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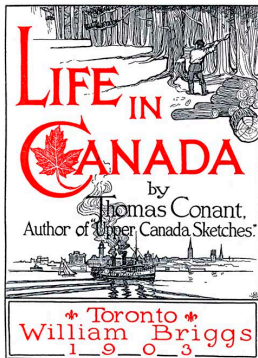


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# Life in Canada - 1903

by: Thomas Conant, (1842 - 1905)

## CA0437-Sampler



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## About this Book.

CA0437; Life in Canada - 1903 by: Thomas Conant, (1842 - 1905)

We, as thinking beings, like to keep our minds as clear of clutter as possible and so we tend to assign things to categories for ease of future reference. So it is with books, we like to assign them to categories so we can direct potential customers to a location where we put books bearing on the subjects of their interest.

Well, this one is one of the rare type which could, just as easily, be categorized into at least three of our standardized categories, viz.:

- It clearly states that it is a record of descendants of a particular individual and so is a “Family History”.
- The author, though, also clearly states his intention of reviewing and examining the effect on his family members of some of the major contemporary social and political upheavals, placing this book clearly in the “History” category.
- However in the process of recounting his families history from both these viewpoints he must explain the workings of a contemporary household and the interactions of the family with the community, making this book a candidate for inclusion in the “Lifestyles” category.

So, while this is an inconvenient book to categorize, it is an EXCELLENT book to learn from, simply because it relates all the large things AND the small things in time, just as a person would come across them in the course of living their life.

The author’s story begins with the author’s ancestor, Roger Conant’, moving to an area of Canada where he could live without the recriminations of his decision to remain loyal to British rule (although physically inactive) in “the 13 colonies” during the “War of Independence” or the “North American Revolution” - depending on your point of view. In other words he became a United Empire Loyalist, a significant decision considering that he could trace his American heritage back 6 generations to Roger Conant (“The Pilgrim”) who, landing from the Ann - the second “Pilgrim” ship to land following the Mayflower - then went on to become the first Governor of the Colony of Massachusetts.

Having crossed the Niagara river (northwards) at Newark, Roger set off - with only his family - to carve out a “lot” of 800 acres of virgin forest on the northern shores of Lake Ontario. And there he made his family’s living from a combination of farming, homesteading, fishing, trapping, and trading. De-

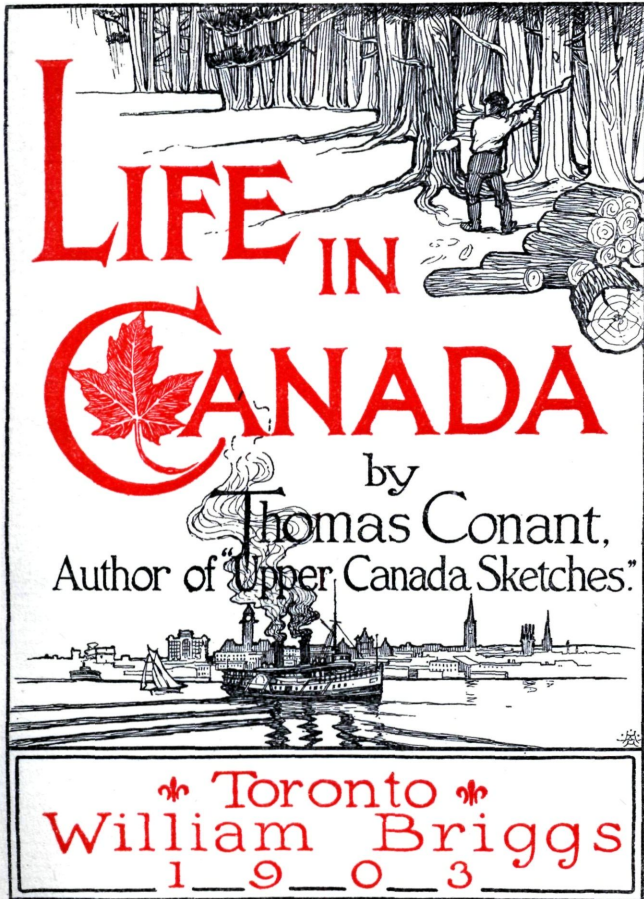
spite his initial isolation his ability to recognize an opportunity, and his intelligence in bringing his affairs to a successful conclusion, left him a major landholder and a rich man by the time he expired, 43 years later in 1821.

