

# "THE RIVER OF PEGBEGWACK"

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A SHORT time after the publication of "The Story of Moncton's First Store and Storekeeper", the author received a letter from a gentleman residing in St. Catherines, Ontario, asking her assistance to discover the former residence of his Loyalist ancestors who, in the early years of the last century, had lived in New Brunswick. The fly-leaf of an old Bible, once the possession of these forebears, Alpheus and Catren Polley, made known the fact that in the year 1808 they were residing in the Province of New Brunswick, County of Northumberland, Town of Moncton, River of Pegbegwack. The St. Catherines enquirer stated that he had never been able to find the River of Pegbegwack on any map of New Brunswick, and in consequence had not been able to determine the exact locality of the early home of these ancestors.

It seems probable that the "River of Pegbegwack" is the well known Petitcodiac River, and that the "Town of Moncton" designated the township or parish of Moncton of our day. The terms *town* and *township* were interchangeable at this time. In this province the term *parish* has long been used in place of township. As we know the meaning of "town," there was no town of Moncton for well nigh half a century after the Polley family had resided at or near the "Bend". However, the township of Moncton was never situated in the County of Northumberland; for, although that County then embraced Kent County of our day, its southern boundary never extended any farther south than it now extends. The ancestors of the St. Catherines gentleman were slightly in error in both spelling and geography, and we must conclude that the New Brunswick home of the Polley family was in the parish of Moncton, River of Petitcodiac and County of Westmorland. But far be it from the present-day population of New Brunswick to pass any unfavourable criticism on the deficiencies in education of any of our early settlers. With few schools, and these in widely separated districts, the pioneers of our province had but few educational advantages.

The peculiar spelling of the word Petitcodiac as Pegbegwack may be due to the fact that the early settlers in the Parish of Moncton were eight German families, and no doubt for many years their pronunciation of place and personal names would carry a strong German accent. An unlettered newcomer in the district would naturally accept their pronunciation of these

names, and write them down as they sounded to his ear. The student of early history in this province knows that our pioneers were largely phonetic in their manner of spelling.

The fly-leaf of Alpheus and his wife Catren's old Bible, which had made known that they had at one time resided in New Brunswick, also made known that in the year 1808 they had "emigrated from the town of Mongton to Upper Canada", taking with them their four children, two of whom had been "bourn in Mongton and two in the township of Hillsborrow". And the thought that comes is of the great undertaking at this date of the "emigration" of the Polley family from the "Bend" district to that part of Upper Canada—the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario—which appears to have been their destination. There were at this time almost no roads in New Brunswick, and very few roads in that section of the United States through which their journey must be made: These few roads were in wretched condition. What little travelling was done in those days was largely by using the waterways as highways transportation. We can but admire the courage of Alpheus and of Catren Polley in their decision to emigrate so, but courage was not lacking on the part of the pioneers of Canada.

However, Alpheus and Catren Polley were fortunate in that they had now a son of twenty years of age who, we should judge, was a dutiful son; and, although it would appear that the son John did not desire to change his place of abode from that of New Brunswick to Upper Canada, nevertheless, he felt that it was incumbent upon himself to accompany his parents and their family on their long and perilous journey, in order that he might afford them any assistance and protection of which they might be in need. But John Polley was a private in a Company of the Northumberland Regiment of Militia, and he must needs obtain a permit from the Captain of his Company before he could leave the province. This permit, which, along with the little old Bible once the possession of Alpheus and Catren Polley, is yet retained by their descendants, states that "John Polley is a private in Captain Simon Kollock's Company and is going on business to Canada and to return. Province of New Brunswick, County of Northumberland." It is signed by Simon Kollock, Captain, His Majesty's Late Loyal American Regiment—June 17, 1808.

On receiving his permit, John Polley must have hurried to join his parents at the "Bend", for two days later the Polley family had set off on their journey. Before leaving "Mongton", John Polley received a parting gift from one who appears to have had his best interests at heart. An inscription on the title page of the little old family Bible of the Polleys states that it had been given

to John Polley. In quaint old time style it reads—“John Polley, his book, given by a friend, Thomas Jann, Province of New Brunswick, County of Northumberland, River of Pegebegwack, Year of our Lord—1808, June 19th.” This was the date on which the Polley family left the “Bend”. Thomas Jann was, no doubt, Thomas Jones. The Jones family was one of the German families which had settled in the township of Moncton. Here again we have an instance of the German pronunciation of names in the Moncton district at this date.

