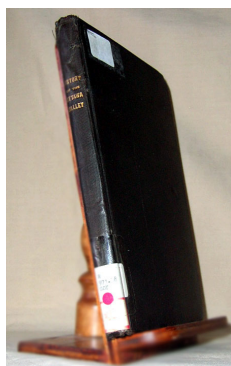


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History of the Ottawa Valley - 1896

by J. L. Gourlay, A.M.

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HISTORY
OF THE
OTTAWA VALLEY

BY

J. L. GOURLAY, A.M.

A COLLECTION OF FACTS, EVENTS AND REMINISCENCES
FOR OVER HALF A CENTURY.

HISTORY OF THE OTTAWA VALLEY

THE history of a country is the narrative or story of the character and conduct of its prominent citizens or inhabitants. The succession of events they have been promoting, or hindering, in which they have been the actors or participants, forms the theme and adventitious circumstances from the coloring of the picture. The topography of the soil, the salubrity or the reverse of the climate, occasionally come in as the local habitation on which they dwell and the atmosphere in which they breathe. Very little has been recorded of our fertile valley in past years and that little is scraps not available as history. It fares no worse than other lands, whose early history lies deeply buried in obscurity and whose people's origin is unknown for want of records, or what are given as facts drawn from imagination or tradition where it is impossible to separate truth from fable. Politicians have proposed to make it an Eden blossoming in beauty and filling the air with fragrance, provided we elect them to make their fortune at our expense but their promises were visionary and vanished away like the mirage of the desert as soon as the candidates were seated and in a condition to help themselves. To indolence and carelessness may be attributed the meagre information we possess regarding the origin, progress, growth and decay of so many branches of the human race. Even the briefest correct records would be of signal advantage to posterity and to the historian. The migratory disposition of mankind makes it difficult to preserve such records even when they exist. Intelligent young people should keep short notes of stirring events that come within the range of their observation as these must be of interest and in the hands of one who could classify and arrange and generalize they would not be heavy, but readable. The story of savage life is confined to the gratification of natural appetite, idleness sleep and slaughter. If they observed any kind of laws they were not always in aid of the survival of the fittest. The history of such tribes is seldom written, or of much value if written. We have some interest in the Indian tribes that roamed these parts, but few traces remain of them; Algonquins, Hurons, Senecas have almost disappeared or at least greatly diminished, so that little reliable can be written of them to gratify curiosity, except we draw too extensively on the imagination. Many of the present rising generation with whom we have conversed can scarcely tell you of their great grandfathers or their grandfathers. We remember in youthful days the first inhabitants of the Ottawa country, on both sides of the river, who used to tell long stories of the red men, but we never met a vestige of encampment, to show that they had ever pitched a camp on the plains. Their wigwams were not of a kind to require a foundation like more solid structures, as

the Governor-General would not have to "fellowship" and to swallow whole, such cabinet ministers.

We once asked a very talented gentleman, who had then spent a good part of a long useful life, why he had not entered parliament? His answer was peculiar: "that he would then have to shake hands with people he would not spit on." He was an aristocratic liberal. It took many years to make the roads even passable in Gloucester. One near the Rideau was only blazed and cleared of brush and poles. This led by Capt. Wilson's to Prescott through Kemptville, to travel with a jumper, or train on one horse, the other being more used by oxen. Some early bridges like at Cumming's Island were of slow construction where passengers had to go on the stringers and animals had to ford it. Some drowning cases are reported. From Capt. Wilsons they had to ferry across the stream and travel down the Nepean side to Bytown, but the other road was blazed and could be used as better in winter than in summer to Billings' Bridge, but from there to New Edinburgh was stony, muddy, crooked, and narrow and not much to speak of for many years. That to Green's Creek was little better for years after Clement Bradley and Benjamin Rathwell, Robert Skead, and others, got lands on it. The road to Hawthorne, East Gloucester, and settlements round the Mer Blue was pushed, and the lands occupied between 1828 and 1836.

What is called Juneville, was started by Sergeant Templeton, George Sparks, and others. About 1833 Baily, Hill, Little, Low, Savage, and others, settled along the Russell road. Some of these little places have several names as, Ramsay's Corners, Taylorville. From 28 to 37, Mr. Gregor Stewart and Sergeant Johnston settled along here. Billings' Bridge became a stirring place, as we approach the middle of this century. Churches, schools, Town Hall, mechanics shops, stores and business places were constructed whilst an impulse was given to business in general. Mr. Hugh Masson about the same time began to make his iron and steam ploughs, and perform many other operations in the business with marked success and acceptance to the public. Latterly he has taken to private banking on a nice little paying scale. He is a respected citizen, a good neighbor, a genial, pleasant gentleman. His wife is a daughter of Mr. Alexander Kennedy. Her mother was a Miss McDiarmid of Lanark Co., near Carleton Place. They had a numerous family of fine looking daughters and some sons. The eldest son, a superior young man, died of lockjaw. He had cut his foot and the wound had healed and seemed all right. He had come with several of his sisters to Aylmer, rendering us a real kindness in a service of song at a church festival. They had fine voices, cultivated them well, and never failed to do justice to the piece, and delight the audience. The value of that service was much enhanced by the good will with which it was rendered. A few days after this, unfavorable symptoms appeared. The skill of the physician was exhausted and was utterly unavailing. With great sorrow, we, among his other many friends, witnessed his extreme, excruciating agonies, which he endured with fortitude, meekness and patience, and the end was perfect peace.