So begins the fascinating story of the Conant family, as it was impacted by outside contemporary events of the time including: the many “shadowy” requirements imposed by the civil administrations of the time (e.g., Col. Talbot, etc.), by the attempts of the newly independent States to the south to add “Canadian” soil to their holdings (i.e., war of 1812, etc.), and the “unfair” application of civil regulation imposed by self-serving politicians and profiteering governors (i.e., the events culminating in the 1837 “revolution” and by the infamous Family Compact.)

But in addition to these major events of the Canadian “experience” our author, humanizes his account with attention to the more personal and in some cases prosaic episodes in the lives of this ancestral family. There is the period when Daniel becomes associated with the docks at Whitby and other members of the family become involved with the nautical businesses which were responsible for the movement of so much trade merchandise both up and down the St. Lawrence river, one of the emerging Canada’s major transportation routes. On the other hand the family comments on the “newcomer” immigrant “farmers” from the old country, bringing with them - supposedly - the latest, and best, farming practices indicates their hostility towards those unwilling to re-learn and accommodate the Canadian reality they were now masters of.

Although this book heads out to re-tell the story of another United Empire Loyalists’ exodus to The Canadas, by the time the end is reached the reader might well believe he has been given an intimate lesson on the life and living of an intelligent and energetic rural Canadian, as he makes a success of life in a previously unexplored (from a “western” point of view) land.

The edition of the book reproduced, is amply illustrated with 27 photographs and engravings, and a detailed Table of Contents but no Index, so this digital edition adds an every-word Index which provides a faster and more accurate key to the extraordinary, but personal, lives of the pioneers of this land. The “on CD” version of this edition is also enhanced with FastFind technology, bringing search results to the researcher almost instantaneously.



# LIFE IN CANADA

by  
Thomas Conant,  
Author of "Upper Canada Sketches."

✿ Toronto ✿  
William Briggs  
1 9 0 3

## Preface.

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IN the following pages will be found some contributions towards the history of Canada and of the manners and customs of its inhabitants during the hundred years beginning October 5th, 1792. On that date my ancestor, Roger Conant, a graduate of Yale University, and a Massachusetts landowner, set foot on Canadian soil as a United Empire Loyalist. From him and from his descendants—handed down from father to son—there have come to me certain historical particulars which I regard as a trust and which I herewith give to the public. I am of the opinion that it is in such plain and unvarnished statements that future historians of our country will find their best materials, and I therefore feel constrained to do my share towards the task of supplying them.

The population of Canada is but five and one-third millions, but who can tell what it will be in a few decades? We may be sure that when our population rivals that of the United States to-day, and when our

numerous seats of learning have duly leavened the mass of our people, any reliable particulars as to the early history of our country will be most eagerly sought for.

As a native resident of the premier Province of Ontario, where my ancestors from Roger Conant onwards also spent their lives, I have naturally dealt chiefly with affairs and happenings in what has hitherto been the most important province of the Dominion, and which possesses at least half of the inhabitants of the entire country. But I have not the slightest desire to detract from the merits and historical interest of the other provinces.

THOMAS CONANT.

OSHAWA, January, 1903.

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ROGER CONANT.

Born at Bridgewater, Mass., June 22, 1748.  
Graduated at Yale University in Arts and law, 1765.  
Came to Darlington, Upper Canada, a U. E. L., 1792.  
Died in Darlington, June 21, 1821.

admitted as a will by the court of that day, 1821, the date of Roger's death. To us such proceedings seem crude, particularly as the document referred to conveyed an estate of great value.

With regard to this will a singular circumstance must be noted. Roger died a very large real estate owner. This part of his possessions is duly scheduled. But of his hoard of gold no mention is made. The author's paternal uncle, David Annis, who lived with the family till his death in 1861, frequently said in the author's hearing—it was a statement made many times—that Roger Conant had gold and buried it. Why he did so is a mystery. It is also certain that no one has yet unearthed that gold. On the farm at Darlington on which he resided, a few days before his death he took a large family iron bake-kettle, and after placing therein his gold he buried it on the bank of the salmon stream of which mention has already been made. The bake-kettle was missed from its accustomed position by the open fireplace, but search failed to reveal its whereabouts. Thereafter, and many times since, persons with various amalgams and with divining rods and sticks have searched for this buried treasure, but always in vain.

Of Eliphalet, the son, who did the business of the family, being the elder son, all trace is lost, and there is no one known to-day who claims descent from him.

