

Deseronto and the Rathbun Company.

Introduction

Perhaps in some way this is not only the story of the Rathbun Company and Deseronto, but in a ~~nutshell~~^{nutshell}, the story of this large country of ours, Canada.

When the first white people came here, some 300 years ago to settle, Canada, was for the most part, just a large lonely expanse of timber forests, mountains, lakes, and wide powerful rivers.

The land was inaccessible, except by boat, and a handful of Indian trails. Some of these Indian trails were later made into roads. Highway 2 is a notable example.

Canada in those days could boast of very few products to export, the main two being furs and timber. The latter is of most interest to us ~~since~~^{since} it ~~was~~^{was} in this business that the Rathbun Company largely specialized when first it ~~commenced~~^{commenced} business at Deseronto.

When lumbermen first came to Ontario, their only means of access was by river, inland to the large timber forests. ~~Algonquin Park was one such area.~~ Algonquin Park was one such area. In order to reach it, lumbermen were obliged to journey up the Ottawa river. ~~There~~ There they cut down the virgin forest of tall pine, ~~and after trimming and squaring the logs with great skill and accuracy, they floated them down river to Montreal.~~ ^{the} and after trimming and squaring the logs with great skill and accuracy, they floated them down ^{the} river to Montreal. Here they were loaded aboard boats, and shipped to all parts of the world.

A few photographs still exist ~~of the lumbering activities~~^{of the lumbering activities}, and some of these may be seen in the Timber Museum in Algonquin Park, where also may be viewed, one of the old locomotives for hauling timber wagons, a type of boat used by the loggers to travel through the bush and across the marsh and muskeg, and ~~a typical loggers' hut rebuilt to show the way they existed during the winter months.~~

The timbers cut from these early forests were prized by buyers from all over the world and the European Market of that day refused to buy anything but this first grade timber.

Gradually, however, the huge forests were all used up and Timber Merchants were forced to purchase smaller timber. Cutting by axe was subsequently found to be slow and wasteful and gradually was replaced by the use of the hand saw. Finally came the machine driven saw and the saw mill.

Historically we now come ^{to} the time when the Rathbun Company first set up ~~their~~^{its} Saw

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Introduction continued:-

Mill in the Town of ~~Deseronto~~ ^{Mill Point} to exploit the local timbers. But before talking about the early history of this Company, it might be of interest to describe how the town of Deseronto first came into being.

Deseronto and the Rathbun Family.

It was in the mid-summer of 1775 that ~~a man by the name of~~ Guy Johnson, a local Indian Affairs Agent responsible for the welfare of a group of Mohawk Indians in ~~a New~~ ^{the Thirteen Colonies,} ~~England State,~~ was warned that an attempt would be made ^{to take him prisoner} (by the colonists.) He therefore collected together all the Indians on the reserve and held a council meeting in the woods near Oswego, N.Y. Here they decided to support the British Government and protect the navigation of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes. They also decided to send a deputation of Chiefs and Warriors to Montreal to visit the Governor of Canada.

After the Council Meeting, the remainder of the Indians returned to their homes. Their peaceful existence was short-lived, however, for they soon found themselves at war with the colonists. Eventually by 1777 their homes and property had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and they were forced to flee their homes and take refuge in Canada. They made their way to Montreal where they ^{camped} ~~settled down to camp at a place~~ near Lachine. Here they were obliged to spend ^{seven} ~~seven~~ miserable years before the Governor of Canada was able to find them a permanent land settlement as an alternative to their very cramped quarters at Montreal. Eventually the Crown was able to grant them the deeds to two tracts of land in Ontario. One piece was situated at ^{the} Grand River and the other on the Bay of Quinte.

Finally, on May 22nd 1784, a group of Mohawk Indians under the ^{joint} ~~joint~~ chieftainship of John Deserontyou, Aaron and Isaac Hill landed ~~with their families~~ at a spot on the shore of the Bay of Quinte near the old Mohawk Church, having made the journey from Montreal in fifteen canoes. Here they settled down once more to a ~~peaceful~~ peaceful existence, farming the land. The other group of Indians under the leadership of Captain Brant and Captain Isaac settled ^{at} ~~in~~ the Grand River.

In the year 1835, John Culbertson, whose mother was a daughter of Captain John Deserontyou, applied to the chiefs of that day for a grant of land on account of the services rendered by his Grandfather. After some time, the grant of eight hundred acres off the east ^{end} ~~end~~ of the Tyendinaga Reserve was made ^{and} (February 17th 1837), Culbertson proceeded to build a landing on the Bay shore of his property, which afterwards came to be

known to travellers in the district as Culbertson's Wharf.

