

BRUDENELL

ADA MACLEOD

BRUDENELL—with the final syllable accented—a place-name that would have attracted the euphony-loving ear of Stevenson—was known of old as Trois Rivieres. It is one of the historic spots of Prince Edward Island, younger by only a few years than the very earliest settlements of St. Peters, Malpeque, Savage Harbour, and Port La Joie, and more dramatic in its story than any of these. Professor Harvey places the date of the founding of Part La Joie by De Gotteville and De La Ronde in the year 1720, so that the capital of “the Island” has thus a seniority of twenty-nine years over the city of Halifax. The pointed headland of Brudenell, with fair rivers flowing on either side, projects into what is now known as Georgetown Harbour. On its summit, two centuries ago, a man of vision and abounding energy built a great work which he deemed of vital import to the then newly-settled Ile St. Jean. But soon the stroke of war laid it low, and the smoothing finger of time passed over it, so that now nothing remains to mark the site save a shadowy “dimple in the wheat.”

On a July day in the year 1731, the young king Louis XV was summoned from among his dissolute companions by “honest Fleury” to sign some necessary documents, among them being a grant of land to the “Company of the East” in Ile St. Jean, a portion of that monarch’s domain in the western world which was so soon to slip from his unworthy hand. This company consisted of four merchants—Jean Pierre Roma and Phillip Narcis of Paris; Joseph du Boccage of Havre; and Claude Catterel of Rouen. Their grant consisted of lands drained by the rivers now known as the Brudenell, Montague, and Cardigan, with a frontage of 3500 arpents, and depth of 40 arpents, but not to include land already occupied by settlers. The concession was to be held as freehold estate subject to fealty to the king’s representative at Louisburg, the only conditions being the reservation of all oak timber for use in building His Majesty’s ships, and the reporting of any minerals found on the land. The Company was to bring from France the first year eighty settlers, and thirty each succeeding year, with the necessary stock and implements for giving them a start; while their moral interests were to be safeguarded by the erection of one or more churches.

The other shareholders belonged to St. Malo and Bordeaux. De Roma, who had been the moving spirit in the scheme and was made Director, at once took up residence on Brudenell Point, and plunged into the task of carrying out his ideals of an enterprise which would not only bring prosperity to the Company, but would form the nucleus of a permanent colony and an extensive commerce.

The giant trees of Brudenell were clad in the delicate tracery of June when De Roma's axemen laid them low; and a Herculean task it was to root out the great green stumps—accomplished only with the aid of levers 35 feet in length, turning on a pivot of 20 feet. After extracting 6000 stumps the whole area was made level as a floor for the construction of his log buildings which numbered nine in all. Two of these were 80 ft. in length for the use of the Company and for the fishermen; three of them were 50 ft. long—for the employees of the Company, for the officers of the Navy, and a storehouse; one 62 ft. long for the master workmen and their assistants; and three were 40 ft. in length for a forge, a stable, and a bakery. Roma reports that these required 3000 posts, 500 planks, 1500 joists, 450 rafters, 170 beams, 50 flagstones, which were brought over the ice on sleds. Brick was made from clay on the spot, and thirteen huge chimneys constructed, which were kept going night and day for seven months in the year. According to his first report, eight hundred quintals of flour had been made into bread in the huge oven. Household supplies were kept fresh by means of a refrigerator supplied with water by four pumps, while a bubbling spring on the cape gave crystal drinking-water to the colony until it was blocked by ice in the winter.

Around each building was a vegetable garden enclosed by a brush fence, and other similar plots were planted with peas and wheat. The yield from the fertile soil was so encouraging that the cape was cleared for a further couple of miles, and an underground storehouse, 120 by 20 feet and 7½ feet deep, was prepared for storing future crops. Roads were constructed to Port la Joie and other surrounding settlements, although Roma acknowledges that they left much to be desired—it being necessary “to lift the leg slightly to get over on the other side of the fallen trees.”

For fishing he built six shallops and a number of canoes and flatboats, while he transported 300 tons of stone which went to the building of a pier 45 by 10 feet. Of his further plans for the trade of the Colony, Professor Harvey says:

The five vessels of the Company—*Le Michel*, *St. Jean*, *Le Postillion*, *L'Angelique*, and *La Belle Faucon*—were to be employed partly in the transportation of fish to France and of commodities

to Isle St. Jean; and partly also in trade between Quebec and Isle St. Jean and Isle St. Jean and the West Indian Islands. From Quebec he would bring food for his own establishment and for Isle St. Jean as a whole, until they should become self-supporting, in which event he could use the same vessels to carry surplus products for the use of the garrison at Louisburg. To pay for the flour and biscuits brought from Quebec, he proposed to carry cod and planks to the West Indies and bring back molasses and sugar and coffee. Thus a three-cornered commerce would be built up, in addition to his trade with France.

