

Tait – River Lots 1 and 2

When John Tait, a carpenter from Orkney, retired from the Hudson's Bay Company, he obtained a grant of land on the north side of Parks Creek.

Today, this pretty stream forms the boundary between the Municipalities of St Paul and St Andrews. One hundred and fifty years ago, Parks Creek was a major stopping place along the "King's Road". For ox-cart drivers and carriages travelling between Upper Fort Garry and the Lower fort, it was a chance to rest horses or oxen under the spreading branches of the tall trees that grew along the little stream.

John Tait must have been delighted to discover that this twisting outlet from the St Andrews Marsh (the "Big Bog") was suitable to power a water mill.

During the 1840's and 1850's, St Paul and St Andrews was the main grain growing area of the Red River settlements. The flat fields of the river bank farms upstream of Lower Fort Garry produced the much of the wheat that was ground into flour and shipped by the HBC to its outposts across the Northwest. Wheat flour, next to furs and pemmican, was the most valuable commodity that a pioneer farmer could sell to the HBC for cash or credit at the company's stores.

Windmills, that ground wheat into flour when their large sails caught the breeze, were a common sight along the river banks north of the Forks. Visitors to the area, such as A Y Hind and Captain Palliser, commented on their beauty.

However, the windmills were not a reliable base for an essential industry. The lack of wind strong enough to operate the grindstones meant that for months grinding had to be suspended. The resulting undependable supplies of wheat flour – a staple of life for the Red River settlements - crippled the growth of the milling industry in Red River. Milling remained at a subsistence level until a new power source could be tapped. That new power was water! Access to a stream with a continuous flow made it possible to build a more efficient water-powered mill.

John Tait must have seen the opportunity that Parks Creek offered when he chose this River Lot.

Clearly, he was a man of vision, energy and determination, Tait built a dam across Parks Creek. The lake that formed behind the dam quickly became the largest man-made feature in all the Northwest! The steady outflow from this large "mill pond" provided enough energy to run 4 grindstones at a time. By the late 1850's, the powerful mill became such a prominent destination for local farmers that the stream was referred to "Water-mill" Creek.

Tait became known as "the miller of St Andrews" and was the most successful miller in the region. Charging farmers between a tenth and a sixth of the grindings (depending on the season) allowed him to invest in other profit-making activities and to buy more land.

At other mills, a store was set up by the milling family to provide basic necessities to the increased traffic at the mill site. Tait, instead, used his expertise as a carpenter to build York boats and other small craft. This was a very good "side" business, because every early Red River family needed a boat for daily transportation along the river. Tait may have even provided

customized vessels that carried goods all the way to Hudson Bay and earned income from this freighting business in competition with the HBC.

Tait and his son and their families became very prominent in the local community. By 1870, Lot 2 was registered to John's son, Joseph Tait, a clear indication that the family was prospering. Joseph's lot did not remain in the family for long, however. The registered owner by 1878 was the notorious, Dr John Christian Schultz, the noted land speculator. The circumstances, under which Schultz acquired the property, are unknown, but Schultz's actions in dealing with early settlers in land transactions have long been questioned.

Confederation

The Tait family played an active part surrounding Manitoba's confederation and the resistance led by Louis Riel. Initially, the Tait's, like most other Anglo- Metis in the region, opposed the actions of Riel.

However, in mid-February of 1870, when firebrands such as Thomas Scott and Dr Schultz raised an army of 300 St Andrews and St Peters men to march on Upper Fort Garry to depose Riel, it was John Tait who stood before the mob of armed farmers. He stated that he would shed no blood of a French Metis because "we are brothers under the skin".

His argument and those of other respected men of the colony (including the Anglican and Presbyterian clergy) carried the day. St Andrews men returned to their homes. However, 50 from Portage la Prairie area continued towards the Forks where they were captured and imprisoned by Riel.

Of course, the example of the Parisien - Sutherland incident gave a clear example of what the price of taking up arms in anger could be. Wisdom prevailed, and the "army of St Andrews" disbanded. From then forward, the Riel issue resolved itself in the Convention of Forty. St Andrews voiced its opinions through strong representatives such as Donald Gunn and moderates like Alfred Boyd (who in 1871 became Manitoba's first Premier).

Dr John Christian Schultz had been acquiring land or businesses that he felt would make him rich ever since his arrival in Red River in 1859. Part of the reason he opposed Riel so vehemently was because Riel's plan to make Manitoba a full-fledged Province with its own government (rather than being just a "territory" ruled from Ottawa) would put limits on Schultz's free-wheeling land speculation.

The coming of a promised transcontinental railway that would cross the Red River excited such fervor that Schultz and others bought up as much farm land as they could in hopes that the rails would cross their properties. If a town sprang up along the proposed route of the railway, so much the better, as the selling price of the land would even be higher.

Lot 2, on the west side of the river in St Andrews, was a rare investment for Schultz. Land was generally cheaper on the east side of the river as it tended to be more heavily wooded and was sometimes rockier. Schultz was not interested in farming the land, at least for himself. He was interested in what price he could get for the land when the railway passed over or near it. The rail line would bring thousands of farmers and businessmen from Canada who would be eager to earn

their fortunes in the West and willing to pay high prices for land. Land close to rails meant ease of transport of farm produce to markets and that meant greater profit for the farmer. Consequently, higher prices could be demanded for land near rail lines.

