

BON MATURE

This is the name of two lakes (Little and Big Bon Mature) which flow into the west side of the Mersey River about 12 miles above Liverpool. For many years it was a favorite hunting country for Milton men, and in ancient times the land about these lakes was covered with a massive and tall stand of pine, as the ~~XXXXX~~ name shows. This name Bon Mature (meaning Good Masting or Good Spars) is a curious survival of the old French regime in Nova Scotia. There was never a French settlement on the river, although Denys had a fishing station at Liverpool Harbour for a few years, long before the New Englanders came to settle there. However the Mersey River and its lakes formed a canoe highway across the province to Port Royal, with a steep but comparatively short portage between the head ~~waters~~ waters of the Mersey and those of the Lequille River, which flows into Annapolis Basin under the very ramparts of Fort Anne. This canoe route was much used by the Indians, and by French travelers, one of whom, de Meulles, left an account of it.

There is no record that Rossignol, the French trader whose name was given originally to Liverpool harbor and the river that flowed into it, ever ventured up the stream to the great lake which still bears his name. Possibly he did, and possibly he was the Frenchman who first noted the tall pines at Bon Mature.

In August 1787, John Wentworth, who was then Surveyor General of the King's Woods, visited Liverpool and traveled up the river in search of a stand of pine suitable for naval masts. Simeon Perkins wrote in his diary, August 18, 1787: - "Major Freeman calls on me and informs me that Governor Wentworth has marked a number of logs, trees, &c, for the King. I call on him with Capt. William Freeman, the Major and ~~others~~ sundry others. He informs that he has laid out 2 miles & a half square on the river, at the stillwater, for a forest for the King's use; that no timber may be cut thereon; that his deputy will survey the

lands for us, at 10 /- per day, & mark what is for the King, and then we shall have a license for cutting the remainder. Mr. John McAlpine is appointed his deputy."

(Note: in the above entry, Perkins gives Wentworth his former title of Governor of New Hampshire, from which he had fled during the American Revolution. Wentworth did not become Governor of Nova Scotia until 1792.)

Wentworth himself reported that he had reserved 4,000 acres "four miles above the saw mills". The uppermost saw mill then was at Potanoc. "The stillwater" mentioned by Perkins was in the vicinity of Bon Mature. It seems clear that Wentworth had spotted the same block of mast pines noted long before him by the French.

In these reserved lands the trees actually suitable for naval masts were blazed and marked with the King's broad arrow and John Wentworth's initials. As the curve in the "J" was impossible to cut with an ax, the actual mark was:-



There is no record that these reserved trees were ever cut and used by the Navy, and tradition in Queens County says that the trees were taken by local loggers and shipbuilders in subsequent years. *More's History of Queens County, page 60, says that some trees marked with the broad arrow were still standing on Midway River in 1837.*

The ravages of ax and fire have made the name Bon Mature a mockery long since, although one stand of good timber remained for many years on the west side of Big Bon Mature Lake. A lone Indian, Cobleal (the Micmac version of "Gabriel") lived in the edge of this clump for years, and although the big trees had been cut and had vanished when I first saw Bon Mature in 1923, the remains of the green clump were still known as "Cobleal's Bunch".

Little Bon Mature flows into Big Bon Mature by a short marshy brook, from the north-west. It is a pretty little pool, surrounded by pines. At the south end of it, one winter day in the early 1930's, I found the mouldered ruins of a small log hut. Milton folk told me it was built about 1910 by a younger brother of John and Russell Walker, lumbermen. He was a clever student whose mind cracked, and he went off into the woods and lived like a hermit for some years at Little Bon Mature, fishing and hunting for food. At last someone found him ill, and he was removed to Milton, where he died.

SAM'S FARM and MURRAY'S ROCK

Just above the pond of the former Liverpool electric plant at The Guzzle, about 2 miles above Potanoc, ~~on~~ on the east bank of the Mersey River, was an area still known in 1923 as "Sam's Farm." Samuel Freeman of Milton, was head of the lumbering and shipbuilding firm of Samuel Freeman & Sons during the 1850's and 1860's. (It went bankrupt in 1876.) In the days of his prosperity, probably in the 1850's, Sam had his men clear land for a farm at the above-mentioned spot. Why, God knows. It was not good land for cultivation, and he owned three or four farms, under good cultivation, in the region of Milton village.

Its only communication with Milton was by the old river road (not to be confused with the present motor road up the river), a rough winding track made by the river-drivers along the east bank of the Mersey, and passable only by ox wagons. After the collapse of the big firm in 1876 "Sam's Farm" was left to grow up again in woods, and it was good rabbit-hunting country in the 1920's.

Not far above "Sam's Farm" the old river road swung away from the river

and passed along a low ridge. Beside the road on the ridge, looking down towards the river, stood a squarish boulder perhaps 12 feet high, surrounded by young hardwood trees. In the middle of the Mersey River, immediately opposite this rock, rose another, remarkably like it. The one in the river was known as ~~Murray's~~ Murray's Rock. An old retired lumberman of Milton, Levi Guy Minard, told me the following in 1939:-

"That rock was named after my ~~uncle~~ uncle Silas Murray. He was working as a river-driver one spring about 1870. The water was running low in the river and the drive had been a hard scrape all the way down from Indian Gardens. There was always a bad log-jam in the river about this rock, and that year the drivers had a long hard struggle there. They were picking away at the jam, sweating and harassed by swarms of black-flies, when all of a sudden my uncle stuck his oldfashioned cant-hook into a crevice of the rock. He yelled, "No more river-driving for Silas Murray !" and leaped away over the jammed logs to the bank and the river road. He never drove logs again. The river men never forgot the incident. The old cant-hook remained stuck in the rock for years, and the river-drivers always called it Murray's Rock."

In talking over Indian names for various places and objects on the river, I found that the Micmacs had a name for the big rock on the ridge, opposite Murray's Rock. It was pronounced GOON-DOW---JEE---DAW-OSS---SIK , with the emphasis on DAW. It means The Prop. An old Micmac legend, related to me by Mike Mokone ("McCooney") says that originally both of these rocks stood in the river, or rather ~~Murray's~~ one rock stood, and "Murray's Rock" leaned against it, like a prop. The standing rock got tired of this, and jumped up on the ridge above, where it remains, with water marks on it. I once examined the rock on the ridge. It was stained by lichens, but I saw nothing like water marks !