

LOOKING BACK OVER THE CENTURY

THE STORY OF HOLLAND LANDING

By Dorothy Cilipka

Just a little village, typical of so many other little villages, it nestles in the Canadian countryside. Holland Landing, in York County, is only a short drive north of Toronto, 38 miles to be exact. But Holland Landing has a story to tell. One has only to stop to listen.

Prologue

Holland Landing is situated on the Holland River. Its position gave it a vital importance in the affairs of man many years before the first white man trod Canadian soil. The section of the Holland River which was used by the Indians as a canoe-landing, later came to be called the Upper Landing. From here, the Iroquois warriors and hunters of old journeyed to Lake Simcoe, or Georgian Bay. Sometimes, their destination was Toronto.

The old Toronto Portage extended from the Upper Landing to the Humber. It was twenty-four miles long, and its route was approximately that of present-day Yonge Street. A swamp near Holland Landing bears the

last traces of a corduroy road, which was a section of the portage. Etienne Brule, and La Salle used this route in the seventeenth century.

At that time, Holland Landing was also the terminus of the carrying-place to Ganatsekwyagon, which is on the Rouge.

The North West Company, Canada's first joint stock company, was founded in 1784. Its traders followed a route from Holland Landing, across Lake Simcoe and on to Barrie, travelling in bateaux. The typical bateau had a flat bottom, straight sides about four feet high, and was thirty to forty feet wide.

An unusual vessel made of Russian sheet iron, but shaped like a birch canoe, was once portaged by horse-power from Holland Landing to Toronto.

A New Era

The Queen's Rangers began

the construction of Yonge Street in 1793. Three years later, the road from York to Holland Landing was ready to be used. Even at the best of times the route, which included parts of present highways 11 and 27,

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was tortuous and difficult.

The Gazetteer of 1799 described Fort Gwillimbury (Holland Landing) as a few log buildings, surrounded by tamaracs. It housed government naval and military supplies, as well as the Indians present. (The Indian presents were distributed annually at Holland Landing). The fort was situated at the Lower Landing, which was one and a half miles from the Upper Landing, and used by larger vessels than at the latter.

The anchor of a warship dat-

ing from 1815 can be seen by visitors to Holland Landing to this day. The anchor was in the process of being transported by oxen to Penetanguishene, when news arrived that hostilities had ended.

Two years later, Dr. John Bigsby described Holland Landing as "scarcely more than a single public house in a marshy country".

The Good Years

"We went forward to a place on the Holland River called Holland Landing, an open space which the Indians and fur-traders were in the habit of frequenting. It presented to me something of a Scottish aspect in the style of the cottages; but instead of mountains the environs were covered with trees." Thus wrote John Galt in 1827. By now, Holland Landing was the chief centre for the transportation of goods to the Upper Lakes by way of Lake Simcoe.

By 1828, a stage coach was making daily trips from York to Holland Landing, via Yonge Street. The stage coach was pulled by four horses bred of Irish stock, belonging to William Weller.

The Red Mill was patronized by all the farmers in the vicinity, even from Barrie.

In 1831, the first steamer on Lake Simcoe was built at Holland Landing. It was called the Sir John Colborne. The next year, Captain McKenzie began preparations for the construction of another steamer to ply Lake Simcoe and the Holland River. The steamer, Simcoe, was built at the Upper Landing. From there, it had to be dragged laboriously to deeper water. (Some other steamers were named the Peter Robinson, Captain Bell, Captain Laughton, Morning, and Beaver.)

The Rebellion of 1837

Samuel Lount, a blacksmith in Holland Landing manufactured weapons used in the Rebellion of 1837. Lount also helped to assemble one hundred men who went to Montgomery's Tavern that ill-fated December day.

At the time of the rebellion, about two hundred Indians were stationed at Holland Landing under the command of Andrew Borland.

The Changing Years

On a map dated 1839, Holland Landing is still shown as "Gwilliamsbury", but its final name is a tribute to Major Samuel Holland, Surveyor-General of the province of Quebec from 1764 to 1801.

In 1840, a man named Thompson ran the stage-line from Toronto to Holland Landing, where the terminus was Phelps' Inn.

Holland Landing was so densely populated with mosquitoes in 1841, that travellers like Sir Richard Bonnycastle were forced to wear veils to protect their heads. The area was infested with black flies, sandflies and water-snakes. Those who survived these adversities might still fall prey to the ague (a form of malaria).

The hotels in Holland Landing served other purposes besides those pertaining merely to the nourishment and lodging of travellers. For example, in 1847, Irwin's Hotel was the terminus of the Toronto-Holland Landing stage-line. The Globe, a Toronto newspaper, reported in January, 1848, that the Playter's Hotel was the

scene of "a meeting of the inhabitants of the village of St. Albans, Holland Landing and neighbourhood" concerning changes to be made to Yonge Street.

In 1850 then, Holland Landing boasted of no less than three hotels. These belonged to Isaiah Irwin, Thomas May and R. Playter.

People living in Toronto in 1850 could take the stage leaving the Western Hotel at 7 a.m. every morning for Holland Landing. Here connections were made with the steamer, Beaver.

Holland Landing suffered greatly when the Northern Railway opened in 1853. Now, travel over the Yonge Street route, which had been so essential for so long, could be avoided. No longer was there need of three hotels in the village.

In 1861, Holland Landing was incorporated. H. D. MacLean was the first reeve.

And people were still enjoying rides on the steamers. Henry Scadding, canon of St. James' in Toronto, and author of "Toronto of Old" wrote in 1873

"Standing on the deck of the

Beaver, we had ourselves more than once threaded the winding of the Holland River." In another comment, he adds: "We have been told that in the bed of the Holland River, near its mouth, solid bottom was not reached with a sounding-line of ninety feet."

Epilogue

In 1931, the population of Holland Landing, which had been three hundred in 1857, was only two hundred and eighty-five.

Holland Landing surrendered its incorporation in 1933.

But perhaps, the success of a village, town, or city, should not be measured solely in terms of rate of growth. Surely, its role in the past, as well as in the present, must be considered in an evaluation. Then, surely, the contribution in the history of early Canada, of a little village called Holland Landing is a significant one.

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