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Toronto Under the French Regime

BY PERCY J. ROBINSON, M.A.

MR. ROBINSON:—Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, may I begin by thanking you for the honor which the Canadian Club and the associated Canadian Clubs have done me. I very much appreciate the honor of this invitation to address you. I know that you will want to hear from me as much as I can tell you in the forty minutes at my disposal of the history of Toronto—Toronto during the French regime, so I shall proceed at once, without a long introduction, to my task.

We Canadians, with a country stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic and to the North Pole ought to be broadminded. A Canadian going back over his history, if he be an English-speaking Canadian, finds himself in a somewhat perplexing situation. He has frequently to change his views. He begins by being attracted by the romance of early Quebec. On the other hand, he finds one hundred and fifty years of the history of the United States forming one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of the British Empire. And that period of history of the United States is part of our own history. As he goes on he must interest himself in the wonderful events of our history, so varied and so picturesque. At one moment it is the Loyalists who hold the centre of the stage, and at an-

other, it is the explorers of the West. In every way, a Canadian must be a broad-minded person. He must be, at one moment, a Catholic, and at another, a Protestant. At one moment, an Englishman, and at another, a Frenchman. I think that any city, which aspires to be a metropolitan city in Canada, must enlarge its borders, must enlarge its outlook and be such a city where both east and west can be at home, where their ideals can be understood and where both French and English would be welcome. On the other hand, I do not know of any city in Canada which reaches this high ideal. I do not think there is any city outside of Toronto which has such a wonderful opportunity to realize this ideal—Toronto with its one hundred and forty years of most intensive British history and also two hundred years of the most picturesque French history—Toronto with its memories of the Loyalists has, of all great Canadian cities, probably been most in touch with our American cousins to the south of us. Thus, I think, there is no city in Canada, if we are true to our opportunities, where there is such a wonderful chance to realize what would be a great thing for Canada, a large, broad outlook, a tolerant spirit and a broad-mindedness which, we trust, the future will bring us. We have heard much of our history during the past week and during the days of these celebrations of our centenary.

When Governor Simcoe in 1793 then declared Toronto occupied the most strategic situation in North America, he only reaffirmed the opinion of Champlain who two centuries before established the French missionaries on the Georgian Bay in the original Toronto with the hope that the mission would be the centre from which the French would capture the fur trade of the interior and of the continent. In the enterprise, Champlain was supported by the full strength of the Jesuit Order who sent to the Huron Missions the ablest of their devout missionaries. And if Champlain and the French failed in their magnificent attempt to conquer the continent through the original Hurons or Torontogueronians, the dwellers in Toronto, they failed, not because they had selected the wrong place or the wrong agents for the undertaking, but through a

chain of events in Europe and America which may be interpreted as the hand of destiny. Champlain and the Jesuits were right in deciding that the peninsula of Ontario, jutting out like a spearhead into the head of the great lakes, was, at that time, the strategic centre of America and that the Hurons or Torontogueronians held the key to the situation. Simcoe in 1793 was equally right in his opinion that the Toronto of his day, now no longer on the Georgian Bay, but as the southern end of communication between the lakes, was the most strategic situation in America. One can see at a glance that Champlain and the Jesuits were right in the beginning of the seventeenth century, but now it is immediately apparent why Simcoe was equally right at the end of the eighteenth century.

Conditions have changed, and in 1934 we could hardly claim for modern Toronto the advantages which Simcoe claimed for his town of York. Simcoe was thinking in terms of his age, before the coming of steamboats and railways and airplanes, even before roads and highways. In this *earlier* age in America, all transit was by canoe and trail and the most direct communications controlled the continent. The passage between Lake Ontario and the Georgian Bay, known for two centuries before Simcoe as the Toronto Carrying Place, was one of the continental highways. It was at first the front door to the Huron Country, and later it was the best road from Montreal to the great centre of the fur trade in the interior. It was more than that. It was the natural route of the Dutch and English traders in the Hudson to the great area north of the lakes and adjacent to Hudson's Bay where the richest furs were to be obtained. No wonder then the Hurons, the Iroquois and the Mississaugas, in turn jealously guarded the Carrying Place. And then the French, the Dutch and the English traders struggled for its possession. The French placed their Fort Ste. Marie as the Northern end of the *passage de Toronto* on the Georgian Bay in 1639. Simcoe, two centuries later, established his Fort of York on Lake Ontario at the southern end of the historic route, and the modern English City of Toronto is today rejoicing in one hundred and forty-one years of prosperity.