Abel, another son, had an immense tract of land in Scarborough, on the Danforth Road, near the Presbyterian Centennial Church of that township. His son, Roger, left a most respectable and interesting

### CHAPTER III.

The War of 1812—Canadian feeling with regard to it—Intolerance of the Family Compact—Roger Conant arrested and fined—March of defenders to York—Roger Conant hides his specie—A song about the war—Indian robbers foiled—The siege of Detroit—American prisoners sent to Quebec—Feeding them on the way—Attempt on the life of Colonel Scott of the U. S. army—Funeral of Brock—American forces appear off York—Blowing up of the fort—Burning of the Don bridge—Peace at last.

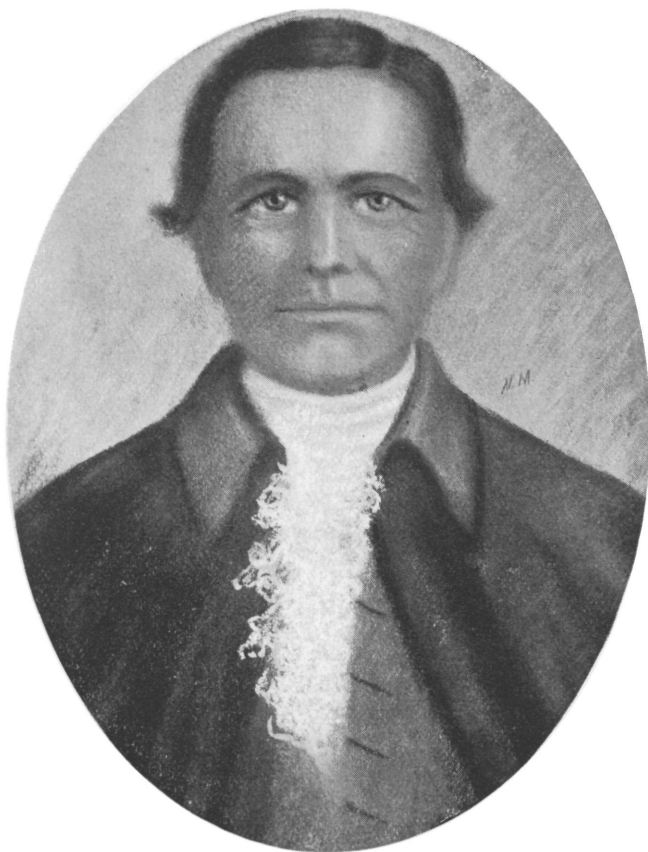
IN twenty years from the time Governor Simcoe established his capital at Newark, on the Niagara River, after being sworn in as Governor of western Canada (his incumbency being the real commencement of the settlement of Upper Canada), began the War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States. Our peaceably disposed and struggling Canadians, trying to subdue the forest and to procure a livelihood, were horrified to have a war on their hands. They could ill afford to leave their small clearings in the forest, where they garnered their small crops, to go and fight. Not one of them, however, for a single moment thought of aiding the United States or of remaining neutral. Canada was their home, and Canada they would defend. From 12,000 in 1792 in Upper Canada, 40,000 were now within its



## CHAPTER IV.

Wolves in Upper Canada—Adventure of Thomas Conant—A grabbing land-surveyor—Canadian graveyards beside the lake—Millerism in Upper Canada—Mormonism.

TURNING to ordinary affairs, we find that at this date our Government helped the settler to exterminate wolves by paying a bounty of about \$6 for each wolf head produced before a magistrate. In reference to these ferocious animals, once so plentiful in Canada, an anecdote of the author's grandfather will be found both interesting and instructive, giving us a true glimpse of the county in 1806. Thomas Conant, whose portrait is found on opposite page, and who was assassinated during the Canadian Revolution on February 15th, 1838 (*vide* "Upper Canada Sketches," by the author), lived in Darlington, Durham County, Upper Canada. In the fall of 1806 he was "keeping company" with a young woman, who lived some three miles back from Lake Ontario, his home being on the shore of that great lake, Clearings or openings in the forest were at this time mostly along the lake shore. Consequently, to pay his respects to the young woman, he had to pass through some forest and clearings in succession. It was in November of that year. Snow had not yet fallen, but the ground



THOMAS CONANT.

