

HISTORY IN A VALLEY

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THE farming community known as Lower Stewiacke lies along the lower reaches of the Stewiacke river. This river flows from the forest some five miles, as the crow flies, from where it empties into the Shubenacadie; but it is a fickle stream, changing the direction of its flow continually, so that in five miles of valley there are no fewer than ten miles of river. When it flows into the open it is a deep, silent stream, decorous and straight-running, the last in the world to be thought capable of erratic tendencies. But once free from the hampering hills and the shadows of the forest, it becomes a creature of moods, and wanders at will over the valley. It flows between wide intervalles dotted with elms, and under long rows of decrepit willows, and, presently indulges in a chuckle as it falls over the first of a long series of rapids. It laughs along the base of School-house Hill, and beneath the bridge makes an elaborate detour to linger under the willows at Willow Bend; then turning about, it flows back, to pass within gunshot of itself across a narrow wooded isthmus.

Thus far, the course of the river lies in a vast, more or less circular enclosure resembling a Roman amphitheatre. The river runs round the edge at the bottom of the hills; the hills rise to the forests which crown the heights; wide marshes and intervalles stretch from side to side. The railroad embankment touches one edge of the bowl, and the river passes under it at Dickies Mill. "Torbay" was the ancient name for this part of the valley, though it is long since forgotten for another, more prosaic.

Below Torbay, the valley is not so wide; the hills are closer together, and the river has not such freedom to wander. Marsh mud from the bay, brought by the tide, lies deep on the bottom; the banks are feet-thick with it, and the voice of the river is stilled. It slips without a sound along its course through wide, silent marshes, passes below the town on the hill, drops beneath another bridge, and glides without a murmur into the murky bosom of the Shubenacadie.

The valley was a favorite haunt of the Micmac Indians. For centuries they hunted along the river, and fished its waters. In the spring of the year, the smelt came from the sea in prodigious

numbers and was followed, in early summer, by the shad and salmon; during the fishing season, the Indian made the valley his home. The farmer knows his camping grounds; his plow still turns up old arrow heads and primitive weapons, fist hatchets and the like. In Torbay, on the north side of the big amphitheatre, a high, uniform gravel-bank, topped with age-old pine trees, stretches across the isthmus formed by the wandering river. Geologists say it is the beach of an ancient sea. Whatever its origin, the Indians found it useful as a portage. In passing up and down the river, to avoid the long struggle with the rapids, they left the river at one end of the embankment, carried their canoes along the top, and launched them again at the other end. Close under the Ridge are numerous small springs, justly famous for their water. Along the Ridge, and near these springs, the Indians placed their camps. Until a few years ago, Indians from the Reserve at Truro came every year to spend a few weeks in the valley. They encamped on the Ridge near a spring. No one knew why they came; they did not seem to know themselves. The women sat before the wigwams making baskets, while the men tramped the forests in aimless fashion, or sat smoking beneath the trees. They ceased coming by degrees, and now they come no more. With a primitive people custom dies hard; the practice of centuries is not easily forgotten. To-day the Red man is seldom seen in the valley.

Early in the eighteenth century, Acadian farmers from Minas discovered the marshes along the Stewiacke, and came and settled in the valley. They built their homes on the north bank of the river, where it empties into the Shubenacadie. The French settlement at Cobequid was less than twenty miles away, and the overland trail to the parent colony at Minas crossed the Shubenacadie near the village, just fifty yards below the junction of the rivers. This ford was widely known, and was called the "Crossing Place".

The village, named Hebert after the first settler, prospered greatly. Half a century of patient toil diked the marshes, brought large tracts of land under cultivation, and filled the marshlands with herds and flocks. Spinning wheels hummed in the village, and the ceaseless industry of the people proved that he who works need fear no want.

The ford was continually bringing outsiders to the village. De Ramezay and his men crossed the river here in 1748. One bitterly cold night in February, they came up the north bank of the Shubenacadie dragging sledges on which they carried provisions. An endeavour to cross the mouth of the Shubenacadie had almost cost the lives of the ten men who made the attempt, so the little

army marched up to the Crossing Place. That night, two hundred men slept around great fires on the river bank, and next morning they crossed the river on their way to Grand Pre. A week later they fell on the English as they slept in their beds, and won a bloody victory. When, in 1750, La Loutre, the missionary priest, organized the raid on the little settlement at Dartmouth, the village at the Crossing Place saw the gathering of the tribes, and may also have seen the bloody trophies which the Indians carried on their return. An English officer and his men visited Hebert in 1754:

We forded the Shubenacadie where the Stewiacke or Torbay river falls into it to a village called Pierre Hebert. This is a fine settlement, has a vast quantity of the best marshlands belonging to it. . . . We came so suddenly upon the inhabitants that they had not time to escape from us, though they were wonderfully dismayed; we soon removed their fears, and we purchased some refreshments from them, which was a happy relief as it was short commons with most of us.

