

THE JOURNAL OF SERGEANT JAMES THOMPSON

1758 - 1830

THE Literary and Historical Society of Quebec having acquired from the heirs of the late James Thompson, the Manuscript Journal he kept, during his residence of 71 years at Quebec, beg to offer to the students of Canadian Annals some selections from the above.

The diary of this worthy old soldier fills nine bound volumes, several of them of folio size, comprising upwards of 2,000 pages.

Though this diary in the main records only daily, dry engineering, masons and builder's operations in connection with the fortifications of Quebec, of no real historical value, there occur several siege details, field narratives and anecdotes which, in the opinion of the Society, are worthy of being preserved in print.

Sergeant James Thompson's experience and duties as overseer of military works at Quebec, cover the whole period from the siege of Louisbourg, to the year of his death, in 1830, at the age of 98.

Some of the entries in his Journal having been dictated to his son, Deputy Commissary General Thompson, and recorded by him when his father was over 96 years of age, are occasionally misleading as to dates, but the loyal and honor-

able career of the brave old Highlander generally entitle the writer to full credence.

One of the leading journals of Quebec mentions as follows his demise, in 1830 (1) :

“ Mr. Thompson was born in the year 1732 at Tain, in Ross-shire, Scotland.

“ Owing to a strong attachment to a young man about his own age, who had obtained leave to recruit for a company in a regiment of Highlanders (Captain William Baillie, his cousin), he volunteered to accompany him on the service meditated in 1758, to take place in North America. In this corps, commanded by the Honourable Simon Fraser, of Lovatt, he served in the harassing siege and conquest of Louisbourg, where, on the landing of the troops, and in the same boat with himself, it was his misfortune to lose his friend and captain, he having been the first officer killed.

“ From a presentiment of what was to befall him, and motives of pure friendship, this officer, the day previous to the landing, addressed a letter to Colonel Fraser, recommending Mr. Thompson to his protection, and took an opportunity of introducing him to his personal knowledge, thereby securing to him a pledge which, throughout all the various services in which the regiment was afterwards engaged, was faithfully redeemed.

“ Mr. Thompson served at the memorable siege and reduction of Quebec in 1759, and was present at the capitulation of the town of Montreal, the following year.

(1) THE LATE MR. J. THOMPSON. FROM the *Star*, of Quebec, 8th Sept., 1830.

“After the disbandment of the regiment, the early occurrence of which having operated against him obtaining the commission to which he was to have succeeded, he was attached to the Royal Engineer Department in the capacity of Overseer of works, in which he continued until the year 1828, being a total period of service of seventy-one years. It was principally owing to an infirmity, contracted during the fatigues of the American war in 1775, the effects of which in his 96th year, constrained him to desist from his official duties. He was particularly active during the first winter after the capture of Quebec in the preparations for the means of defense against an attack by the French, expected to take place the ensuing spring; and in the battle of the 28th April, 1760, on the plains of Abraham, he so highly distinguished himself in the exploits of “Fraser’s Highlanders,” that after the pressure of duty had somewhat subsided, General Murray, who personally knew his merits, made him an offer of the situations, either of Barrack-Master of Quebec or of Town-Major of Montreal: but he gave the preference to the nature of duties he had to perform in the Engineer Department.

“Mr. Thompson’s services were eminently conspicuous on the occasion of the invasion of Canada by the American army in 1775, there having been no commissioned officer of Engineers present at the time.

“On General Amherst’s division appearing in front of St. Louis Gate and then entering the town of Quebec with their cheers, in expectation that they would be immediately admitted, it was Mr. Thompson who, from experience in gunnery acquired at Pointe Levy in 1758, leveled and fired the first discharge from a 24-pounder at them from Camp Diamond Bastion, which caused their precipitate retreat to Pointe-aux-Tremoules.

“ On the defeat of the other American division, at Près-de-Ville, under General Montgomery, who was killed, it fell to Mr. Thompson to superintend the private interment of that General's body, whose sword he considered himself entitled to withhold, and which still remains with the family.

“ From his general intelligence, particularly on military points, his strong memory, faculties which enabled him to treasure up a store of most interesting anecdotes, and which, up to a period nearly approaching his dissolution, he would freely relate in all their minuteness of circumstances, and with all his frankness of manner, he acquired general esteem, in which he had the happiness to number that of each succeeding Commander of the Forces, and which seems to have gained strength with his increasing years.