Since Toronto owes its origin to the Carrying Place, and the various forts and settlements established along its course in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries will be the subject of this address, the course of the passage to Toronto and the communication between the lakes must be more clearly defined. South of Lake Simcoe, (originally Lake Toronto) two trails led to Lake Ontario, one from Holland Landing to the Mouth of the Rouge, known as Le Grand Portage de Gandalsetwegen, the other from the west branch of the Holland River to the mouth of the Humber, known as the Le Portage de Teiaiaagon.

During the Huron period we may be sure that the Hurons were often on Lake Ontario. And with them Bruilé and the traders and missionaries. There were Huron remains at Baby Point. The Hurons, the original Torontogueronians, came down to the Humber mouth to fish for salmon. They had frequent skirmishes with the Iroquois from the south of the Lake.

After the expulsion of the Hurons in 1650, the Iroquois were supreme in Ontario. It became their beaver hunting ground, a vast wilderness from which all human beings had been expelled. Then gradually the French began to find their way again to Lake Ontario by the St. Lawrence to send their missionaries to the Iroquois villages now for the first time established on the north shore of the Lake. Fort Frontenac was established in 1673. By 1700, the Mississaugas were in possession.

So far as Toronto and the Carrying Place are concerned the chief events of importance during the Iroquois periods were: (1) The establishment of the Sulpician mission at the mouth of the Rouge in 1669; (2) The visit of Pere and Joliet the same year; (3) The settlement of the Senecas at Teiaiaagon on Baby Point about 1675; (4) The first recorded episode at Teiaiaagon; (5) The visit of Father Hennepin to the Humber mouth in 1678; (6) The visits of La Salle and other explorers to Teiaiaagon and the Carrying Place in 1680 and 1681; (7) The visit of Dulhut in 1684; (8) Denonville's proposal of a fortification post at Toronto in 1686; (9) Col. Patrick McGregorie crossed the Carrying Place in 1687; He was the first Englishman

(or rather he was a Scotsman) to visit Toronto; (10) Denonville made a raid into the Seneca Country in 1687 and the Ottawas came down from Michilimackinac by way of Teiaiaagon. Denonville visited Toronto on his way back. It has been assumed that the chief was on hand to receive the vice-regal party; (11) Lahontan suggested a fortification at the mouth of the Toronto Bay, at the northern end of the Carrying Place; (12) The Huron Chief, the Rat, was probably a frequent visitor to Toronto; (13) The Mississaugas established themselves at Toronto and the Fonds du Lac.

The Mississaugas originally came from the Georgian Bay and named Toronto the Carrying Place. During the Iroquois period from 1650 to 1670 the history of the immediate environment of Toronto begins with the Seneca village at Gandatsekewyagon at the north of the Rouge. This village was at the southern terminus of the eastern arm of the Toronto Carrying Place; the distance from the Rouge mouth to Holland Landing was about thirty-five miles and is described by Potier as Le Grand Portage de Gandatsekewyagon. To this village the Ottawas from Michilimackinac brought their furs to trade with the Dutch from the Hudson.

The first French trader to visit the mouth of the Rouge was a noted coureur du bois named Jean Pere. He seems also to have traded at Toronto. A friend of Radisson, Pere had a picturesque career. His wandering ranged from the shores of Hudson's Bay, when he discovered the Moose River and Moosonee, to England, France and New York. In 1669, Pere accompanied by a still more famous Frenchman, Louis Joliet, was at the Rouge mouth and both explorers crossed the Carrying Place to Lake Huron on their way to Lake Superior.

