

WAS BRIGHAM YOUNG A NEW BRUNSWICKER?

By K. A. BAIRD

THE Mormon Church was founded by Joseph Smith, but the man who made it a success, leading the exodus from Illinois to the Great Salt Lake Valley, was Brigham Young. The story persists that he was a native of New Brunswick, not born in Whitingham, Vermont, as biographers state.

About one hundred and fifty years ago immigrants from across the Atlantic, especially Scotland, settled around the pleasant bays and coves of the southeastern coast of Grand Lake, New Brunswick. Some have left their names, as White's Cove, Syphers' Cove, Wiggins' Cove, Young's Cove. The latter is said to be named after an ancestor of Brigham Young. There are two sources of the story, which agree in their chief points. It is known and told by present residents of Young's Cove, men of more than three score years, who were born before Brigham Young died, and who think their grandfathers knew and did business with his father. Also, the story was published by Dr. E. Stone Wiggins in an article in the *Toronto Mail*, dated Saint John, N. B., January 10, 1876. This was one year before Brigham Young died, but some sixty years after the events narrated. Thirty-five years after that, in April 1911, D. R. Jack, having found a copy of the story, read it before the Loyalist society of Saint John with comments indicating that he thought it might well be true, but had not been proven. Later in the year (October) he read another paper before the same Society, claiming the story as written by Dr. Wiggins was not true. His chief proofs seem to be statements from American sources considerably later than Dr. Wiggins. By harmonizing some minor differences between the story related by residents living in the late 1930s and that written by Dr. Wiggins sixty-two years before, we arrive at the following.

Peter Young, a blacksmith, a Dutchman, and a United Empire Loyalist, settled in 1786 on a farm later occupied by Isaac Snodgrass, and still later by his son, Robert Bruce Snodgrass. The father of Isaac Snodgrass was a fellow immigrant with Peter Young. The shop where Peter worked has long since been out of existence, but its outlines are shown by a mound. On the farm as late as 1938 stood a building, well over a hundred years old, used as a workshop. Its shingles

were hand made, split and shaved, and about one and a half times as long as modern shingles. They were still sound, and may possibly have been made by Peter Young himself.

Present-day farmers of Young's Cove harvest their crops with mowing, reaping, and pitching machines, hayloaders, and potato diggers, but some of the older men still know how to and do mow a small crop of buckwheat with scythe and cradle. Less than one hundred years ago their ancestors handled their hay with forks made of crotched sticks. Peter Young, who is reported to have been six feet three inches tall, a very powerful man, but disfigured by smallpox, made a strong two-pronged fork of iron. Some say he made it for his son, Abraham, a handsome strong young man, who was always breaking forks. After his own crop was harvested it is said Peter used to rent the fork to his neighbours for a penny a day. It passed into possession of Benjamin Ellsworth, brother-in-law of Peter Young, thence to Robert Snodgrass, who purchased the Ellsworth farm. Early in this century it was acquired by the predecessor of the New Brunswick Museum; and it is at present in that institution.

In 1785 Archibald MacLean, a United Empire Loyalist, had settled at Cumberland Bay. Abraham Young married Catherine MacLean, daughter of Archibald, and sister to Captain John MacLean, from whom Dr. Wiggins got some of this information in 1875-6. Captain MacLean was then an old man, but had been born after the family came to Grand Lake. Catherine was a small woman and considered peculiar. Her own family said she was "never known to shed a tear". Her husband, Abraham Young, was illiterate. They settled on a farm later owned by Gilbert Wiggins, J.P., whose grandfather purchased it from Abraham Young when he left the district. Here Brigham Young was born March 24, 1801, the same night his grandfather, Archibald MacLean, died. He and two brothers were said to have been baptized at the residence of Ludovic Syphers in the parish of Canning by Rev. Richard Clark, rector of Gagetown, on March 3, 1806, but there is no record of this in church books at Gagetown covering that period. His brothers were Peter, Martin, George, Archibald, and Henry. One sister, Rhoda, died in infancy. Four sisters were born after the family moved away. They were said to have settled in various parts of the United States. Peter died at age three, and Archibald died as a result of exposure on the journey up the Saint John River. Henry was drowned in the Alleghany River in

New York, in 1864. Martin and George were living in the United States in 1876, having frequently corresponded with their maternal uncle, Captain John MacLean.

In 1808 Abraham Young moved with his family, some say to Canada, some say to a place on the Saint John River above Fredericton. His wife travelled with three horses, riding one, leading a second, while her son Brigham rode the third. They had to swim the Jemseg River. Abraham went down Grand Lake, through the Jemseg River, and up the Saint John by canoe. One report says it was a bark canoe, another says he cut down a huge pine tree and made a dug-out. Both kinds of canoe were in use on Grand Lake and its tributaries as late as the beginning of this century. Into his canoe he put most of his worldly goods, including a churn full of axes, which he hoped to sell to advantage in his new location. He also had about £30 in silver coins in the churn.

It is said that the travellers were in a great hurry. About ten miles below Fredericton Captain MacLean met Abraham Young, recognized the four children and called to him to stop until he spoke to them, but he would not. Further down the river he met his sister who was dismounted. At her request he assisted her to remount, when she and young Brigham promptly galloped their horses off. They arrived at their destination before Abraham, who found rough going after passing Fredericton. His canoe upset and he lost everything save the children and the canoe. Of course the axes and money sank. One story says he travelled the rest of the way on foot. At any rate he reached the new location, set up as a blacksmith, and soon had lots of work. Meanwhile his wife worked the new farm with help from Brigham. Ere long enough money was earned to pay for the place. Some years later the farm was sold to an Irishman who lived a few miles away. Brigham was sent with the deed to get the money, £325, *but he took the money and fled to the United States.* His parents thought he must have been robbed and murdered, and even had the purchaser brought before the grand jury. Later they also went to the United States. One report says the mother learned of her son's unfaithfulness and died broken-hearted. The father is said to have lived and died in the State of Vermont.

There is not space here to argue for or against the truth of this story. Some indications of its possible truth may be noted, however. It does not reflect much credit upon the early morals of the prophet; and, if true, a man of Brigham

Young's type would doubtless prefer another version of his ancestry and early life. The book mentioned by D. R. Jack, *American Ancestry*, was published in 1899, twenty-two years after Brigham's death. It is apparently the source of information used by Werner in his biography, published in 1925. It is not too much to presume that this information came from Mormon sources, and may be on a par with the statement of some of Brigham Young's disciples, quoted by Werner, to the effect that when he was born heavenly sounds were heard and a star did some special twinkling. These American stories agree with that from New Brunswick in stating the year of his birth to be 1801, but *they* say the month was June.

What would lead us to give any credence to the story related above? It was first published in 1876, one year before Young's death and twenty-three before *American Ancestry*. At that time Dr. Wiggins seems to have discussed the matter with Captain John MacLean, who evidently believed that the leader of the Mormons was the same person he had known as a boy, and whose grandfather gave his name to Young's Cove. He had corresponded with two other nephews living in the United States, who would surely have corrected his impression had it been wrong. Moreover, one would imagine he would have been more anxious to think his idea wrong than to believe it right, since at that time Mormonism with its theories and practice of polygamy was considered a most disgraceful thing by most people in New Brunswick. Yet Dr. Wiggins seems to have gathered from the old Captain, as from others, that the above story is true. To absolutely prove or disprove it is doubtless impossible now.