But Roma was one of those curious ill-starred people who, with the best of plans, and the expenditure of endless labour, always seemed to fall just short of success. As early as 1715 he complained that the fortune he had amassed had been ruined by M. Demarest; that a concession he had obtained in St. Domingo in order to retrieve that fortune had been taken from him by the Duc d'Orléans; and that his effort to enter the service of the King of Sardinia in 1726 had been blocked by the French Ambassador at Turin.

The same ill-fortune seemed to pursue him in the New World. For one thing, he seems to have been, as Carlyle's mother said of her distinguished son, "gey ill to live wi"; so that in a short time difference arose between him and the other members of the Company who were not so disinterested as himself and cared solely for profit. After the first year they refused him any further financial support, and he was compelled to go to France in 1736 and make arrangements with them and with the Minister to become sole proprietor of the concession, receiving also the position of Commandant, under Louisburg.

He crossed swords with Abbé Bierne, chaplain of the Company, on the question of authority; and two of the King's officers, St. Ovide of Louisburg and De Pensens of Port la Joie had to be called in to make peace. In Roma's well-planned scheme of things there seemed to have been no room even for Cupid, because shortly after this incident, he lodged a complaint with the Commissaire at Ile Royale against the Father Superior of the Recollects on the ground that the latter had connived with two young habitants in enticing away from his service two comely young maids he had brought from France. He demanded the instant return of his domestics, and amends from the Father Superior.

Sir Andrew Macphail lays much of the blame of his ill-success on the spirit that prompted his voluminous reports "written with such meticulous care that one wonders how he found time to do anything else but write". Herein lies the sign of failure. "A colony that is concerned about making reports is doomed."

In 1751 Colonel Franquet, an officer of engineers, was sent from France to plan a system of defence for the French possessions in the gulf of St. Lawrence. Of his visit to Isle St. Jean he left a detailed account, which was translated and summarized by the late Professor John Caven of Prince of Wales College. As he sailed up and down the spacious harbour of Trois Rivieres "taking soundings, examining headlands, and exploring the three great rivers that like so many highways offered safe communication with the interior of the country, he was struck with the magnificence of the situation, and its importance for a seaport whether in peace or war. The entrance in every condition of the tide was safe to ships of the heaviest tonnage, with an abundance of deep water inside to afford good anchorage to the entire navy of the nation. From such a station a fleet could watch the passage of Canso, sweep the waters of the gulf, protect the communications between Bay Verte and Canada, and between the Island and Isle Royale. And yet as Franquet turned over in his mind all these advantages, the beautiful expanse of water was disturbed only by the wind, the rush of the mackerel, or the splash of the wild fowl. Not a boat save his own was visible. "Not a human being save the sailor on his own craft was to be seen."

This solitude was due to the fact that although a steady stream of settlers from Acadia were pouring into the Island at this time, yet they hesitated to take up land at Trois Rivieres since its title was still legally vested in the Company represented by De Roma. Franquet urged the Government to rectify this, with such effect that the census of 1755 supplied by the missionaries to L'Abbé de L'Isle Dieu showed a population of over one hundred at this spot.

Then came the fateful year 1758 with the expulsion. The next ship recorded by history that sailed up the three fair rivers was the *Cancaux* in the spring of 1765, bearing Captain Holland and his survey party preparing the way for settlers of another race. It was Holland's custom to give place-names after the titles of prominent people of the time, and in this case they were named for George Brudenell, fourth Earl of Cardigan, and Duke of Montagu. Like Franquet, he was much impressed with the magnificent harbour, and on one of its headlands he laid out a site for the town of Georgetown named after George III.

The first settlers under the new régime were a party of Highlanders who landed at Brudenell in 1774, but who were pursued by the same ill-fortune as their predecessors. In their ignorance of conditions they had brought very little provisions, and their first year's crop was completely destroyed by mice, so that they were constrained

to join their compatriots at Pictou who had come in the *Hector*, and thereby added much to their perplexities. The Rev. George Patterson, who wrote the *Life of Dr. Macgregor*, tells that in his own congregation was a man who in his childhood, as a member of this party, had been beaten by his father for refusing to eat a mess of boiled beech leaves which was all they had to stay the pangs of hunger.