Sometime after the year 1837, Culbertson conceived the idea of building a village about his residence, but it was not until 1855 that he had a small lot surveyed for the purpose, giving it the name 'Deseronto' after his Grandfather. In July 1848, a portion of Culbertson's land situated where the centre of the present town of Deseronto is now, was sold to an American Company registered in Oswego, N. Y., as the H. B. Rathbun Company, a lumber concern set up to exploit the rich timber resources of the region. Its members were Messrs H. B. Rathbun, Thomas Y. Rowe, L. E. Carpenter, and Amos Rathbun. The latter, however, later withdrew from the business. The Company established a small saw and grist mill, and store here, and the place, for it was not yet even a village, came to be known as Mill Point. The business was carried on with indifferent success until 1855, when Mr. H. B. Rathbun decided to bring his family and permanently reside at Mill Point. At the same time he took over control of the business from his partners, and from then on continued to run the business on his own for a further 9 years.

In 1851, a postoffice was opened in a little log house near the present town limits. This office was afterwards removed about half a mile further east on the Napanee Road, and received the name of Bowen, after that of the Postmaster. This name may still be seen on some old Provincial maps.

In 1871, Mill Point was enacted as an incorporated village, having an area of 460 acres, which had been set aside for this purpose from the township of Tyendinaga, but had been set aside for this purpose. The population of the town at this time was 864.

Mr Hugo Rathbun may be regarded as the builder and founder of Deseronto as a business community. He continued to run his company alone until 1864, when he brought his eldest son, Mr. E. W. Rathbun, into the business. Mr. E. W. Rathbun After a number of years of service to the Company, finally took over control of the business from his father. When he became President and General Manager, the Company was renamed H. B. Rathbun and Company. In 1880, Mr. F. S. Rathbun was admitted into the firm, and worked with the business for several years as an accountant, finally being appointed Secretary Treasurer when the Company was incorporated as one of the great commercial corporations of the Dominion of Canada in 1883, which was entered in the same year in Dunn and Bradstreet under the name of the it was entered

'Rathbun Company Ltd.', with a registered capital of \$2,000,000.00 ⁱⁿ terms of today's currency values, a firm of this size would probably be worth in the order of ~~more than~~ ^{from} 6 to 8 million ^{dollars.} It is rather significant to note that in]

At about this time it would also be interesting to mention that the first school was constructed in Deseronto. It was a three room solid brick building put up at a cost of only \$1400.00 to accommodate the families of the rapidly growing population.

The Rathbun Company expanded once more by purchasing additional acreage from the Indian Reserve, west of Mill Street, on which the village was allowed to grow. This expansion was ultimately followed in the year 1889, by ^{an} order and proclamation of the Governor ~~in~~ General in Council (and by general consent of town's people) that the name of the village be changed ~~to~~ to that of the incorporated Town of Deseronto. The population at that date was 3200, this number being found by special census.

The first Church on the reservation was in the form of a log cabin built in 1784, by the Mohawk Indians, when they first came and settled in the area. The cabin had very few windows, and the door was covered with deer skins, presumably to keep out the draft. The church had a bell but no belfry, so the bell was hung on poles outside the church. The Reverend John Stuart D.D. ^{who had been} sent out by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, ^{and} ^{having} who ministered to the Mohawks at ^{the} Queen Anne Chapel at Fort Hunter from 1770 ^{to} 1777 ^{had} fled with them to Canada, was then subsequently appointed to the Charge of both the Grand River and the Quinte Indian Groups in Canada.

In place of the little log church, there are now ^(N.P.) two stone churches on the Reserve, — Christ Church and All Saints. Christ Church was built in 1843, destroyed by fire on May 12th. 1906, and rebuilt in 1907. All Saints Church was erected in 1884.

The church in Deseronto grew up in a slightly different way. It was in the 1860's, not many years after the formation of the Rathbun Company, that the Ministers of the Westleyan ^a Methodist Church from the Shannonville circuit began preaching in Deseronto. Very soon the so called 'Union Church' was built (later called the 'White Hall') and this building was then used by both the Westleyan ^{METHODIST,} Presbyterian, and Anglican Churches, as a place ~~for worship~~ ^{worship} and where each could conduct their services on a Sunday. The arrangement was reached where ^{by} the Anglicans held their service in the morning, the Presbyterians in the afternoon, and the Methodists in the evening.

The permanent Anglican stone church was built in 1880, and the present Presbyterian ^{church} was constructed and financed by the Rathbuns' in 1881.

