

JOHN ARBUTHNOTT CADENHEAD 1858 - 1898

by Wm. John Quinsey, OLS(Ret), CLS

(One of the hazards of land surveying in Canada in the early days of settlement was death by exposure. There is a lesson in this biography.)

John Arbuthnott Cadenhead was born in 1858 in Canada West (Ontario), the son of Alexander S. and Mary Cadenhead. Alexander and Mary were born about 1824 and 1831. They had emigrated from Scotland prior to 1851. John had two elder brothers—Alexander G. born in 1851 and Arthur D. born in 1853.¹

In 1871, John, age 13, was living with his parents in the village of Fergus in the Township of Nichol. His eldest brother Alex, age 20, had left home perhaps to work in the lumbering industry. His father was the Crown Land Agent for the County of Wellington. His brother Arthur, then 18, was a Bookkeeper. His sister, Elizabeth, was 10 and his youngest brother, George, was 7 years old. The three younger children were attending school. The family's religion was Church of Scotland.²

Living with the family was a senior John Cadenhead, a teller at the Bank of Montreal in Fergus.³ John Sr. was born about 1821 (three years before Alexander). He was not married. As he had also emigrated from Scotland, it is likely that he was the elder brother of Alexander.⁴

The Cadenhead's owned a five acre parcel of land. In addition to their house, there was a barn or stable for their cow and one other horned animal. They had an orchard of fruit trees, a vineyard, and produced some wheat and butter.⁵

Another family of Cadenhead's resided on a farm near the northern corner of Nichol Township, about five miles from Fergus. Brebner Cadenhead, born in 1826, had also emigrated from Scotland.⁶ It is likely that he was the younger brother of John Sr. and Alexander.

In 1878, John Cadenhead Sr. decided to go West to Manitoba where homestead grants had become available. A British subject, head of a family, or single and over 21 years of age, had only to pay a \$10 fee and register his claim in a land office for land of any size up to 160 acres. Then he had to live on the homestead for six months of the year for five years; clear a certain amount, own cattle, and build a cabin. Three of John Senior's nephews went with him. They were brothers Arthur D. and John A. aged 25 and 20, and their cousin Brebner (Junior) aged 21 years. All four obtained quarter section homestead grants of 160 acres each in adjoining sections along the western side of Township 4 Range 3 East of the Principal Meridian near the future community of Sainte Elizabeth, not far from the Post Office of Jolys, about 60 kilometres south of Winnipeg.⁷

Alexander S. Cadenhead continued in his position as Crown Land Agent until the end of 1879. In early October that year, he received notice that his agency, as well as those in Huron, Grey and Perth, was to be closed. In those counties, very little

public lands remained for disposition.⁸ We do not know the subsequent location of Alexander S. and Mary Cadenhead. They had left the area of Fergus by 1881.

The Manitoba census of 1881 indicates that the four Cadenhead men, with adjacent homestead grants, lived together in one house. Also living with them was Alexander G. Cadenhead, the elder brother of John A. and Arthur.⁹ Alexander's stay was temporary. He returned to Ontario to work in the lumbering industry. There he married, and settled in Parkdale (Toronto) as a dealer in lumber, and raised a family of five children.¹⁰

By 1884, John A. Cadenhead had returned to Fergus, Ontario. It was there on 10th January 1884 that he received his commission as PLS, Ontario.¹¹ That same year he acted as assistant to Otto J. Klotz D.L.S., D.T.S., of the Department of the Interior, on a 2,000 mile canoe exploratory trip to Hudson's Bay.¹² The trip was made in two Peterborough canoes and four men. Their route began on the South Saskatchewan River from a point north of Swift Current. From there they went down that river into Cedar Lake, across Lake Winnipeg, and down the Nelson River to York Factory. It entailed 87 portages.¹³

John A. Cadenhead did not remain in Fergus for long. He returned to Manitoba. On May 2, 1887, he received his commission as Dominion Land Surveyor #207.¹⁴ His location, given as "Town of Morris", indicates only his nearest major town, and not a change in place of residence. It was probably that year that he married. His wife was Harriet Ann. By the census of April 1891, they had one son, John Douglass, who was two years old. Living with the family was their uncle John Cadenhead Sr., aged 71. The enumerator, of French origin, gave the name of the location as "De Salaberry", and the occupation of both John A. and his uncle as "cultivateur" - meaning "farmer".¹⁵ A second son was born to the family in January 1892. His name was Hassard A.¹⁶