In fancy, perhaps, we can picture the Polley family in the month of June, and “year of our Lord, 1808”, as they started on their long journey to Upper Canada. They would travel “light”, we would judge—possibly a couple of hair-covered boxes and some carpet bags would contain all their wordly possessions. John Polley must have felt a great responsibility in the safe conduct of his parents and their family on their “emigration”.

We are of necessity unable to know the exact route which the Polley family followed. But it is altogether likely that they would take passage from the “Bend” to St. John on some one of the small trading schooners which, sailing from St. John, occasionally visited the settlements at the head of the Petitcodiac River. The trading schooner might be ten days, or even longer, on its return trip to St. John, the length of time depending in part on weather and tidal conditions, and also on the number of settlements visited for trading purposes. There was certainly no schedule time for the movements of these trading vessels. The schooner “Weasel”, sailed by Trader Harper in the Bay of Fundy and its tributaries at this date, would at times spend three or four days alone in visiting the little settlements at the head of Cumberland Basin. We can, therefore, form but little idea of the length of time which it would take the Polley family to “make St. John”, the first lap of their long journey.

On reaching Saint John, the travellers must await passage on some sailing vessel bound for Boston, and again from Boston take passage for New York. From here they would probably sail up the Hudson River to its junction with its tributary, the Mohawk River. Here, should the Polley family decide to travel across the State of New York to their destination, the Niagara Peninsula, by the old military water route, they would proceed up the Mohawk River to its upper reaches, from whence a short portage would bring them to the upper reaches of the Oswego River. The Oswego River emptied into Lake Ontario, and thence they could again find some sailing craft which would convey them to the Niagara District. The last lap of their journey would be a “trek”

through the bush trail from one to two feet wide which led to their new home, the settlement near St. Catherines. However, it is just possible that the Polley family would choose to make a part of their journey across the State of New York by caravan, in which case they would travel the rough roads which would largely follow the water route. Whichever route the travellers followed, whether that of the water ways or rough roads and bush trails, the trip would be accompanied by much discomfort, privation and suffering. It is quite possible that it would take them three months to make their journey from the "town of Mongton" to St. Catherines, a journey which in our day can be made by railway, with every comfort and even luxury, in less than twenty-four hours, and by aeroplane in one quarter of that time.

It is most probable that the populous and early settled State of New York would be one of the foremost of the American States in progress and development, and that its highways of transportation at this time and through the coming years would equal those of any part of the Continent. Yet, in the year 1829, some twenty years after the Polley family had crossed the State of New York, Egerton Ryerson, educationist and journalist of Toronto, made the trip from there across the State of New York in order to purchase a printing press, and he tells us it took him six days to reach New York City, travelling steadily day and night by stage coach and on horseback. However, the Polley family reached their journey's end, and there they lived the pioneer life of the settlers in the Niagara District, now one of the most prosperous districts of Ontario. We should judge that in many respects the pioneer life here differed little from that of the pioneer life on the River of Pegebegwack. In the "Bend" district the settlers had provided themselves with the few necessities, which they purchased from the trader, by means of barter. The most popular medium of exchange of the settlers on the Petitcodiac River was grindstones. On the Niagara Peninsula it was potash. Deer meat and maple sugar were also in demand.

Many long years have passed since Alpheus and Catren Polley and their children settled in the Niagara District of "Upper Canada". Long since they have given place to others who, too, have "had their day and ceased to be". Alpheus and Catren Polley's descendants of the present day are living surrounded by comforts and luxuries undreamed of by these, their New Brunswick forebears. Yet amidst the wealth of their many possessions they still lovingly treasure John Polley's military permit, and his little old Bible given him as a parting gift "by a friend, Thomas Jann", who in long gone days dwelt in the little settlement near the "Bend" on the banks of the "River of Pegebegwack".