

COBOURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY - ESSAY CONTEST.Selected person - HON. HENRY RUTTAN.- b.1791.d.1871.

T. Ritchie, in "Victorian Cobourg" by Mika Publishing (1976) begins his chapter on Henry Ruttan with the words "The history of Upper Canada rests, in large part, on the activities of "forgotten" men".

My own meagre research for this essay confirmed those words. I agree that his subject is one of the "forgotten" of history, but I was led to the conviction that Henry Ruttan excelled in a many faceted career, including - military, judicial and legislator, as well as being a businessman and noted inventor.

* He was a man of firm convictions and proud of his French Huguenot origins. His distinguished grandfather, Abraham had amassed a fortune in Holland before coming to America in 1734. Two sons, William and Peter came to Upper Canada in 1778. They settled near Kingston but later moved to the Bay of Quinte area.

Here a third son, Henry, was born to William in 1791. The boy grew up on the farm and received little formal education but his mother taught him to read well. Henry left home in his early teens and was soon working in a general store at Kingston. His industry and enterprise so pleased his employer that he set up his apprentice in business at Grafton, near Cobourg.

† However, stirrings of war in 1812 prompted Henry to enlist in the Militia -(a part of the British Army at that time) By all accounts he was a brave soldier and after promotion to lieutenant he was seriously wounded in the battle of Lundy's Lane (1814) After a miraculous recovery, it was not long before he was made up to the rank of colonel.

In 1816 Henry married Mary Jones, the daughter of Elias Jones, a notary of Cobourg.

Sometime in 1820/21, Henry bought a tract of land at Cobourg and began the building of a large house on Elgin Street, east of William. The marriage produced nine children - five of whom survived to later adulthood. Two became noted local Barristers and one an ordained minister.

At the Ontario Historical Archives I found, amongst the "Merritt Papers" a copy of "The Reminiscences of Hon Henry Ruttan" and also a copy of a lecture given at Cobourg, to the Mechanical

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Engineers Society on "Ventilating Systems in Buildings" - both of which were most interesting and helpful in the evaluation of the man.

However! it was in 1820 that Henry Ruttan was first elected to represent Northumberland County in the Upper Canada House of Assembly. He was made Speaker for a short time in 1828/9.

The T. Ritchie and Guillet's references to Ruttan's involvement in the Trent navigation intrigued me.

At the main Peterborough offices of the Trent/Severn Waterway I obtained pamphlets on the history, but the name of Henry Ruttan was not mentioned. I asked the resource person re. the apparent omission but she had never heard of the gentleman.

At the museum archives I read much on the early surveys and construction of the locks - but still no mention of Ruttan.

A person at the Waterways office did mention that a revised history was presently being prepared at the Head Office in Cornwall by a Mr John Withal.

I felt that I should write to Mr Withal and below are some excerpts from the (I hope) self explanatory paragraphs of the letter. ...firstly I should explain; The Waterways historical pamphlets and script do state that a Government Commission was set up in 1833/4 to study the feasibility of Trent/Severn navigation. A professional engineer/surveyor, Mr Nocol H Baird was engaged and did a wonderful job in surveying and submitting a masterful report. Waterways history gives him deserved credit. Etiquette procedures probably required Baird to report to the Lieut Governor (Sir John Colborne) but one presumes that the Commission would deal with it.

● Exerp (1) of my letter - para six reads :-... In 1837 Hon Henry Ruttan as Chairman of the Government's Select Committee on Trent/Severn navigation gave an informed and detailed report to the Assembly with strong recommendation for acceptance and action. Ruttan was a man of vision who always worked for the building of the Waterway.

From para seven :-.. this man (Ruttan) excelled in a diversity of careers and Public Offices - he was a "great" of early Upper Canadian history. He made significant contributions to this community and to his country, besides his involvement (cont)

in the Trent/ Severn navigation."

Para ten reads "... nevertheless! should your historical research department have inadvertently overlooked the contribution of the Hon Henry Ruttan to the early conceptual and construction stages of the Trent/Severn system - may I respectfully suggest that you further research the matter and should he merit mention in your historical publications then "honour where honour is due".

I trust that you will give consideration to my concerns.
(end of letter)

When at the Peterborough archives, I read the Will of Hon Henry Ruttan and in so doing I felt close to a kindly good natured gentleman. ^{In} one paragraph, he bequeathed the income and royalties from his patents relating to the ventilation of railway coaches to son Henry Jones.

..briefly.. other highlights in the life of Hon Henry Ruttan.

(a) He was elected to the Assembly for a second term from 1836 to 1840.

(b) He was appointed Sheriff of the Newcastle District (roughly Northumberland and Durham counties) in 1827 and held the position for the next thirty years.

(c) He was recalled to the Army in 1860 to command the 4th Military District - and important posting. He held the position until 1862.

(d) His Cobourg land was known as "Ruttan Woods" - which must have been impressive with large trees - for it is recorded that Walnut wood was supplied from the Ruttan estate to make furniture for the Senate Chamber at Ottawa.

(e) Henry Ruttan gave the land for the building of the first Catholic Church in Cobourg. Considering his pride in Huguenot ancestry and his awareness of Catholic persecutions of his people - it shows a rare quality of Christian charity in the man's character.

(f) Perhaps Ruttan's greatest benefaction to mankind was in the field of ventilation and improved heating systems. He held several patents and with son Henry Jones operated an extensive business. Because of those inventions, incalculable amounts of fuel energy have been saved and the benefits in improved health for millions of people is beyond imagination. Henry Ruttan can verily be called "Father of air conditioning".

I salute him.