Shortly after the coming of the Westleyan ^PPreachers, the Reverend Barnett from the Selby Circuit introduced the Episcopal Faith, and held meetings in the School House, east of Rouch and Whittons Meat Shop. Later these meetings were held in a hall on George Street. In 1876, Messrs. Hall and Wager, conducted a series of meetings in a temporary tabernacle on the north-east corner of Thomas and Centre Streets. Finally, ~~in 1876~~, as the direct result of the sustained efforts of these various ministers to establish their particular faith in the town, a permanent church was ~~finally~~ constructed in 1877, ~~which building today is known as the United Church.~~

In 1890, an additional three acres of land was purchased, on which the High School was erected. At this time the Rathbun Company, employed about 5,000 people in the various industries, which consisted of two saw mills; sash, door and blind factory; flour mill; railway car shops; boiler repair shops; blacksmith shops; shipbuilding yards; gas works; railway yards; printing works and offices; general store; and many other manufacturing ventures such as the manufacture of Portland cement, from a formula obtained in Germany. The Printing Works printed and published the local newspaper called the 'Tribune'; copies from which I obtained ~~incidentally~~ much of the information ^{for this paper.} ~~used in this talk.~~

The Rathbun Interests ~~were the first company in this part of Ontario to equip~~ ^{provided} the homes and offices of Madoc with telephones. The Company's name was the North American Telegraph Company, incorporated in 1886. This Company served a large number of exchanges in Eastern Ontario from Pakenham to Peterborough. ^{and} accounts show that ~~the~~ ⁺ ~~North American Company~~ was providing telephone service in Madoc as early as 1891.

The timber resources of the Rathbun Company spread over a wide area of Eastern Ontario, and included lands bordering and ^{ad} adjacent to the Trent, Moira, Salmon and Napanee rivers. The finished products were shipped to all parts of the world, and Sales Agencies were established in London, England, and many other large population centres around the World.

The Company originally started operations with only one saw mill fed by logs driven down these four rivers, but the Rathbun ^{'s} in due course built and operated many other plants culminating in the construction of a Smelting Works in 1899. They built and

operated their own railroad, primarily to haul logs to the mill. For towing log booms, they owned and operated the tugs, 'Rescue' and 'Munson'. For the economic benefit of water transport they also managed the lake freighters, 'Resolute' and 'Reliance', and for conveying passenger traffic the passenger steamers, 'Ella Ross', 'Deseronto', 'Quinte' and 'Armenia'.

On May 25th 1896, Deseronto suffered a very disastrous fire. The fire started on the docks where the timber was stacked and quickly spread until the houses in the town were set alight. The fire occurred while many citizens were away for the day on a railway excursion to Kingston. Most of the people were not available when the fire first started and it found a strong grip on town buildings before fire brigades from Belleville, Napanee, and Kingston could reach Deseronto and help fight the blaze. Much of the town east of Fourth Street was burned to the ground, and a large part of the Rathbun Company was destroyed including the Deseronto Flour Mill (renowned for its 'Crown Jewel Flour'), The Bran House, Grain Elevator, Coal Sheds, Trestle Docks, Chemical Works, and a tremendous stock of timber. At the time, a moderate estimate of the loss was set at \$250,000.00; the Rathbun share being ~~set at \$150,000.00, and the balance made up by the town's people.~~ townspeople.

The Company and town gradually recovered from this setback in their progress towards prosperity, and bit by bit, a new town grew where the old one had perished. The Rathbun Enterprises were always trying to interest other manufacturers to bring their industries into the town ~~and settle~~, and finally they were largely instrumental in ^epersuading the Gaylord Iron Company to set up an Iron Works in Deseronto on January, 27th 1899.

The Gaylord Iron Company ^{had} commenced operations originally in Detroit in 1856. ^{and} Prior to 1886 it was known as the Detroit and Lake Superior Iron Co.

The smelting works in Deseronto ^{were} built at the west end of the town, south of Main Street, and on the shore of the Bay of Quinte. The Bay of Quinte Railway Line was extended to the works, thus providing a ^{convenient} ~~method~~ method of transporting the raw materials ^{and} ~~as well as~~ the finished pig-iron by rail as well as water. The Ore Dock was an extensive structure equipped with three hoists for lifting the ore from the holds of vessels, and trestle and tramway for carrying the ore to the piling ground adjoining the furnace. The works covered an area of ^{four} ~~the~~ acres, and the output of the plant was

12,000 tons of pig-iron a year. The charcoal ^{and possibly the other chemicals needed for the iron industry were} supplied by the Rathbun Chemical Company, ~~and possibly the other chemicals as well necessary for the manufacture of the iron~~

This Company, like the Rathbun Enterprises, eventually had to close down due to the drying up of timber supplies in the area. There was talk of extending the railway further north, but for some reason this plan to obtain further supplies of lumber was never proceeded with and the firm was eventually compelled to close down.