One of his sisters married John Anderson, a cabinet maker, then afterwards a Presbyterian minister of undoubted piety. One married Mr. McMillan, long an efficient assistant to that very able teacher, Dr.

THE NORTH SHORE OF THE OTTAWA.

We have mentioned in a preceding page the arrival of Mr. Philemon Wright in Hull. Afterwards he was appointed to a seat in the Parliament in Quebec; for there was scarcely an election as the county had only his own little colony of less than a hundred souls, and judges, etc., were appointed to sit in the Legislature in those times. He reported to the Government that he had between 1796 and 1799 explored both banks of the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa as far as the Chaudiere Falls. His report is the history of Hull in its beginnings and progress. Mr. Wright, after considerable difficulty, secured two respectable men to accompany him on the exploration. They halted at the great falls and went back to examine the quality of the land, cutting long small trees and lodging them in large ones that they might climb and get a view of the country. Had they climbed the barrack hill or Rockcliff they could have seen the level country to the mountains. The tall thick forest hid the mountain range out of view from the level of the shore of the river. They must have come in a canoe, though he does not describe it but he speaks of the smoothness and depth of the river.

From Montreal he could not have come on foot to the Chaudiere for there were so many rivers to cross, not fordable anywhere near their outlet at the Ottawa. Had they brushed and blazed a road from the Falls north, they could have had a panoramic view of the whole valley and the river from the Chats to Grenville, as we have often seen it. From the heights of our city you can take in the range of your vision nearly a hundred miles of mountain, river and valley. They returned to Montreal, reported their discoveries to the gratified people and went on to Woburn, Mass., where the narratives of the men made such impressions that he was able to employ without difficulty twenty-five men and induce five families to begin the settlement. They left Woburn, February 2nd, 1800 and on the 13th reached Montreal. After a short stay they proceeded about 15 miles a day, sleeping at the houses of the habitants at nights. They had considerable trouble with teams and their wide double sleighs on the train roads, keeping one animal in the snow alternately to keep from wearying one out. The trip to the head of the Long Sault is minutely described, and how they camped out with great fires, and the woman slept in covered sleighs, the men with blankets over them around the blazing fires. The men were happy without a landlord to collect fees or complain of extravagance.

The former journey had been by water, and they knew nothing of the ice, and so kept some running on before them, cutting to make sure of their safety. He speaks very highly of an Indian, a good savage with his wife and child, who wondered at the animals, having seen nothing but wild ones before that time. He left his wife and child in the woods and became their guide to Hull. They camped on the bank in the open air about six or seven nights. The banks were twenty feet high, so they had to leave their teams and sleighs on the ice and climb the banks, cut the wood for their fires, cook supper and breakfast and

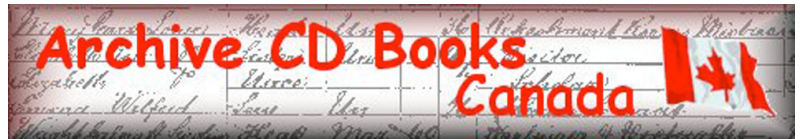
to the land either of his birth or of his adoption. He and my father were great adepts in the science of numbers. Discovering my growing fondness for the same, his genius led him to search and send us many a puzzler, and was tickled and pleased to get the solution written out and sent him. Mrs. Tiberius Wright, Jr., has a fine large family of children and live south of the homestead. The home of Mr. Alonzo Wright, M. P. for a long time in Ottawa county, is well-known to rich and poor. A magnificent frame house with a large well-stocked conservatory, and the most beautiful surroundings, well becoming the monarch of the Gatineau, who dispenses the hospitalities in a style and manner little short of princely grandeur. The large farm on the east bank of the river is very fine indeed, exhibiting several natural terraces, all facing the southwest, and whether garden or orchard, cultivated fields or pastures and meadows, present an aspect so picturesque, on so grand a scale, and with such taste, showing as it were the artificial finish of a master's hand. His fields of the finest cows, his stables of blood horses, and what some greatly admire (though we never could), a perfect stock of dogs—some lion-like in their huge size, all indicating immense wealth.