Schultz had already bought river lots 233 and 281 on the east side of the river by 1870. He acquired Lot 288 and Lot 231 by 1878 and Lot 277 by 1882. These river lots entailed hundreds of acres and extended two miles back from the river. Coincidentally, they were all crossed by the main line of the CPR when it was eventually built along the east side of the Red River south from East Selkirk to St Boniface.

Schultz had concentrated his efforts in the Parish of St Clements due to its proximity to the anticipated crossing at Selkirk (as recommended by the railroad's Chief Engineer, Sandford Fleming). He was one of the original investors in the town of Selkirk. In 1875, he acquired river lots in what was to become the centre of the new town. He owned the lot that eventually became Manitoba Avenue. He was even involved in the naming of some of its streets. Agnes Street was named in honour of his wife, Agnes Farquarson Schultz. (Surprisingly, there is still a Schultz Avenue in Selkirk today!) Schultz owned so much property in Selkirk, that even in 1908, his widow, (Agnes) paid taxes to the Town of more than \$8000 annually.

Probably as a way to keep cash flowing into his pockets so as to fund more land purchases, Schultz built the first Merchants Hotel at the corner of Manitoba and Eveline in 1877. This was a very good business since when word got out that the railway was coming, the town boomed!

Land prices shot up and people flocked to the new community for work building houses, wharves, boats and roads. Railroad and timber crews working their way west from Lake Superior descended on Selkirk's saloons and brothels. Churches were built to reinforce morality and schools soon followed.

Selkirk looked as if it would become the railway capital of Manitoba and perhaps the key city in opening the West. Unfortunately for the people of Selkirk, Schultz also had huge holdings in Winnipeg, particularly in Point Douglas. Schultz, while being the Member of Parliament for Selkirk, decided that he could make more money if the railway passed through Winnipeg.

He not only backed Winnipeg's bid for the Crossing of the Red River, but gave free land to the railway. When the railway did cross the river from St Boniface, it was onto Schultz's donated land in Point Douglas. Winnipeg went from a shabby, flood-prone frontier village to a bustling transportation hub in a matter of months. The value of all Schultz's land in the new city skyrocketed! Though his land in Selkirk languished as the bottom fell out of its land market: almost every other early investor in Selkirk lost their shirts! Schultz became one of the wealthiest men in the province!

Schultz was later made a Senator when he was defeated at the polls by angry voters, (mainly from Selkirk?) and became Manitoba's Lieutenant-Governor. The distinguished and respected Colin Inkster when he read the complimentary epitaph on Schultz's tombstone was heard to say "it is a pity we knew him!"

Milling

Milling was a business in which one could make a profit outside of the fur Millers, if they had the capital to undertake the expense of constructing a gristmill, could earn up to a sixth of all the grain their mill ground. However, few of the early settlers had any capital. Early mills in Red River Settlement were sponsored or subsidized by Lord Selkirk or his estate, the Christian Mission Society (Anglican Church), or later, by the HBC.

Wind mills could be built using mostly local materials, but expensive items like metal machinery and even millstones had to come from Britain and be transported by voyageurs. Another problem that the first Selkirk Settlers encountered was that no one among them had ever assembled a mill before. as

Even when a mill was assembled, there was no guarantee that it would work. They required constant maintenance and repair and most importantly – wind. The early mills were very unreliable because they required steady, strong winds to turn the massive mechanisms. It is no wonder that the most common accessory in every household became the **Quern** – a hand mill for grinding just enough grain to provide a family's needs for a day.

By the 1840's, water mills began to appear but were limited by the locations of appropriate streams and climatic conditions. St Andrews had two water mills: Tait's mill on the west side of the river and John Gunn's on the east. But in 1863 and 1864 even these mills were unable to operate because of the drought.

Still, the mills and the millers became well-known and popular personalities in their local areas. The mill became a meeting place where farmers came both for the making of flour and for the passing on of news. It has been said that "gossip" was as much a feature of the milling business as the grinding of grain. In the Red River Settlements, millers were respected for their acumen and became opinion-makers and community leaders.

Popular millers such as Donald Gunn, (who had gotten into milling as a sideline with his sons in 1849) became the representative to Riel's Convention of 40 and later a member of the province of Manitoba's first government. Donald's son, John was elected to Manitoba's first Legislative Assembly in 1870.

Other Notable millers included Louis Riel's father, "the miller of the Seine", as well as Cuthbert Grant, Andrew McDermot, Robert Logan, Thomas Sinclair and Narcisse Marion. All of whom played significant roles in the emergence of Manitoba.

In 1878, a St Andrews miller pulled a stunt at the legislature that changed the course of Manitoba's economic development.

The MLA from St Andrews, EHGG Hay, who had built the first steam-powered grist mill in Manitoba, did something outrageous that opened the whole legislature's eyes to the bright future that the farmers of Manitoba could enjoy. He gave away free loaves of bread to the MLA's.

Shocking, because the MLA's were mostly descended from Scots and things given for free are rare? No. It was because the bread was made from flour grown and ground in Manitoba! It was of such high quality that it announced the birth of a new and vital industry to Manitoba's decision-makers.

What Hay did was to point out that Milling, in combination with wheat growing, could produce a high-quality product that could compete with the leading flour producers in Canada and the world. That combination would spread Manitoba's reputation, and indeed that of the whole Northwest (later Saskatchewan and Alberta) around the world. The profits to be garnered from

wheat and flour production opened up the entire West of Canada, inspired immigration from Britain and Europe, and created a vibrant economy for Western Canada for a century.