“ Of his numerous family, four sons attained the age of manhood : two are officers in the Commissariat ; a third is the present Judge of Gaspé (1830); and the fourth, who died in Montreal, was a senior lieutenant in the Royal Artillery”.



BRIGADIER GENERAL R. MONTGOMERY'S SWORD, 1775 (1)

“ The path leading round the bottom of the rock on which the garrison stands, and called *Près-de-Ville*, was then quite narrow so that the front of the line of march could present only a few files of men. The sergeant (2) who had charge of the barrier-guard Hugh McQuarters,—where there was a gun kept loaded with grape and musket-balls, and levelled every evening in the direction of the said foot-path—had orders to be vigilant, and when assured of an approach by any body of men, to fire the gun. It was General Montgomery's fate to be amongst the leading files of the storming party; and the precision with which McQuarters acquitted himself of the orders he had received, resulted in the death of the general, two aides-de-camp, and a sergeant; at least, these were all that could be found after the search made at dawn of day the next morning. There was but one discharge of the gun, from which the general had received a grape-shot in his chin, one in the groin, and one through the thigh, which shattered the bone. I never could ascertain whether the defection of Montgomery's followers was in consequence of the fall of their leader, or whether owing to their being panic-struck, a consequence so peculiar to an unlooked-for shock in the dead of night and when almost on the point of

(1) Extract from *Hawkins' Picture of Quebec*, 1834.

(2) There were other Canadian worthies, who can legitimately share the credit of this *fait d'armes*—Chabot, Coffin, and the captain of an English transport, Barnsfare.—J. M. L.

coming into action ; added to which, the meeting with an obstruction (in the barrier) where one was not suspected to exist. Be that as it may, he or rather, the cause in which he had engaged, was deserted by his followers at the instant that their perseverance and intrepidity were the most needed. I afterwards learnt that the men's engagements were to terminate on 31st December (1775).

“ Considering the then weak state of the garrison of Quebec, it is hard to say how much further the enterprise might have been carried had Montgomery effected a junction with Arnold, whose division of the storming party, then simultaneously approaching by the Sault-au-Matelot extremity, was left to carry on the contest alone, unaided, and which was left to sustain the whole brunt of the battle. But as I do not undertake to give a detailed history of the whole of the events, I return to the *general* and the sword. Holding the situation of overseer of works in the Royal Engineer Department at Quebec, I had the superintendent of the defences to be erected throughout the place, which brought to my notice almost every incident connected with the military operations of the blockade of 1775 ; and from the part I had performed in the affair generally, I considered that I had some right to withhold the general's sword, particularly as it had been obtained on the battle-ground.

“ On its having been ascertained that Montgomery's division had withdrawn, a party went out to view the effects of the shot, when, as the snow had fallen in the previous night about knee deep, the only part of a body that appeared *above* the level of the snow was that of the general himself, whose hand and part of the left arm was in an erect position, but the body itself much distorted, the knees being drawn up towards the head ; the other bodies that were found at the moment, were those of his aides-de-camp Cheesman and

McPherson, and one sergeant (1). The whole were hard frozen. Montgomery's sword (and he was the only officer of that army who wore a sword that I ever perceived) was close by his side, and as soon as it was discovered, which was first by a drummerboy, who made a snatch at it on the spur of the moment, and no doubt considered it as his lawful prize, but I immediately made him deliver it up to me, and some time after I made him a present of seven shillings and six pence, by way of prize money.

“ The sword has been in my possession to the present day (16th Aug. 1828). It has a head at the top of the hilt somewhat resembling a lion's or bulldog's, with cropt ears, the edges inteded, with a ring passing through the chin or underjaw, from which is suspended a double silver chain communicating with the front tip of the guard by a second ring ; at the lower end of the handle there is, on each side, the figure of a spread eagle. The whole of the metal part of the hilt is of silver. About half an inch of the back part of the guard was broken off while in my possession. The handle itself is of ivory, and undulated obliquely from top to bottom. The blade which is twenty-two inches long, and fluted near the back, is single edged with a slight curve towards the point, about six inches of which, however, is sharp on both edges, and the word “ Harvey ” is imprinted on it, five and a half inches from the top in Roman capitals in a direction upwards. The whole length of the blade is two feet four inches (when found it had no scabbard or sheath, but I soon had the present one made, and mounted in silver to corres-

(1) Col. McLean, in a letter dated 28th of May (1776) to some unknown person, state that twenty more dead were discovered in spring, under the snow at Près-de-Ville, in addition to the thirteen found in January, 1776. (*Canadian Archives*, 2. 12, p. 69).

