

Echo From The Past

(by Rev. J. L. Delaney)

RICE LAKE FERRIES: MRS. TRAILL: SULLY:

In the early part of the 19th century there were various inns and "ferry" landings operated on Rice Lake for the convenience of the travellers and immigrants going to the back country. We have already mentioned Fothergill leasing lot 27 (Ley Point) for ferry rights, and Tidy's Inn on lot 16.

In 1820 the Hamilton Court granted to Lieut. John Wm. Bannister of Otonabee the ferry privileges on Rice Lake, Otonabee and Trent from lot 16 and to John Williams the same privilege from lot 8 (Chs. Burrison's) and Lemuel Brunley lot 2, con. 1, Alnwick township.

The best known of these inns was that at Sully (just west of Harwood) made famous by Mrs. C. P. Traill. In "Pearls and Pebbles" she describes the "motley group of emigrants that shared the only available room in the log-house which did duty as tavern on the shores of Rice Lake".

In the "Backwoods of Canada" is her well known account of their trip out from Cobourg, across Rice Lake and up the Otonabee in 1832.

"Within the sight of Sully the tavern from which the steamboat starts that goes up the Otonabee, you see several well-cultivated settlements; and beyond the Indian village the missionaries have a school for the education and instruction of the Indian children..... certain it is that the introduction of Christian religion is the first step towards civilization and improvement; its very tendency being to break down the strongholds of prejudice and ignorance, and unite mankind in one bond of social brotherhood.....there are some fine settlements on the Rice Lake, but I am told the shores are not considered healthy, the inhabitants being subject to lake-fevers and ague, especially where the ground is low and swampy.....if, as is possible, in the course of years these inland waters should be made available for boats and larger craft than Indian canoes, such lands as lie near them will become valuable but the time may be far distant".

At that time the settlers were very thrilled that Capt. Cleghorn of the Sully tavern was operating a new steamboat the "Pem-o-dash".

Mrs. Traill telling of their voyage says,—"We left the tavern at Rice Lake, after an unusual delay, at nine o'clock. The morning was damp, and a cold wind blew over the lake, which appeared to little advantage through the drizzling rain, from which I was glad to shield my face in my warm plaid coat, for there was no cabin or other shelter in the little steamer than an inefficient awning. The first attempt to connect the Rice Lake with Peterborough was by a boat or large scow propelled by horse power. This failed through bad management. The vessel became unmanageable, the horses escaped and made for an island in Rice Lake. The next was worked by steam, the "Pem-o-dash"—the Indians called it "Fire-ship". It was in this apology for a steamboat that we embarked for our voyage to Peterborough.... but the circumstance of a steamer at all on the Otonabee was a matter of surprise to us, and of exultation to the first settlers along its shores, who for many years had been content with no better mode of transport than a scow or a canoe for themselves and their marketable produce, or through the worst possible roads with a waggon or sleigh".

John Langton (later auditor-general and deputy minister of Finance for the Dominion government) was one of the first settlers of the Upper Kawarthas. He describes the trip down from Fenelon Falls for the election of 1836. Sully was the voting place for the Peterborough district. For electioneering headquarters they set up a marquee on "Spoke" Island, which they named "Constitution Island". "The beautiful little Calypso with her flags flying and her crew all dressed alike in striped guernsey frocks, white trousers and low straw hats with blue ribbands, and each a British ensign as a scarf, rowing to and from the island and taking out the candidates every morning to address the electors as they came in on the steamboat (from Peterborough, etc.) was a sight that Rice Lake had never seen before, I guess."

The Tories won the election and McKenzie's radicals were defeated. Then money was voted for the development of the Trent waterway and the future of the district seemed most promising. However, when the rebellion of 1837 broke out the money was diverted to meet other emergencies. Though the Trent canal project was thus put aside for generations, good use was made of the Rice Lake—Otonabee stretch and the navigable parts of the Kawarthas all through the last century.

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