Was born at Bridgewater, Mass., in 1782; came to Darlington, Canada, with his father, Roger Conant, in 1792. On February 15th, 1838, during the Canadian Revolution, he was foully massacred by one Cummings (in Darlington), a despatch bearer, of Port Hope, Ont. The assassin was applauded for the act by the Family Compact.

was frozen. Tarrying until midnight at the home of the object of his affections, he left, alone and unarmed, to walk the three intervening miles to his home. Getting over about one-half the distance, he heard the distant baying of wolves. Fear would, it may be supposed, lend speed to his feet, but thinking rightly that he could not outstrip the wolf on foot, he walked quietly along, watching for a convenient tree for climbing. In a very few minutes the wolves were upon him, in full cry, eyes protruding, tongues lolling, and ready to devour him. A near-by beech tree, which his arms could encircle, furnished him with the means of escape. He climbed, and climbed, while the wolves surrounded him and watched his every motion, never ceasing their dismal howls the live-long night. Thus he kept his lonely vigil. To lose his hold for a single second meant instant death. Great, however, as was the tension upon his strained muscles, they held on. Morn tardily came at last, and with its first peep the wolves left him and were seen no more. When they were really gone, he said he for the first time began looking about him, and found, with all his climbing, he had ascended a very few feet from the ground, and but just out of reach of the wolves' jaws as they made frantic jumps to reach him. We may, however, be safe in assuming that the scare and involuntary vigil did not do him much harm, for in the March following (1807) he married the girl he went to visit that night, and made no complaints of having been maltreated by wolves.

## CHAPTER VI.

A manufactory of base coin in the Province of Quebec—A clever penman—Incident at a trial—The gang of forgers broken up—"Stump-tail money"—Calves or land?—Ashbridge's hotel, Toronto—Attempted robbery by Indians—The shooting of an Indian dog and the consequences.

I REFERRED in the last chapter to the Spanish milled dollars in which military services were paid for. Mexican dollars were also in vogue, and a few years previous to the American War of 1812, some enterprising New England counterfeiters, fancying the densely-wooded portion of Lower Canada, near the state lines, would afford a secure base for their operations, emigrated to our lower province. These Mexican silver dollars were used as a currency for small moneys almost to the exclusion of British coins. The reason for this was because these Mexican unmilled dollars were of pure silver, almost without alloy, and were worth, intrinsically, rather more than their face value. In these forests the counterfeiters set up their presses and dies, and succeeded in making Mexican dollars so very nearly like the genuine ones that they passed unquestioned. Indeed, there was no limit to the amount these fellows could produce, or as to the amount of wealth they could accumulate thereby ;

that is to say, so far as wealth could be accumulated in those early days among forest fastnesses. However, this band had good houses constructed, and as well furnished as they could be at that early day. One of the traditions about them is that they were in the habit of throwing a dollar into the spittoon when they wanted it cleaned, which perhaps shows they had all the hired help that money could in those days give them. They appear to have lived a free-booting sort of life and to have enjoyed such luxuries as money could command. So expert had they become at the business that paymasters in the American army actually crossed over the lines by stealth, through the woods, and bought these Mexican dollars from the counterfeiters to pay the American troops with. This is a fact, anomalous as it may seem, and no doubt these paymasters reaped rich harvests by these transactions. As an illustration of the cleverness of these counterfeiters I will note that at one time they actually passed four thousand of their coins on one of the banks in Montreal.

We may, therefore, assume that as counterfeiters they had arrived at considerable perfection. The flooding of the Province of Quebec with these Mexican dollars somewhat disarranged the even flow of trade transactions.

On the close of the American war, however, these Mexican dollars were gradually taken out of circulation. The genuine ones were mostly taken to England to be recoined into British shillings and sixpences. This altered state of affairs caused these counterfeiters

## CHAPTER VIII.

Building a dock at Whitby—Daniel Conant becomes security  
—Water communication—Some of the old steamboats—  
Captain Kerr—His commanding methods—Captain Scho-  
field—Crossing the Atlantic—Trials of emigrants—Death  
of a Scotch emigrant.

DANIEL CONANT, as a vessel owner on Lake Ontario for many years, felt keenly the great need for proper harbors and docks for loading and unloading his vessels. Up to the close of the Revolution of 1837-38 he had, when near home, made use of Whitby harbor, which was four miles westerly from Port Oshawa. But the great drawback to Whitby harbor was its shallow water, which caused much trouble in getting away from its single warehouse when his ships were fully laden. At this juncture of the long-felt want (about 1839) one Smith came along and contracted to build new docks at Whitby harbor, and to place them beside deep water. Daniel Conant became Smith's security on his bonds for £1,100, or \$4,400, for due fulfilment of the contract. It may be incidentally mentioned that the author most distinctly remembers that his people spoke of Smith as most eloquent in prayer, especially when in the family circle. This gift, added to the want of the

abounding clover, we have one of the best cattle and horse-raising countries in the world. If the West, which cannot grow clover and such light-colored barley as the Americans want, is content to grow wheat, we had better by far let the West do it and confine ourselves to the specialties in which they cannot compete with us.