As it was lighter and shorter than my own, I adapted it and wore it in lieu. Having some of the "Séminaire", where there was a number of officers, prisoners of war of General Arnold's, I had occasion to be much vexed with myself for not having with me, for the instant they observed it they would have been their General's, and they were very much affected by the recollections that it seemed to bring to their minds, indeed, several of them wept audibly! I was, however, in mercy to the feelings of those ill-fated gentlemen, that whenever I had to go to the Seminary I always took care to leave the sword behind me. To return to the body on its being brought within the walls of the Seminary was identified by Mrs. Widow Prentice, who kept the hotel known by the name of "Free-Mason's" by a scar on one of his cheeks, supposed to be a sabre-cut, and by the General having frequently lodged at her house on previous occasions of his coming to Quebec on his duty. General Carleton, the then Governor General, being satisfied as to his identity, ordered that the body should be decently buried, in the most private manner, and His Excellency entrusted the business to me: I accordingly had the body conveyed to a small log house in St. Lewis Street (opposite to the then residence of Judge Dunn, the second from the corner of St. Ursule street (2), owned by one François Gaubert, a cooper, and I ordered Henry Dunn, painter, to prepare a suitable coffin; this he complied with, in every respect becoming the rank of the deceased, having

(1) General Montgomery's sword was purchased in 1873, from the heirs of Mr. Thompson, by the Marquis of Lorne, Governor General of Canada, and presented by him to the Livingstone family, of New York, connected with Gen. R. Montgomery by marriage.

(2) This house being at present No. 72, owned by the Chevalier C. Baillargé, City Engineer.

covered it with fine black cloth and lined it with flannel ; after the job was completed there was nobody to indemnify six dollars that Dunn gave to the six men who bore the body to the grave ; he wished to insist upon my paying his account, as the orders for the other work had been given and paid by me, but as I could not have required his men (having enough soldiers of my own) I contrived to put him off from time to time, and I really believed it remains unpaid till to this day ; however, Dunn is long since dead, and as he could well afford to be at the loss, it was perhaps after all, only compelling him to a generous action towards a fallen foe. He deserved, in some measure, to sustain the loss, for I gave him no directions about the six men, as I had a party of my own in waiting at the Chateau to carry the corpse to the grave at the moment that General Carleton conceived proper ; and when I did ascertain his wishes to that effect, I proceeded to Gaubert's, where I was told that Mr. Dunn had just taken away the corpse ; this was about the setting of the sun on the 4th January, 1776. I accordingly posted up to the place where I had ordered the grave to be dug, (just alongside of that of my first wife within, and near the surrounding wall of the powder magazine, in the gorge of the St. Lewis bastion), and found, in addition to the six men and Dunn, the undertaker, that the Rev. Mr. De Montmollin, the millitary chaplain, was in attendance, and the business thus finished before I got there. On satisfying myself that the grave was properly covered up, I went and reported the circumstances to General Carleton, who expressed himself not too well pleased with Dunn's officiousness. It having afterwards been decided to demolish the powder magazine, and to erect a casemated barrack in its stead, I took care to mark the spot where Montgomery was buried (not so much perhaps on his account, as from the interest I felt for it on another score) by having a small cut

stone inserted in the pavement within the barrack square, and this precaution enabled me afterwards to point out the place to a nephew of the General, Mr. Lewis, who, learning that the person who had had the direction of the burial of his uncle's corpse was still living, came to Quebec about the year 1818, for the laudable purpose of obtaining the permission of the military commander, General Sherbrooke, to take away the remains. I, of course, was called upon for the purpose of pointing out the spot ; and having repaired thither with young Mr. Lewis and several officers of the garrison, together with Chief Justice Sewell and some friends of the deceased, I directed the workmen at once where to dig, and they accordingly took up the pavement exactly in the direction of the grave. The skeleton was found complete, and when removed a musket ball fell from the skull ; the coffin nearly decayed. No part of the black cloth of the outside nor of the flannel of the inside were visible ; a leather thong with which the hair had been tied, was still in a state of preservation after a lapse of forty-three years ; there is a spring of water near the place, which may have had the effect of hastening the decay of the contents of the grave.

The particulars attending the removal of the remains through the several towns of the United States to their ultimate place of deposit (Broadway, New York) were published in all the public papers in that line of communication.

“ (Signed) JAMES THOMPSON,

“ Overseer of Works.

“ Quebec, 16th August 1828.”