In the Winter of 1669 and '70 for the first time there was a permanent settlement of white men in the immediate neighborhood of Toronto. M. de Fénelon, the fiery half-brother of the famous Archbishop of Cambrai and M. d'Uile spent the Winter at Gandatsekewyagon and the name Frenchmen's Bay still clings to the inlet near the mouth of the Rouge. The Iroquois settled at Teiaiaagon

at Baby Point as soon as they found that Fort Frontenac cut the traffic round the eastern end of the Lake. Frustrated for the moment by the Cataraqui, they discovered an equally short route round the western end of Lake Ontario and entering the Lake at Oswego, then coasting the southern shore and round the western end to the Humber mouth, they resumed their trade with the Ottawas at Toronto which became for the first time a place of meeting.

In the Autumn of 1678, three or four years after its foundation, Teiaiagon had a visit from Father Hennepin, the celebrated and not too veracious companion of La Salle. Hennepin was storm-bound in the Humber for more than two weeks and has left a graphic account of his visit. Hennepin dedicated the English edition of his book to King William III., a fact not without significance when one remembers the subsequent devotion of Toronto to the Prince of Orange. On the occasion of Hennepin's visit to Toronto, he was on his way to Niagara where he was to meet La Salle.

Not long after La Salle's departure from Canada, Teiaiagon had a visit from Du Lhut, an explorer of almost equal fame. Du Lhut had brought down from the upper lakes a horde of savages whom he had persuaded to take part in La Bane's stupid raid into the Iroquois country. They reached Niagara by way of Lake Erie only to find that the war was over. Du Lhut preferred not to return with his discontented allies, but crossing to Teiaiagon he went north over the portage.

Two years later in 1686 at the suggestion of a Jesuit missionary, Father Enjalien, Denonville instructed Durantage who commanded at Michilimackinac to establish a fortified post at Toronto to guard the Carrying Place and prevent the access of Dutch and English traders to the valuable trade of the lakes. There can be little doubt that the Toronto which Denonville intended to fortify was a Toronto on the Georgian Bay, but it was the Carrying Place he intended to bar. If his instructions were carried out Durantage's fortification was, in all probability, at the northern end of the portage at Orillia to what is now

known as the Coldwater Road but then known as the Portage de Toronto. If a post was built at this time at the northern Toronto, and the fact is open to doubt, it did not prevent a party of Dutch and English traders from Albany crossing the Carrying Place in 1687, led by a French deserter named Manion Lafontaine and a Scottish officer named Major Patrick MacGregorie. This was a notable adventure. MacGregorie was an emissary of Donegan, an ambitious Governor of New York. Ontario at this early date almost slipped from the grasp of the French. Patrick MacGregorie and the wily Durantage deserve to be remembered in Toronto.

Later in the year, Denonville himself after his raid into the Seneca Country paused on his way home at Toronto—the first recorded visit of a vice-regal party to Toronto, and the first occasion when a military force of any magnitude passed our shores. In this year one of New France's most distinguished soldiers died at the mouth of the Rouge.

After Denonville nothing more is heard of Teiaiagon as an Iroquois village. As a consequence of his raid, the Iroquois retired from the country north of the Lake. Encouraged by the military operations of the French and the protection of Fort Frontenac, the Mississaugas descended from the Georgian Bay and in 1700 we find them established at Toronto and westward to the head of the lakes. It is not necessary to go into the details of the struggle of the Mississaugas for the possession of Ontario. They emerged victorious and for the next hundred years Toronto was Mississauga Toronto. The Mississaugas brought the name Toronto south with them from the Huron Country. In 1700, they were in possession of the Carrying Place and established in Teiaiagon, now named Toronto, and occupying sites along the shore from the Rouge mouth round the lake to Niagara. This region, known to the French as the Fond du Lac or Bottom of the Lake, occupied a strategic position. The Mississaugas who roved along the shore from site to site, could trade with the French or the English as they chose and could be independent of both. They had the support of the French in expelling the Iroquois, but the Mississaugas had hardly

established themselves in Teiaiaagon in the Spring of 1700 when they sent the following message to New York:—"We have come to acquaint you that we are settled on ye north side of Cadarachqui Lake near Teiaiaagon where we plant a tree of peace and open a path for all people quite to Coilaers House and desire to be united in Ye Covenant Chain, our hunting place to be one, and to boil in one kettle, eat out of one spoon, and so be one; and because the path to Coilaers House may be open and clear, doe give a diest elke skin to cover Ye path to walke upon."