In barley and marrowfat peas we have a monopoly. On account of the money we get for the clover-seed itself we are again ahead of them, and are more than ahead of them in raising horses and cattle, which feed upon our clover. There is something in our climate, soil and feed which produces horses large and strong, which are ahead of the West by far. Hence the westerners continually buy from us to get our stock.

To prove that wheat does not pay, I will instance that the rent of land in Ontario County is usually \$5.00 per acre. No matter if one owns his own farm, it is worth that as well. Seed, again, is worth \$2.00 per acre for wheat, and the cultivation and harvesting is worth another \$7.00 per acre, making the acre of wheat cost \$14 per acre. Now, at an average yield of twenty-five bushels per acre, and this sold at 75 cents per bushel, it yields \$18.75 per acre, or only \$4.75 more than the crop cost. It's no pay, and there's no other way to look at it, and hereafter we ought to raise wheat enough only for our own use, as long as it's such a drug on the market, especially so when we can do much better with peas, barley, cattle and horses. Let those interested ponder over this point.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Book farmers and their ways—Some Englishmen lack adaptive-ness—Doctoring sick sheep by the book—Failures in farming—Young Englishmen sent out to try life in Canada—The sporting farmer—The hunting farmer—The country school-teacher.

BOOK farmers come to us now and again. These are usually persons from Britain, possessing some means, but not sufficient to make them gentlemen at home. They have had no particular knowledge of farming at home, but since farming is supposed to be so easy a matter in Canada, they do not for a moment doubt their ability to get on with a farm. They resort to the best works on agriculture; and after the perusal of a few volumes really begin to flatter themselves that they have a very superior knowledge of farming, and are able to teach the Canadian on his native heath just how it ought to be done. Such a man purchases his farm and usually pays the cash down for it, and for his stock as well. Searching over the community he finds a pair of the heaviest horses he can, for the light Canadian horses, he knows, will be of no use to him, and he gets some long poles made at the nearest carpenter shop, and hires the village painter to paint them in black and red sections



my elbow! There are no gas bills to pay, nor water rates, and the mail comes to me daily, just as regularly as your city mail does. Then what do we want with your city?

Speaking of the post-office reminds me to say that the meanest hovel in the land can to-day put itself in almost daily communication with the best minds of the age. Such service the mail hourly and regularly performs for us, and is such a great factor to the pleasure of our lives, and yet we scarcely bestow a thought upon it. No, I do not propose to try to assume that life in the country would be very pleasant or desirable away from the mails. Given a daily mail and a comfortable country-seat, and easy access to the train, so that I may come to the city quickly and easily, if you have therein any real intellectual treat, and I yet fail to see what are the inducements to make one prefer life in the city to the free life in the country.

A rural life is a natural life, and a city life is an artificial life. Man in his first estate was an arboreal being, and in such surroundings thrived as he does to-day. Our Ontario families, as a rule, who leave good properties in the country to go into the cities, make a mistake in almost every respect. Even if the parents do not feel the trouble wrought upon their families during their lives, their children almost invariably do not make the men and women they would have made had they hung on and occupied the paternal acres. In most instances these are sold, and in a few years the money scattered. Had they held on to the paternal acres, and bought more, they

## CHAPTER XXI.

Manitoba and Ontario compared—Some instances from real life—Ontario compared with Michigan—With Germany—“Canada as a Winter Resort”—Inexpediency of ice-palaces and the like—Untruthful to represent this as a land of winter—Grant Allen’s strictures on Canada refuted—Lavish use of food by Ontario people—The delightful climate of Ontario.

WHEN the Manitoba fever broke out a good many persons in this locality, and some of my own tenants among the number, became uneasy and thought of emigrating. Some did so, but notably those who were not located on farms here. For a time they sent back glowing reports, and all seemed well, and even Ontario would not seemingly begin to compete with Manitoba. It is not, however, to be supposed that there have been no disappointments. One instance will suffice. A tenant farmer from near Whitby, worth about \$2,000, went to Manitoba a few years ago, and took up 320 acres of land. When the boom was on he wrote home that he could sell his land for \$10,000. Next fall passed. His wife came down visiting, and said that they had sold one-half their land for \$6.00 per acre in order to save the rest; also that they had threshed three days and only had fifty bushels of grain, and lamented that they had ever