In the period 1893-95, John A. Cadenhead was on the staff of the International Boundary Commission. At that time a composite photograph of the staff was taken. The photo which we display is an enlargement of the original, one and a half inches by one inch.¹⁷ Otto J. Klotz also served on that staff as chief of one of seven topographical survey parties employed in the survey of the boundary between British Columbia and the Territory of Alaska.¹⁸ It was probably during those years that J.A. Cadenhead acted as the assistant to Klotz.¹⁹

At about the end of that period, John A. and his family moved to the Parish of St. Charles, at that time on the western outskirts of Winnipeg.²⁰ There, John, with the assistance of his wife, operated a market garden.²¹ The third child of John and Harriet Ann, born in June 1896, was their daughter Caroline E.²²

The following year, John A. Cadenhead of Winnipeg obtained employment with the Department of the Interior.²³ The Surveyor General in his annual report, stated the following (with addition of editor's paraphrases):

"In August 1897, Messrs. J.A. Cadenhead and R.W. Cautley, D.L.S.'s ... (and three other men) were sent to assist Mr. Fawcett (Thomas Fawcett, the Gold Commissioner had opened his office at Dawson on the 16th June)... With Inspector Harper and a party of twenty men of the North-west Mounted Police ... they arrived on the

10th of October. Mr. Fawcett ... (found that he would be unable to provide food for his increased staff until additional supplies could be obtained - in the spring)... So he sent the new arrivals to Fort Yukon in charge of Mr. Cadenhead. ... An order was obtained from ... the Alaska Commercial Company on the stores at Fort Yukon for whatever supplies the party required while there and also enough to bring them over the ice to last until June. It was proposed that they should remain at Fort Yukon until the days became longer, returning in March or April, by which time they would still be able to use sleighs in moving around and attending to some of the surveys. Mr. Cadenhead's party proceeded safely to within fifty miles of Fort Yukon where they found themselves blocked by an ice jam and had to abandon their boat. They packed their blankets the remainder of the journey and reached their destination without further mishap."

At Fort Yukon (in Alaska on the Yukon River), they were treated as welcome guests by Captain Ray of the United States Army, and obtained comfortable accommodations.²⁴ However, they had expected to be employed on productive work in the Yukon. This was not possible at Fort Yukon. J.A. Cadenhead in particular was unhappy with the situation.

In December 1897 in Alaska and the Yukon, the weather turned unusually mild. J.A. Cadenhead discussed with his party the matter of making the trip, 400 miles, back to Dawson. Except for Cadenhead, they believed it to be impossible. So Cadenhead made the trip by himself dragging his sled all the way, caching grub along the road for a possible return trip. He arrived at Dawson on 2nd January 1898. There he found plenty of work that he could do at the Gold Commissioner's office.²⁵

For 1898, the Surveyor General reported: "On the 19th of April 1898, Messrs. Cadenhead, Gibbon and Cautley, D.L.S.'s, with a party of men proceeded to Dominion creek, one of the largest tributaries of Indian river." While Cautley and Gibbon made a survey of the creek claims, "Cadenhead was occupied in taking evidence with regard to the legality of some of the staking. They returned to Dawson on the 31st of May."



Photo courtesy of the International Boundary Commission

"Messrs. Cautley, Cadenhead and Gibbon, especially the two former, were engaged for a considerable portion of the summer in the Gold Commissioner's office assisting Mr. Fawcett with the immense amount of business transacted there....Mr. Cadenhead was receiving applications for quartz claims."

"In September Mr. Cadenhead was engaged surveying the placer claims on Sulphur creek. He went by Indian river and was instructed to make a micrometer survey of the river to the mouth of Sulphur creek."²⁶

John A. Cadenhead's successful solitary trek the previous December may have given him a false sense of confidence in his ability to survive in the Yukon. It cost him his life. The untimely death of the late J.A. Cadenhead, D.L.S., was reported by the Deputy Minister of the Department of the Interior:

"He left Dawson, accompanied by a party of men, on the 12th day of September, (1898) under instructions to make a track survey of Indian River to the mouth of Sulphur Creek and then make a detailed survey of Sulphur Creek itself. There were no notes to indicate that any action had been taken in reference to the Indian River, but the party reached the point of Discovery on Sulphur Creek early in October and began operations. Members of his party informed me that at the time he started for Dawson his health was very poor and he felt himself unable to work; he therefore started for town on the 25th October unaccompanied by any member of his party. His body was found on the morning of the 27th October, by the North West Mounted Police, frozen in the ice, head and shoulders above water, near the mouth of the Klondike - not more than a hundred feet from occupied houses. He had attempted to cross the river on the ice, which in some places was quite safe, but in a few spots, where the current was strong, but recently formed. It was in one of these treacherous places he dropped through and had been unable to climb out. The pack on his back kept him from going through, but also left him powerless to help himself. This, combined with the fatigue resulting from his long trip, undoubtedly was the cause of his death. The body was surrounded by solid ice which had to be cut away to extricate it. The notes and accounts of deceased had been thrown to some distance on the ice, showing his desire to preserve them from destruction as far as possible. The burial, which took place on the following Sabbath from the Presbyterian church, of which he was an official member, was attended by all the Government officials of Dawson, and the members of his own profession acted as pall-bearers. His burial place is a high point overlooking the Klondike River, where a new public cemetery has been laid out. His widow and three small children reside at St. Charles, in the Province of Manitoba."²⁷

John Arbuthnott Cadenhead was just forty years old. The Klondike Nugget tells us that he was a medium-sized man with brownish black beard who wore large gold-rimmed spectacles. He was found at daylight with eyes staring directly ahead but with a face quite calm and peaceful. The pall-bearers were Yukon Commissioner William Ogilvie, DLS, Gold Commissioner Thomas Fawcett, DLS, and Dominion Land Surveyors Chas. W. Barwell, James Gibbon and R.W. Cautley, and Mr. D.B. Craig, Clerk to T. Fawcett. The service held at the Presbyterian Church at 2.30 p.m. was conducted by the Rev. Dr. Grant, aided by the Reverends Bowen and Dickey.²⁸

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The Nugget also gave the advice, "*An occasional death, such as that of Surveyor Cadenhead, is a warning to all of the rapidity with which a man becomes helpless upon getting himself wet. Old timers warn us that it is unsafe to travel alone for if the unexpected happens a man by himself is helpless. Many a man's life is saved in these regions by his companions.*"

In the words of Otto J. Klotz, "*A more faithful, hard-working and never-flinching man it would be difficult to find.*"

Addendum: On the 27th October 1898, an inquest was held by coroner and jurors at the office of the North West Mounted Police at Dawson. The verdict was, "That the said J.A. Cadenhead accidentally met his death through exposure, while endeavouring to cross the Klondike River....". His pocket watch had stopped at 14 minutes to 12 o'clock.²⁹

The salary of John A. Cadenhead was three dollars per day. This was probably the rate at which other D.L.S.'s in the Yukon were paid. He had made arrangements to have his salary paid monthly to his wife.³⁰ He had a \$5,000 life insurance policy and equity in his farm property east of Morris at Ste. Elizabeth.³¹ He had purchased Lot 12, Block L, Government Addition on the hill-side in Dawson for \$100 and had a building erected on it. The Department paid the funeral expenses of \$290 and granted Mrs. Cadenhead the sum of \$1095, the amount of her husband's salary for one year.³²

In 1900, Mrs. Harriet Ann Cadenhead moved into the city of Winnipeg where she was the proprietor of a six room house at 351 Ross Avenue. Her occupation was given as "boarding house". In 1901, in addition to her three children, she had a student as a boarder.³³ In November 1903, she sold her farm at Ste. Elizabeth for \$500.³⁴ By 1904, it seems that she had moved out of Winnipeg, or had possibly remarried. A search has not been made for the descendants of John Arbuthnott Cadenhead.

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W.J.Q.

Notes:

1. Census 1871, C-9946, Ontario, Wellington County, Village of Fergus, Schedule 1, p.8, lines 8-15. Also for Alex. Cadenhead, born Feb. 5, 1851; Ontario Census 1901, T-6508, West York, Toronto Ward 6 Schedule 1, p.2, line 17.
2. Ibid.
3. Gazetteer and Directory of County of Wellington, 1871, p.99.
4. Census 1871, C-9946, Ont., Wellington County, Village of Fergus, Schedule 1, p.8, lines 8-15.
5. Census 1871, C-9947, Ontario, Wellington County, Village of Fergus, Schedules 3, 4, and 5, with references to Schedule 1, page 8, line 8.
6. Census 1871, C-9946, Ontario, Wellington County, Township of Nicol, Sub.Dist. C, Div. 2, page 39, lines 10 to 17. Brebner Cadenhead owned Lots 4 and 5, Conc. 16, 200 acres.