What became of the people at the Crossing Place, it is impossible to say, though it is known that some found their way at the time of the expulsion to the Isle St. Jeans. There they endured great privation and suffering. The names of a few are to be found in the list of those who were later taken to France. The village itself was burned, and the homes in the valley were destroyed. Vestiges of the little settlement remain to this day. Several old cellars have not yet been filled in, two wells are in good condition, and a number of old apple trees still bear fruit. A perennial silence reigns at the Crossing Place and over the marshes where, two centuries ago, the Acadian milkmaid drove home her cows and the song of the workmen lightened the labour of dike building.

For some years after the removal of the Acadians, there was little immigration to the new world. For seven years England was busy fighting, and in the new world England and France were at death's grip. Settlers were not anxious to move into a country where war was the order of the day and which could, quite conceivably, become enemy territory. But after the capture of Louisburg and the fall of Quebec, settlers began to pour in. In 1760, the French farms at Cobequid were settled by people from New England, and the little town of Truro was founded.

The only means of communication by land between the new town and Halifax was by way of the old French trail which crossed the river at the Crossing Place and continued overland to join the road running between Windsor and Fort Sackville. People from New England were not satisfied with a "cow-path", and solicited

the Governor to construct or to help to construct a road joining the two places. It was decided to follow the old trail, to widen and improve it; and, in order to protect this highway and at the same time to bring settlers to the fertile lands along the Stewiacke and the Shubenacadie, the Government ordered a fort to be erected at the confluence of the Stewiacke and Shubenacadie rivers. This fort was completed by October 18, 1761, and the soldiers were put to work on the portion of the road between the fort and Truro. The road was never finished. Parts of it are in use to-day, but for the most part it can be traced with difficulty through thick forests. What was built was well built, as farmers in the valley who have tried to get their plows through the rocks can testify. Why the road was never built, and why Truro remained for thirty years without means of communication with Halifax save by woodland paths, has not yet been explained.

The fort was called Fort Ellis. According to some authorities, it was named for Governor Ellis, who had been appointed Governor of the province in 1761. But tradition has another version. In 1762 four families of the name of Ellis came to the valley; their descendants live in the vicinity to this day. And, according to family tradition, the fort was not named for the Governor. The four Ellis families had landed at Halifax after being ship-wrecked off the coast; from Halifax they had gone to Windsor, and the early frosts of the winter had found them floating on the tide up the Shubenacadie. Winter was coming on, and the sight of a block-house on the river bank suggested a comfortable winter residence. So the four Ellis families lived that winter in the fort and—according to tradition—the fort has ever since been called “Ellis”. Tradition, in this case, appears to be at fault. The controversy is settled by a letter dated “Fort Ellis, Oct. 18, 1761”, written by Lieutenant Shipton, the officer in charge of its construction, to announce the completion of the fort. The fort was named before ever the Ellis families left Ireland; but it was a strange coincidence that the hand of fate should have guided them to their first residence in the new land for them to find it already named “Ellis”.

When the Ellis brothers came to the valley, they found all the best land taken up. Colonel Wilmot, soon to become Governor, and Captain Arthur Gould of the Council, had secured a grant of all the land on the north bank of the Stewiacke extending far up to the head of the marshes and including Torbay. This was unfortunate, for it held back the settling of the valley for many years. The lands changed hands many times, but remained the property of speculators in Halifax.

Mariner Marshall came to the valley in 1769, and went far up beyond Torbay. He had served his country well, commanded a boat at Louisburg, and later at Quebec. He proved himself a good farmer, too, and left a well-stocked farm when he died. Other settlers came eventually and settled on the wide fertile acres in Torbay, some buying, others renting, their farms. They were New Englanders for the most part, originally from North Ireland.

