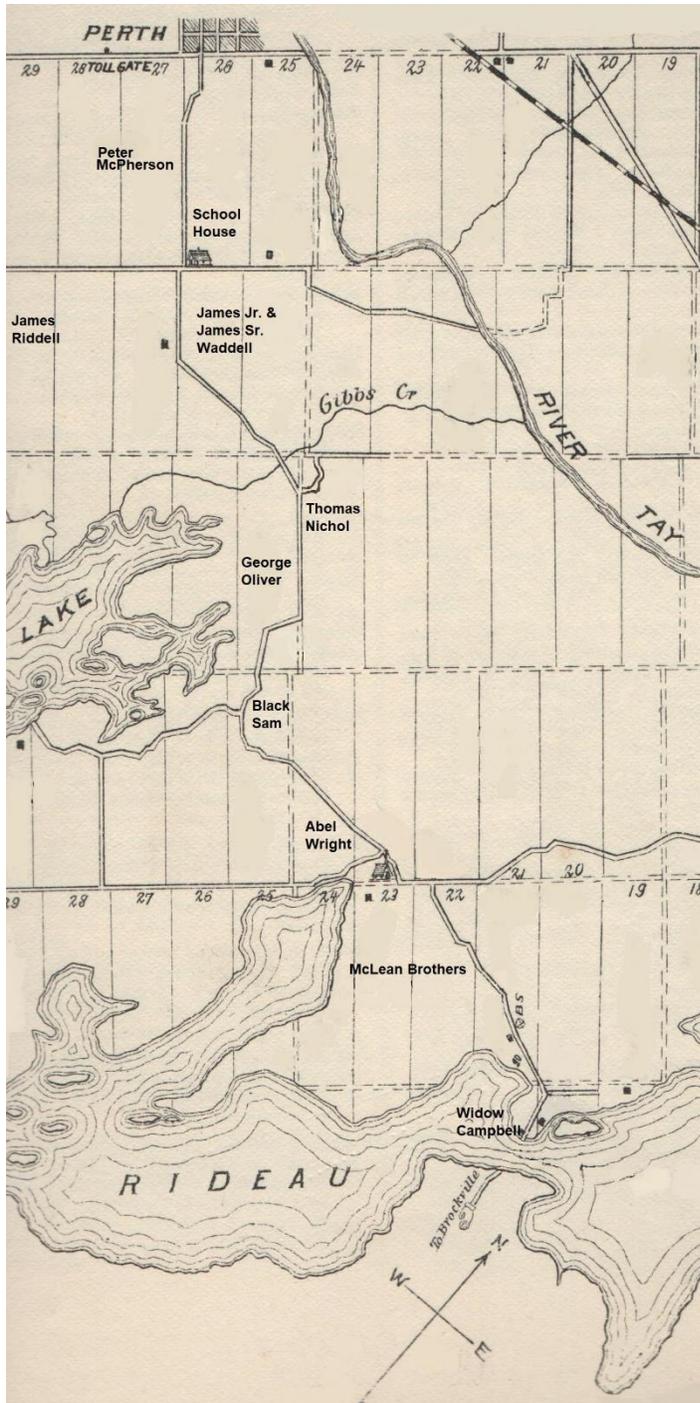
<sup>6</sup> The Nichol daughters were Euphemia, Marion, Isabella, Margaret, and Janet.

<sup>7</sup> James Riddell (1790-1866) settled North Elmsley Township C-9/L-29(W) in 1826. The "*boys and girls*" were Robert (1811-1836), Hannah (1815-1891), Janet (1818-1894), John (1821-1908), William (1825-1888), Walter (1826-1901) and Mary (1828-1907).

<sup>8</sup> James Waddell Sr. (????-1850) and son James Waddell Jr. (1803-1886) purchased North Elmsley Township C-9/L-26 in 1832.

<sup>9</sup> Jebb's Creek (aka Gibb's Creek).

<sup>10</sup> Otty Lake.



Turning to the east we passed a good frame house, the residence of a man named Oliver<sup>11</sup>. It was in this vicinity that 'Black Sam' committed suicide, by hanging himself on a tree. He was a poor and lonely negro, who had escaped from bondage and found his way to the cold north. The unfortunate man found himself in a community that had no use for him, and doubtless put an end to his life rather than go back to the more genial climate where he would be in slavery. (See Endnote)

Forest and hills were the features of the road until we came to Capt. Abel Wright's<sup>12</sup> farm. The Captain was a U. E. Loyalist<sup>13</sup>, who had probably the first orchard in that settlement. The memory of his luscious apples still lingers and carries us back to the time when Uncle Abel and Aunt Sally made us welcome to the privileges of their plantation.

After passing several hills we came to a turn in the road, where was another primitive schoolhouse, and in this vicinity a number of McLeans<sup>14</sup> had settled, notably Dr. McLean<sup>15</sup>, who died at an early day, and is not remembered by the writer. From here to the ferry was a dense forest and the road one of the worst in a wet season. A solitary dwelling, the residence of Widow Campbell<sup>16</sup>, a wharf at the steamboat landing, a few log sheds, were all the edifices that graced the port of Oliver's Ferry.

<sup>11</sup> George Oliver (1787-1845) purchased North Elmsley Township C-8/L-25 in 1827.

<sup>12</sup> North Elmsley Justice of the Peace Abel Wright (1791-1873).

<sup>13</sup> His father Ashael Wright (1754-1813) was the U.E.L. He came from Massachusetts and settled in Augusta Township, Greenville County.

<sup>14</sup> Between 1815 and 1825 six McLean brothers, John (1788-1840), Thomas (1792-1851), Robert 1799-1844), David (1802-1862), William and Alexander, settled at North Elmsley Township C-6/L-23, C-6/L-24, C-6/L-27, and C-7/L-22.

<sup>15</sup> Royal Navy Surgeon John McLean (1788-1840).

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Buchanan-Campbell (1805-1875), widow of Archibald Campbell (1798-1834). She carried on her husband's freight forwarding business after his death and ran an Inn at the Ferry.

Your readers will pardon us for the free use of names, which we may not always have quoted correctly. As absence of over forty years is apt to obliterate the member of many friends. Their names often come to us, but are not always at hand when wanted. Likely some of the families of the original settlers occupy the old homesteads. Your people are not as migratory in their habits as the people of the United States. We know many places in the west settled long after the vicinity of Perth that you may travel for twenty miles and not find a farm in the hands of the original settlers or their families.

MaC<sup>17</sup>

---

#### EndNote

No evidence has been found corroborating this account of a Black man committing suicide along the Rideau Ferry Road. The incident may or may not have happened.

If it did happen, however ...

From the context of the overall article, the suicide would probably have occurred at some date between about 1820 and 1835.

Background/Context –

In the 1780s-1790s the UELs brought about 500 slaves into Upper Canada (of total of 2,000 brought to Britain's North American colonies).

But in 1793 the Upper Canada Legislature passed the *Act to Limit Slavery* that provided that any enslaved person who reached Upper Canada became free upon arrival, and also freed the future children of those already in slavery at age twenty-five.

Then slavery in Britain and all its colonies (including Upper Canada) was entirely abolished effective August 1, 1834.

Canada's reputation as a safe haven for Blacks grew substantially during and after the War of 1812. Between 1820 and 1865, tens of thousands of African-Americans found refuge in Upper and Lower Canada via the legendary Underground Railroad.

---

<sup>17</sup> Author unknown.