

APOLOGIES

We apologize to the readers of last month's article on Davis Lock and Jones Falls for the faintness of the print. The articles have been repeated for this reason.

POSTSCRIPT TO JONES FALLS

JONES FALLS SOAP OPERA

Recently, a personal diary of Peter Sweeney, the first lockmaster at Jones Falls, has been discovered in the National Archives. The diary covers a period of 12 years from 1838-50. It reads like a Victorian melodrama.

Sweeney, his wife and 2 children were all heavy drinkers. His wife hated him and his children rejected him. His lock workers complained about him to the government. He must have been a wonderful man.

Sweeney was constantly involved in a hide-and-seek game with his wife over liquor. In 1848, he hid his grog in the cookhouse and drank it all. Two years later, he was lurking in the bushes on the other side of the lock trying to find the bottle Mrs. Sweeney had hidden for herself. Often there are resolutions in the diary not to drink. Every month, Sweeney broke his resolution. Sweeney loved to attend Methodist camp meetings although he was Catholic. The reason for his enjoyment of the camp meetings was the plentiful beer afterwards.

Sweeney had one son, Tom. I imagine he would have preferred not to have a son at all. Adolescent Tom was hired as a worker to help his father at Jones Falls. He promptly fell in love with the wife of another lock-Mr. King. Fist fights and name calling became an everyday occurrence at the locks. The Kings left the station after Leggett, the local magistrate was called in to intervene.

Other lock labourers launched legal suits against Sweeney. In 1846, Tom was sent down to Davis Lock as a canalman after a quarrel with his father. In 1847, he was back on the locks at Jones Falls. The arguments between father and son increased. Finally Tom threatened to shoot Sweeney, crossed the American border and did not return home.

Daughter Kitty, educated in a Kingston nunnery, had her difficulties as well. She became involved with a temporary labourer, John Weaver, in 1848. Both Sweeney and his wife opposed the relationship so Kitty eloped. Her husband was hired on at Davis Lock the next summer. When Weaver took his teenage wife to that station, Sweeney followed and brought his stubborn daughter back. In the autumn of 1850, Kitty gave birth to a son who Sweeney spitefully referred to as Kitty Sweeney's son. He found it difficult to admit that the last name of the child was really Weaver. Kitty's 2 year marriage could not stand such opposition. She remained with her father for the next 20 years of her life.

Mrs. Sweeney eventually could not stand to live with her obnoxious husband. By the end of the period the diary covers, she was spending nights with friends or in a separate building at Jones Falls simply to avoid her husband. She died, still a young woman, in the 1850's. Sweeney wrote in his journal that he was disappointed and tired of his life. (I wonder why). He remained as lockmaster until 1850.

Davis Lock to 1900

Davis Lock is one of the most untouched lock stations on the Rideau. Settlement in the area of the lock station has always been sparse - the lock staff and a few neighbouring farming families. About 1800, Walter Davis, an American settler, arrived at Lot 9, Concession 2 in South Crosby Township. He erected a small sawmill described in an old source as a 'primitive stump mill'. (More complicated sawing operations were done in Gananoque). Davis was the first settler in the entire region. His closest neighbour lived seven miles away in Bastard Township according to an early history of Leeds County. One story tells that when the family fire died out one evening, poor Davis had to walk a round trip of 14 miles to bring back a new supply of hot coals. It seems unlikely though that the family did not own a tinder box. The Davis family consisted of one adopted son, Thomas Ripley and several daughters. Ripley served as a soldier in the War of 1812 and after returning home, married one of his foster sisters. (There really weren't too many other women available.)

Their son, C. L. Ripley, became the Township Clerk and Justice of the Peace for the area. In the late 1820's In the late 1820's, Mr. Davis was forced to sell his land to the government after it was decided to put a lock station at the mill site. He was also hired to find a stone quarry and to begin some preliminary excavation. Another man, Donald McLever, was awarded the contract, however. McLever had a mad scientist personality. He built a complicated machine powered by a water wheel to pump out the area of the lock pit. Observers claimed that the machine was impressive, but failed to operate. Eventually, McLever was fired for mismanagement of his contract. Robert Drummond, the contractor at Kingston and Brewer's Mills took over the work. By 1832, a neat little lock with one dam was ready to operate.

John Purcell, a stone mason, was appointed as the lockmaster. He was supposed to have laid the first stone at Davis Lock. From 1831 to 1857, he held the position until he retired on the

great sum of \$48 per year. Purcell was a friend of Peter Sweeney, the lockmaster at Jones Falls, and took on Sweeney's son, Tom, as a worker when his father would not keep him on the other lock.

Early maps and sketches of Davis Lock show that there were anywhere from 3 to 7 log buildings on the site. Three were probably occupied in the 1830's - one by the lockmaster, one by his helper and the other by an unnamed farmer. During the 1840's, a stone building was erected for the

lockmaster's family. Like other lockhouses, it had gun slits and a tin roof. John Purcell was even given 3 muskets to defend the lockhouse in case of attack. However, nobody bothered to give him any ammunition. A small log watchhouse was also erected about this time but disappeared over the years like the other log buildings at the lock.

After 1857, Purcell was replaced as lockmaster by John Johnston, a former lock worker from Smiths Falls. Johnston remained at Davis Lock for 14 years, but there is little information on him.

In 1871, Alfred Foster, took over the locks. People began to call the station 'Foster's Locks' after a while. Foster seems to have been a strong character. He was born in Newboro, the son of the lockmaster there. At the age of 16, he took over the Newboro Locks when his father died. A few years later, he was transferred to Davis Locks. When he first arrived, Foster had difficulties with a lockman who refused to obey orders. He promptly fired him. A few years later, he wrote a letter to the government complaining of his own low wages. He requested an increase of salary to \$38 a month. Foster was even responsible for a law suit. In the 1880's, he accused local farmers of destroying the dam at Rock Lake. An investigation was launched. When no information could be found, one of the farmers sued for libel. Foster left the lock in 1897.

I have very little information on the families near Davis Lock at this time. Dick Mahoney of Chaffey's Lock stated in an interview that his father, Dennis, farmed and worked at the lock station in the late 1800's. A John Weaver, husband of Kitty Sweeney, daughter of the lockmaster at Jones Falls, was also a lock worker about 1850.

As well, the son of the first lockmaster at Chaffey's, William Fleming married a Margaret Doyle and in 1870, built a house near Davis Locks. 'Captain Billy' was the captain of the 'D.C. West', one of the steamboats that travelled the Rideau at that time.

After 1900, a few cottages were added to the station and the characters changed, but in appearance the lock is very similar to the way it was 100 years ago.

Davis Lock is one of the few lock stations with a legend. There are at least 5 different versions - all about buried treasure. With the price of gold going up, it might be a good idea to take a bulldozer to Davis Lock and start digging.

One legend claims that Mr. Davis, the original landowner, buried the money he received for his property somewhere near the lock station. He died before he could tell anyone where it was buried. Another version states that the money was in a keg sent to pay the men building the lock. It was supposedly stolen by one of the workmen who died of malaria without disclosing the hiding place of the gold coins.

Two of these stories involve Barrel Point on Lake Opinicon. Some say a barrel of gold was buried on this point and that is how it got its name. Another story involves pirates and a man casting the gold overboard in the area of the point. And - according to one old timer - American businessmen during the Depression actually launched a business venture to find this legendary treasure.

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