TO KNOW HOW THE ORDER OF THE GATEAU BECAME
FIRST INSTITUTED

Be it remembered that, on the evening of the 6th day of January, which was in the year of our Lord 1773; Lauchlan Smith, Esquire, one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, and Seigneur of the Parish of S^t Ann on the south shore of the River S^t Lawrence below the Point of Levi, passed the evening with M^r John Chisholm, M^r Francis Smith and M^r John McLane of this city (all of them now dead) at the House of M^r James Thompson Overseer of Works for the Garrison of Quebec, and being the Festival of Epiphany, in commemoration of the wise men of the East, who were conducted by the luminous appearance of a Star in the Lower Regions of the air; to the place where Our Saviour was born, a Gateau was provided, which, being cut into as many parts as there were Persons in Company, and each one having receive his part, beheld that of the said Lauch^a Smith Esquire contain a Bean, which according to ansient custom constituted him King of the Gateau and after being saluted by the Company as King, he returned them thanks, and said in his facetious way, since you my Friends acknowledge me as your King, I cannot do less than bestow on you some distinguishing mark of my sovereignty, then, taking hold of a sword he found hanging in the Room, ordered the said James Thompson to kneel down befor him, and having put the point of the sword on his head said, arise Sir James, and did the same to John Chisholm, Francis Smith, and John McLane, and the evening was spent in great Glee.

That on the evening of the 4th of January following, the gentlemen thus Knighted, waited on their Sovereign with a formal address of thanks for his great goodness on Knighting them on the evening of last Epiphany day, and praying that he would be pleased to confer the same Honor, on three gentlemen who accompanied them with the address viz. Hugh Fraser, Henry Dunn and Francis Anderson. This prayer was readily granted, the Sovereign having immediately Knighted them.

The Sovereign having ordered a somptuous entertainment, proposed that, his Knights be incorporated into an Order, to be henceforth and forever called by the name and Title of Knights of the Honorable Order of the Gâteau.

That articles of Bye Laws be immediately made out for the good Government of the same, the knights having thanked the Sovereign for this additional mark of his goodness, M^r McLane was directed to make out these articles, and a day was fixed for the knights to assemble for the purpose of signing (1) the same. These (2) Bye Laws required that the chapter of the Order should be held monthly, and in conformity thereto the chapter have been regularly Held from the above period to some time in 1785, when the members became so numerous that some of them could not be kept to that order required by the Laws, which caused discontent, consequently many had withdrawn and soon after the chapter tumbled into a dormant state.

The Sovereign with deep regret contemplated much on the foregoing unhappy circumstances, and ever since the discontinuance of the chapter, it was his intention to revive

(1) For *signing*.
(2) For *these*.

and new model the same into such form, and on such principles as may effectually prevent any future discord, but, the Sovereign's removal from Quebec to his Seigniory of St. Auns, has hitherto been the cause of his not having carried his design into execution, and now considering his advanced years, that by any further delay his Order of the Gâteau (in which he greatly delighted might fall into eternal oblivion.— He doth therefore, and by the authority vested in him as Sovereign of the Order of the Gateau first, Revoock and annul all Laws and usages heretofor observed in the Late Chapter of his Order, and do hereby and by the Authority aforesaid, Revive and Reconstitute the same in ample form, and being thus constituted, to consist of the Sovreign and in its fullest extent of Thirteen Knights and no more on any pretense whatever, well knowing that the down fall of the former chapter proceeded entirely from the number of Knights being unlimited, and for which cause this clause is made essential, perpetual irrevocable and unalterable.

That a chapter will be held on the evening of the 6th of January in every year to celebrate the Festival of Epiphany according to the ancient custom.

That the knights shall wear a Star pendant to a mazarine blue Ribbons from the 3rd button of the vest, as a distinguishing Badge of the Order of the Gateau.

This Badge to be made according to the design hereto annexed (1), in gold, or gold gilt, or, as it may be hereafter agreed upon by the knights when duely convined in Chapter.

That in the absence of the Sovreign, the Chapter shall be governed by a President, who shall be elected and installed

(1) There is, in the text, a design of the proposed badge.

in that office on the evening of a Festival of Epiphany, in every year and shall be invested with Sovereign authority, in as much as if the Sovreign himself were personally present.

The Laws for the good Government of the Order of the Gateau shall be framed by the Knights chapter, and when the same is made out and agreed to by unanimous consent, the Sovereign will approve and confirm that Law by his sign manual.