Mr. F. S. Rathbun died on Saturday, ^{November 26,} ~~20th~~ 1898. ~~Like L. R.~~ During his business career he ^{had been} president or treasurer of ^{many} ~~quite a number of~~ ^{ies} different companies in Ontario, including the Bay of Quinte Railway Company, The Oshawa Electric Railway, ^{The} North American Telegraph Company, The Thousand Islands Electric Railway, ^{and} The Muskoka Slide and Booming Company. ^{He was also} Treasurer of the Town of Deseronto, ~~He was~~ President of the Board of Deseronto's first free Public Library, and Postmaster of Mill Point and Deseronto for 20 years. He was fond of boating, yachting, and cycling, and was Captain of the Deseronto Canoe and Boat Club. He was ^a trustee and member of the Board ^{of} ~~the~~ Governors of the Church of the Redeemer, and Librarian of ^{the} ~~the~~ Sabbath School. For a man who worked and lived in a small town, he must have lived a very full and good life.

Mr. E. W. Rathbun, eldest son of the founder of the Rathbun Company, can probably be regarded as one of the most successful business men to have settled in ^{this} ~~the~~ part of Canada. Born at Auburn, N.Y. October, 5th 1842, and educated in New York City, he gained his early business experience working for Storm Smith & Company (East India Merchants) New York. He joined The H.B. Rathbun Company, in 1864 at the age of 22 and stayed with the Company from then until ^{his death} ~~1898~~. On the incorporation of the Rathbun Company in 1883, he was appointed President and General Manager at the age of 41. In 1887 he was appointed one of the Royal Commissioners to examine and report upon the Forests of Canada. He was one of the founders of the school of Mining, and Governor of that Institution. He was ^a trustee of Queen's University and his last public appearance before his death on ^{November 24,} ~~the 24th~~ 1903, was to speak at the opening of the new Arts Building in Kingston.

He was President of a considerable number of Companies as well as being Senior Partner in ~~the~~ E. W. Rathbun & Co., of Oswego, N. Y.

Mr. E. W. Rathbun

On the incorporation of the town of Deseronto in 1889, ~~he~~ was elected the town's first Mayor and was successively re-elected each year until 1903, when he ~~voluntarily~~ ^{chose not} to seek re-election. ~~signed from incorporation.~~

After his death, the business was subsequently carried on by other members of the family, ~~after his death~~ but the scale of business operations ~~of the Company~~ gradually declined.

It is now 112 years since the foundations of this Industrial Empire ~~was~~ ^{were} laid with the building of a Saw Mill at Deseronto and it should be remembered ^{that it} was created basically by Ontario saw logs and Rathbun brains and enterprise. The names of the Rathbun ~~ships~~ ^{ships} in the marine ~~part~~ ^{section} of the business are ~~well~~ remembered today. Contemplating the volume of logs drivendown the four principal rivers in the district, one must keep in mind that the logging railway penetrated as far north as Maynooth, which was a long way to go in those days to find feed for a sawmill. When the general shortage of lumber sources of supply became apparent, the fact that the Company had already spread ^{so far} northwards ~~there~~ must have largely influenced ~~them~~ ^{them} against expanding their operations further afield owing to increasing transportation costs.

Among their various enterprises, the Rathbuns operated a model farm, principally to grow the feed for the large number of horses they used for transport purposes to run the business, but apart from this reason they operated the farm for experimental purposes, to ~~obtain~~ ^{determine} the best crops for ~~the climate~~ ^{climate and} local conditions.

The Cement Factory was located at Marlbank, a few miles away from Deseronto for obvious reasons. When the Rathbuns built their first mill, the highways were for the most part water-ways. The Railways were in the immediate future; but under the conditions as they existed, Deseronto was ideally situated to bring the logs to the saw mill, and ship the variety of finished products to their sometimes distant markets economically by means of water haulage. The rivers by which the logs came to the mill all drained into the sheltered waters of the Bay of Quinte, and the Crown Timber Agency ~~being~~ ^{at} Belleville was also very convenient.

Time, however, is inexorable in ~~its~~ ^{its} effect. As the settlement of land continued, ^{the} and log harvest diminished, and the source of lumber became more distant, profitable operation ended in so far as the wood products were concerned. But in spite of the eventual

failure, ~~the over all effect the total amount of the Rathbun Payrolls~~^{of} made a handsome contribution to the development of the Province, and the final penetration of the hinterland.

From such beginnings a great nation such as Canada can grow.