The first few years were hard ones for the settlers. The valley was cut off from communication with the outside world, save for a narrow woodland path to Halifax. What few supplies the settlers did not themselves produce were brought on horseback from the city. Some were not so fortunate as to have a horse, and more than one man tramped the fifty miles to Halifax to bring back on his shoulder the half bushel of seed wheat that would give him his bread for the following winter. The staple articles of food were bread, fish and tea. A Scottish minister, new to the country, passed through the valley in 1785, and after a week of "bread, fish and tea", three times a day, without variation even in the order of serving, came to the sad conclusion that the resources of the country were indeed limited. He has left a vivid picture of life as it was in the valley at that time; the houses, small and built of logs; the clothes of the people of the simplest kind, and all homespun. The history of those years is a story of hardship and struggle, of unceasing toil and drudgery; the story of stern men and patient women at grips with nature, and the whole painful process by which the foundation of a nation's greatness is well and truly laid. It is a story that cannot well be told. The memory retains outstanding incidents, when the usual and the ordinary have become dim and obscure.

No other event in the early history of the valley can compare in importance with the building of the Great Eastern Highway. In 1792 the road was built connecting Halifax with Truro and Pictou. It passed through the valley at Torbay, crossing the river some four miles above its mouth. That road was a marvel in more ways than one. Even to-day, after much has been done to improve it, it remains a remarkable study in inclined planes; for only on rare occasions does it run horizontal. But to the valley people it meant more than did the railroad half a century later. It was the first of those threads which, in the next century, were to bind the valley as with bonds of steel to the great world outside. Three times weekly the up-bound coach rushed from the perilous heights of Oak Hill down into the valley, dashed with tremendous clatter across the bridge, and vanished over the distant top of Mile Hill. Sometimes a troop of soldiers passed along, and on one occasion a

deserter from Halifax came into the valley and lay hidden in a barn on a hill by the side of the road. The soldiers came looking for him, and he left the barn and ran down the hill. They shot him as he ran, and buried him where he fell; a garden covers the spot to-day. There is a happier tale of a tall English boy named Burrows—or Burris as it is now spelled—who came into the valley and attached himself to the household of a prominent farmer there. He proved his worth to the good man for whom he worked, and stayed with him through the winter. One day in the spring, the soldiers came. The lady of the house sat churning before the fireplace when they entered to search. She had hidden Burrows in the chimney. The soldiers searched without success, while the lady sat by her churn and poured forth the vials of her wrath. She had been born in Ireland, and to this day the virulence of her tongue is a matter of tradition in the valley. They were on the point of going away, when they discovered the family wash lying on the grass, and with it—a military shirt. Burrows came forth from his hiding place, but Mr. Pollock, his employer, was a man of influence and means; he purchased the freedom of the boy, and the soldiers left him in the valley. Many of his descendants are now men of note in the province.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of expansion and increasing contact with the world outside. Torbay remained for many years the centre of population. An inn was built on the river bank, and soon after a smithy. After Waterloo, settlers came to the New World in large numbers, and the valley received several of new inhabitants at that time. Admiral Cochrane, of the British Navy, was stationed at Halifax for four years after 1814 and, while there, purchased the Fort Ellis estate. He imported stock from Scotland, and did much to promote agriculture and stock breeding. By 1820 most of the intervale land along the river was under cultivation, and the settlers began to cut into the heavier forests on the hills. During the war of 1812, times were brisk in Halifax and the valley farmers seem to have done some trading, taking their produce down by ox-cart, but the years of depression which followed discouraged trading, and the farmer tended to remain almost completely independent, relying on his farm for food and his flocks for clothing.

About 1840, it was proposed to abandon the old road over the hills and to build a level road. The measure met with no little opposition, and was discussed with much heat in the columns of the *Acadian Recorder*. There were many who could see nothing to be gained by having a level road; it was finally decided to build

a portion of the proposed highway to see what would happen. This was done, and it was found that the people preferred, for the most part, to travel a level road rather than a tilted one, though a number of determined individuals refused, to the end of their days, to be seen on it—a matter of principle, it may be supposed.