The Sparks's wealth was prodigious. North of Mr. Wright the Main family reside, grandchildren of the late Mr. Andrew Main, so long a successful merchant in Ottawa. They lost their father years ago and a son was drowned below Eaton Chute. The widow was a Miss Hamilton. She has a large and fine family. They did not belong to the early inhabitants. On the west side opposite the Wrights, were the Steeles, Brooks, Hudsons, Churches, Sheffields, Chamberlains and many others had taken lands on which afterwards the villages of Chelsea and Ironsides were formed. Andrew and David Blackburn migrated to Hull in 1829 and settled above Chelsea, Andrew on the west side. David took lot No. 11 on the 11th range and 11 on the 12th range. They sailed from Glasgow on the 9th of July of that year on the brig Amity; Captain E. Roy, and in fifty-one days reached Montreal. In two days more they got to Bytown. Col. By was then on the canal works. They made application to the land agent, Burrows, and furnished with a list of vacant lots, were directed to Mr. Chamberlain. They were ferried over in a log canoe to see and take the lands. The next year Andrew assisted the Chamberlain brothers to make their first timber, floated down the river above the bridge. Andrew's wife was a Miss Pollock, and they raised a fine family of sons and daughters. One daughter is Mrs. Thomas Brown, who has two beautiful children. Her husband is a fine prosperous man, besides a legacy is left her in the old land. Twenty-seven of the relatives are buried in the cemetery at Cantley. David Blackburn the only surviving brother, is in wonderfully good health, considering his broken limbs and his difficulties of locomotion. He is a cheerful, good old Christian, with a high appreciation of the value of religion. When a boy preacher, we remember meeting him at Wakefield, to which he walked or rode, and led the singing many a day. He is the only elder in the congregation in Cantley at the present time of writing. He told us he and his people were the only family six miles north of Mr. Tiberius Wright and wife, who were then healthy, vigorous people, living where their son now resides. In the year 1831 Horace King brought a gang of hands to cut logs for the Hamilton mills at Hawkes

DIFFICULTIES OF RELIGION.

THE first great difficulty in religion is that humanity has broken the restraints of law and separated itself from God. The vessel has parted its cable, left its anchor and is driven by adverse winds of passion upon trackless seas, with dim hopes of regaining its former anchorage, or re-uniting the broken strains of the cable that bound it to the peaceful shore. Yet in the deepest degradation and widest wanderings, man cannot wholly forget his origin. Unhappy creature, he can neither forgive his offences nor renovate his debased nature. Alienation from God is atheism, and yet atheism is abhorrent to his mind. He has struggled through the ages to give himself a religion and failed utterly to even satisfy himself. Beginning with Cain, who struck out from the family religion, down to Herbert Spencer, how many vain attempts have been made and systems proposed, to meet this confessed want? The religions that cover the earth are an insult and an abhorrence to the unknown God, whom men ignorantly worship.

Despoiled man sought to clothe himself with leaves at the beginning ; in subsequent ages he has wrapped himself in any rags that come in his way ; to slake his burning thirst he plunges into the most polluted waters ; endeavoring to find his way home, buries himself in frightful deserts, a "waste howling wilderness." If truth has not had a lodgment in his mind in his early training, the greater evolution in his talents, the more he mingles with the world, in the more sovereign contempt he holds religion. He professes to know almost nothing of his soul, less still of a future state, and least of all the Author of his being. Two thousand years ago, the Greeks had an altar to the unknown God, evidently thinking He ought to be worshipped. Agnostics scarcely believe that now. Paul showed the Greeks that this ignorance was inexcusable in the face of the visible creation. Had specimens of those Greeks been frozen and laid away above the snow line in the mountains to be waked from that catalepsy in the genial light of the 19th century, would they present a more antique appearance than some modern thinkers? What has the religions of China, Hindostan and the neighboring countries done for their votaries? The star worship of the Assyrians, the sun worship of the Persians, the polythism, as it may be termed, of ancient Greeks and Romans ; the idolatries of Scythians and savage Scandinavians accomplished no more for these nations than kissing the dust from the feet of hideously stupid idols does for the degraded, swarthy African. Home spun theories of religion never satisfy men, though they would delight to be their own Saviour. Elevated natures—Moral Esthetes, tax their imaginations largely and fancy they find God in his works. The lofty mountains infinitely variegated, that cast the long shadows over the plains in the morning and evening seem to strike them with wonder. The beauty of the green woods, the flowery meadows, the waving corn and the golden grain kindle a kind of enthusiastic devotion ; the ocean lashed into tempest, rolling its foaming billows as if to overwhelm the earth with its funnel shaped waterspouts, etc., raised to the clouds by the furious monsoons from the burning desert, present a kind of savage grandeur to the eye and the mind. The surpassing magnificence of the starry heavens, (a revelation of the infinite) contemplated in the calm clear evening with



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