This declaration may be described as the first treaty of reciprocity with the United States, and it emanated from Toronto. But hardly had the Mississaugas declared for free trade with New York, than they made overtures to the French in Montreal. Both the French and the English now turned their eyes to Toronto and the foot of the Lake. Even before 1715, the English intended to build a post at the end of the Lake—possibly at Toronto itself, to capture the trade of the Carrying Place, but while they hesitated the French, by a brilliant coup, established their new posts in addition to Fort Frontenac, one at Quinte and another at Niagara and, a third at Toronto. They were able to do this only because a clever Frenchman named Joncaire had won the favor of the Iroquois and had estranged them from the English. These three new posts in Ontario came into existence simultaneously in 1720. Toronto and Niagara continued to be intimately associated for three quarters of a century. Toronto, which had hitherto been a dependency of Fort Frontenac, now became and remained a dependency of Niagara. Joncaire, the first commandant of the new Niagara, was also the first inspector of the Magasin Royal at Toronto. Joncaire played a very great part in securing the claims of France to the Lake region and the Ohio Valley. And Toronto may now claim an interest in the career of this distinguished pioneer.

The French post of 1720 at Toronto, probably situated on Baby Point, was actually built, however, not by Joncaire but by one of the Douvilles, a family with which Joncaire was intimately associated. Alexandre and Philippe Dou-

ville had traded as mere boys at Toronto as early as 1716 and it is likely that one or the other built the Magasin Royal. Alexandre Douville at a late date received a commission and as Captain Douville commanded at Fort Rouille in 1759 when the fort was burnt. Philippe Douville was trade clerk at Toronto in 1726 and, in the same year, received the same appointment at Niagara, a condition of affairs which produced a great scandal only terminated by the King's cancelling the lien at Toronto and closing the post after an existence of ten years.

Philippe Douville had paid only four hundred livres for his privileges at Toronto. The trade then was already valued at three thousand livres. The little shop at Baby Point was well-stocked with goods and the merchants of Toronto will be interested to know that not so long ago there existed an emporium which supplied everything from ribbons to raisins. Over a long period, the Douville family were connected with early French Toronto. The signatures of both brothers may be seen in the Declaration of Independence made by the Iroquois in Quebec in 1749.

Some years after the building of the Magasin Royal at Toronto, the similar structure at Niagara was replaced by the great stone house which still stands on guard at the mouth of the river. This building, the oldest stone building in America, has recently been restored to the condition in which the French left it in 1759 when it was taken over by the British and is undoubtedly the most interesting and the best preserved historic relic outside of Quebec. The stone house was placed where it is, perilously close to the crumbling shore of the Lake, in 1726 that it might bar the passage of the English traders from Oswego along the south shore to Toronto. The Stone House at Niagara means much more to Toronto than it does to Buffalo or to any American city. And it is in the annals of Niagara that the history of Toronto between the years 1720 and 1793 is for the most part to be discovered.

Hardly had the French in 1720 established their three additional posts in Lake Ontario, at Niagara, Quinte and Toronto, when the English asserted their claim to a share in the fur trade of the lakes by building a stone fort at

Oswego. The Dutch and English traders of Albany and the Hudson had no intention of abandoning their trade over the Toronto Carrying Place, a trade which had already proved profitable for a century.

Toronto in the first half of the eighteenth century was a place of resort. It was on the main line of travel between Toronto and Detroit. Detroit, founded in 1701, soon sprang into a rude and barbaric opulence. Silks and satins and wines were common. The road to Detroit lay along the north shore of Lake Ontario and innumerable travellers to Detroit and even the Mississippi and New Orleans passed at the mouth of the Humber or if the Lake were calm, crossed from Gibraltar Point to the mouth of the Credit.

I have tried to briefly outline something of these early centuries when our history was picturesque in the extreme.