The new road was opened in 1843. It did not pass through Torbay, but crossed the river three miles further down, just one mile above its mouth. The coach passed no more by way of Oak Hill and the inn on the river bank. The smithy closed its doors and moved down to the new road; a new inn appeared, a carriage builder opened a shop, a church was built, and Hiram Hyde, with his fine new coach and four, dashed at furious pace along the new road. With the coming of the level highway, trade with the city revived and farmers from Truro and Stewiacke drove the long way, remembering, many of them, when they made the same journey by a woodland path. The spinning wheel and the loom still continued in use, but the dandies began to appear in "store clothes", and the ladies of the valley included in their wardrobe gowns, reserved for special occasions, which were not their own handiwork. Strange commodities from the outside world, luxuries then, necessities now, began to play an ever increasing part in the life of the valley people. The long term of isolation was at an end; independence was giving way to interdependence.

In time came rumours of a railroad. It was well known that Joe Howe had gone to England to see about it, and one April day in 1851, after the coach had passed, a lanky youth was sent running across the fields to spread the news that "Joe Howe is back, bringing the railway with him", and, with visions of a man with a sack on his back, he published the tidings through the valley. The Ancients gathered at Pollock's Inn to discuss the matter, with dire forebodings of the evils and ills that would ensue, for few could contemplate the coming of a railroad with equanimity. There was the difficulty of getting cows across it, and the appalling calamity of having one's farm cut in two, with no way to get round to the other side. And indeed, what good would it do? One could take one's own potatoes to town by ox-cart, and it was certain there would never be enough work to keep the thing busy!

It was while the railroad was building across the valley that there occurred an event which lingers as a tradition among the valley people. A construction camp, situated on the north side of the valley and known as Corkey's Patch, was inhabited by a colony of Irishmen. The good Protestants of the valley were not cordial in their dealings with the new-comers; they did not approve

of their religion, of their manner of life, or of their excessive fondness for strong drink. The valley people were undeniably peace-loving, but relations were strained, and the denizens of Corkey's Patch not indisposed to quarrel. At the close of a riotous holiday, a number of rowdies, homeward-bound, called upon Sam Pollock, the inn-keeper, to quench their thirst. Sam was known the whole country over, and is still remembered as a man of prodigious strength of body and a fighter that never knew defeat. In passing years, local heroes tend to grow in respect of their heroic qualities, and so it is with Sam. It is related how in a famous trial of strength with a man named Greene, who had travelled far to meet him, Sam ended a two-hour struggle by throwing his opponent completely over the cow-shed. Another version declares it was the wood-pile and, while such conflicting accounts seem difficult to reconcile, it is universally agreed that Greene was never the same man afterwards.

The home-bound Irishmen soon made it evident that they were bent on trouble; Sam Pollock, roused from bed, was not in an amiable frame of mind and, when he discovered that his midnight guests had no intention of paying for their drinks, his wrath overflowed. A well aimed blow from one of the visitors knocked the candle to the floor and the fight was on. Rob Kent, a husky youth of eighteen, was courting that fine night, and arrived at the inn as Sam went down under the mob of drink-crazy Irishmen. A great-boot stood near and, seizing it, Kent went into action swinging the boot, flail-fashion, with all his young strength into the knot of struggling men. He was just in time; Sam was down, still fighting hard, but they were hammering him with a bottle, and not even Sam could stand that long. At the unexpected interruption, the crowd turned on Kent and drove him to the staircase where he stood, swinging the boot. Freed for the minute from some of his enemies, Sam dragged himself to the fireplace and, locking his hand into a large conch-shell, got to his feet. At this minute, the house door opened and Mrs. Pollock, wrapped in a quilt, stood there holding a candle above her head. The tide of battle turned. Sam was thoroughly angry, the Irishmen did not seem inclined to linger, and Sam with his conch, and Kent with his boot, aided their departure. There is no record of anyone being killed, though it was through no fault of Sam Pollock that everyone got away. This was a big event in the valley, and by it the coming of the railroad is remembered.

The railroad passed near the little village and Stewiacke, as it was called, grew in importance. Two things contributed to its development. As the nearest point on the railroad to the ship

building centre at Maitland, great quantities of ship building material came by way of the village. A spur was built out to the bank of the Shubenacadie, a mile distant, and boats plied up and down the river. Still more important was the growth of the lumbering industry. To the early settlers, the forest was an encumbrance to be cut down and burned as rapidly as possible; but with the coming of the steam saw-mill, lumber became a marketable commodity, and the valley people had a new source of income. They spent the winter in the woods, and in the spring the logs were floated down river to the mill. The growth of a second industry helped greatly in the material advancement of the people, and does much to explain the comfortable homes and present prosperity of the valley farms. Mills and shipping yards were established near the town, and added to its population.