For the three decades following, Brudenell was deserted, and the next settler was a man who in a manner links the Island with the days of Bonnie Prince Charlie. His name was James McLaren. His father, a cattle-dealer owning lands in the Braes of Balquhiddy, and known as "Big Donald of the Cattle", had joined the followers of the Prince in "The Forty-five"; but before leaving home he had transferred his property for safety to a near relative of his wife, one of the Stewarts of Appin who remained loyal to the Hanoverians. After the final defeat at Culloden, Donald McLaren was captured by a party of dragoons and was being taken by them to Carlisle for execution; but in passing through a wild ravine familiar to him, and with an opportune mist shrouding the hillsides, he suddenly broke away from his captors and plunged down a steep declivity, hiding himself in a water-soaked bog at the bottom by drawing a sod of turf over his head. So persistent was the search made by the soldiers that he was forced to remain in this position till after nightfall, when he made his way to the house of a friend, who concealed and sheltered him until his death which occurred shortly after in consequence of his exposure in the morass. Sir Walter Scott has made use of this incident in one of his tales. Exasperated by their fruitless search, Cumberland's troopers returned to McLaren's home and burned it to the ground after killing all the cattle. His son James, afterwards the Brudenell pioneer, was at this time four years of age, and clearly remembered being carried out of the blazing cottage by a servant maid who had first secreted under her plaid a cheese which was to serve as food for the child and herself in their flight. But the cheese unfortunately fell to the ground, and was picked up by one of the troopers who fastened it on the point of his bayonet, jeering at her discomfiture.

When young McLaren became of age, he demanded the return of his property from the relative who held it in trust, but this was refused; and the lingering lawsuit that ensued, although decided in his favour, left his patrimony so diminished that when his friend the Earl of Selkirk successfully brought his large party of Highlanders to Prince Edward Island, he decided to follow. With his family and relatives, twenty-two in all, he sailed from

Port Glasgow in 1803, landing at Pictou and making his way that autumn to Brudenell where he had purchased 266 acres from Selkirk.

Standing at the prow of the vessel, as she slowly made her way to their destination between shores ablaze with colour, stood his young daughter Christina, the bride of Donald Gordon. Suddenly, as they were passing a small island she exclaimed that she saw a woman, leading a little child by the hand, disappear into the bush. Troubled glances and gestures passed between the other passengers, as none of them had seen the apparition, and it was known that the place had no inhabitant. A grave whisper went about that the woman was "fey", and had seen a vision of "second sight"; and these forebodings were only too well justified when a few months later the young woman and her babe were buried on this same island. As we stand beside Christina Gordon's grave on this little burial-spot of long ago, we would fain place a tribute of respect to all these brave pioneer women who staked so much in the founding of a new country; who had to meet their hours of anguish without, in many cases, even the uncertain aid of the "skilly-woman"; but who faced their many problems with just as much courage and resourcefulness as did the men who carved the homes out of the great forests. It is recorded of the ancestress of one of the leading families of the Island that, among other unneeded things brought by her to the wilderness, was a scarlet riding-habit in which she had been wont to follow the hounds over the meadows of England. Think you that as she knelt beside the big trunk and raised its cover, while the tall pines roared under the lash of the storm all around her little log-dwelling, it was merely to drop tears of vain regret over this gaily-hued token of vanished joys? I trow not. Rather would she draw it forth with an appraising eye as she reached for the scissors, and with unaccustomed fingers began to transform it into warm dresses for the baby.

With their first crop of flax the women of the Brudenell party spun and wove a set of sails, while the men cut down a giant pine tree that stood on the north bank of the river and fashioned it into a dug-out—an unwieldy craft with which they used to make trips to the mainland for supplies. Thus was inaugurated the Georgetown-Pictou service which was later carried on somewhat uncertainly in the winter season by the ice-steamers. It may be interesting to note, in passing, the subsequent history of these boats. The *Northern Light* passed over to the Newfoundland Government and was broken up some years ago. The *Stanley* is reported as being recommissioned by the Dominion Government, while the *Minto*

and *Earl Grey* are in the hands of the Soviet, having been sold to Russia as ice-breakers during the war.

Success soon followed the wise and earnest efforts of these pioneers, but James McLaren had laid firm and sure a spiritual foundation. One of his first duties was the building of a little log church where every Sunday he read the Scriptures and the Gaelic version of the English Church service, while scattered settlers from long distances came by canoe or horseback to this tiny sanctuary in the wilderness. Just a hundred years later his descendants erected, on the spot where this church had stood, a tall monument to his memory.

This toil-won ground
Is holy: here the burning bush flamed high
One hundred years ago, when faith was crowned
In the first settler's log hut built nearby,
And love in that rude home was blessed with children's cry.

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Long years ago they went to take their rest
Beneath the spreading trees on yonder hill—
The field they cleared for use at God's behest,
And where the quiet tenants of his will
Are undisturbed of any joy or ill.
And, here and there, white stones with carven name
Tell who lies covered up, for ever still:
But the First Settler has a shaft of flame
Reared by the villagers unto his worth and name.

Brookfield.