The later part of the century saw the growth of the public school system in the valley. There had been a privately owned and operated school in Torbay, early in the century, and the percentage of illiteracy in the valley was never very large. Men who were of school age in the thirties show the result of careful training in the use of the English language as seen in the records of public meetings. The purity and simplicity of their language is strangely reminiscent of the Scriptures. Valley people were good Presbyterians, and the Scottish minister who visited them in 1785 found the Bible in their homes. The King James version left an indelible impress on the valley folk, and the admirable directness and clarity of speech, still to be found in some of the older people, had its origin in a life-long acquaintance with the Scriptures.

By the end of the century the valley was in close contact with the city and, through it, with the world beyond. The farmer was no longer isolated; he brought to his table the fruits and spices of the Orient, and the produce of the whole wide world was his for the buying. A mutual dependence had taken the place of the forced isolation of earlier years. Milk and butter from the valley farms went every morning to the city, and the produce of a dozen cities found its way to the farm.

The first quarter of the twentieth century was a period of marked progress. It was characterized by great improvement in farming methods. The application of scientific principles to stock breeding and cultivation of the soil, and the use of commercial fertilizers, improved the farm animals and increased production. An agricultural society was formed by the more progressive farmers, and a yearly fair encouraged competition in stock breeding and vegetable culture. Application of modern machine methods did much

to lighten labour. The internal combustion engine became the farmer's best friend, sawing his wood, threshing his grain, and performing a great number of smaller tasks which had previously to be done by hand. A variety of machines came to help him in cutting and curing his hay, binding his grain and sowing his fields. The odd man still regards the experimental farms with disfavour, and is not at all convinced that one can learn of farming from books. An occasional lunar enthusiast still looks upon the moon as an all-wise councillor in matters agricultural. But for the most part the valley farmer is inclined to be modern in his outlook, and learns readily—when he is sufficiently convinced that there is something to learn.

The little village on the river bank grew into a town. A planing mill was established, and later on a peg factory. A number of minor industries, peculiar to a farming town, came into existence, and with the coming of the motor car, an up-to-date garage and machine shop. Three churches were built; not because they were needed—one would comfortably accommodate the town—but churches are undeniably a source of architectural beauty, and as such should be encouraged. Town planning is still in its infancy as far as Stewiacke is concerned; but a few years ago, a wise and autocratic town council decreed certain changes. They widened streets and moved buildings in a most disconcerting manner, and in so doing added much to the potential beauty of the town and but little to their own popularity; the townspeople share a human failing in regarding an increase in taxation as a heinous offence.

A high shaft of marble stands among the trees in the town square. The Great War left its mark on the valley; the monument is engraved with a long list of names.

The town is the business centre of the community; but Torbay, or East Stewiacke as it is called now, has its own church and school. The greatest single influence on the development of the community has been the increased efficiency in methods of communication. In place of the trail of 1785, a wide, well-built highway passes through, and unites the valley with the world outside. A hundred years ago, the settler made the trip to town in three days, in two if he hurried. To-day he makes the same trip in as many hours. The railroad brings to him the produce of a thousand factories and of every climate. In the old days, he who lived on the hilltop could communicate with a fellow-farmer across two miles of valley—provided his lungs were good and his neighbour's hearing not defective. To-day, the farmer can carry on a conversation with a man in Halifax or New York without leaving his house. News of

Waterloo came to the valley six weeks after the battle was fought; to-day the state of the King's health, as he retires for the night, is noted with concern by his loyal subjects in Stewiacke one hour later. The valley farmer can spend his evening comfortably at home, listening to Grand Opera from New York, a play from London, or a symphony from Amsterdam. His daily newspaper, delivered to his door, tells in detail the world events of the day gone by. The independent household of a century ago has given way to one which must rely to considerable extent on the business world for the comforts and necessities of life.

"The old order changeth, giving place to new", but with it all, the river runs along its course much as it did a hundred and sixty years ago when Mariner Marshall built his lonely home on the bank. The old settlers sleep beneath the pines by the river side, their labour done, and new generations follow in their footsteps. They use new implements, and their habits of life differ somewhat from those of their forebears, but they are the same sober, hard-working, law-abiding people, conservative in their views and not given to hasty change. They are good citizens; but as makers of history, they are utter failures. It has been wisely said, "Happy that people whose annals are brief".