

WILLIAM FORTUNE

Compiled by A. P. Walker

Very little is known of the early life of "Colonel" William Fortune, a Deputy Surveyor, who was granted a Commission 4th July, 1788, and who practiced in what is now the eastern part of the Province of Ontario. We do know, however, that he reached Canada from South Carolina soon after the close of the American Revolution, and on his arrival, applied to Lord Dorchester, the Governor-General, for a Commission to practice in Canada. He stated in his application that he had been an inhabitant of South Carolina for several years antecedent to the late war, and had acquired considerable property there, being a Planter and Land Surveyor in that Province. He had been granted a Commission to practice as a Land Surveyor there by Sir Egerton Leigh, Surveyor General of His Majesty's Province of South Carolina, this Commission being dated 5th day of May, 1773. Mr. Fortune further stated in his application, that on the outbreak of hostilities he had been declared to be a "Public Enemy" on account of his allegiance to the British cause, and had to abscond from his property and family, and for three years lived chiefly in woods and morasses. Upon arrival of British troops he was employed by them under Earl Cornwallis, had fought bravely in the action of 25th April, 1781, had been appointed Colonel of Militia on 8th September, 1781, and at the close of the war had made his way to Canada.

His application was favourably received by Lord Dorchester, and a Commission to practice in Quebec was issued. As this Commission may be of interest to Surveyors of the present day, a copy is given below:

"Guy, Lord Dorchester, Captain General and Governor-in-Chief of the Province of Quebec, etc., etc., etc.

"To all to whom these Presents may concern. Greeting:

"Whereas William Fortune, late of South Carolina, now of the Province of Quebec, Gentleman, hath petitioned to obtain a Commission of Surveyor of Lands in the Province of Quebec, and John Collins, Deputy Surveyor General for the said Province hath certified to me this Day, that he hath carefully examined the said William Fortune, respecting his fitness and capacity as a Surveyor of Lands, and the sufficiency of his Surveying Instruments, and that the said Instruments

have been duly regulated and rectified by the Meridian near the Town of Quebec, and that the variation has been found equal to Twelve Degrees and Thirty Minutes West, and that the said William Fortune is a person of proper character and well qualified for the said office of Surveyor of Lands.

"Now know ye, that having taken into consideration the Loyalty and Integrity of the said William Fortune, and his fitness and capacity so certified: I have nominated, and by these Presents do nominate and appoint the said William Fortune to execute and perform the Trusts and Duties of a Surveyor of Lands in the Province of Quebec, according to law: To have, hold, exercise, and enjoy the said office of Surveyor of Lands in the Province of Quebec—during Pleasure.

"Given under my Hand and Seal at Arms, at the Castle of St. Lewis, in the City of Quebec, the Fourth day of July in the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, and in the Twenty-eighth year of His Majesty's Reign.

"(Signed) Dorchester.

"By His Excellency's Command.

"(Signed) Geo. Pownall, Secretary."

We have no definite information as to the age and place of birth of Col. Fortune, but it is probable that at this time he was a man of over 50 years of age, and born in Ireland. He received from Lord Dorchester in addition to his Commission, a grant of land, for his services in the Army, of 1,000 acres, and this was located for him by Deputy Surveyor General Collins, at the North-East Corner of the Township of East Hawkesbury, close to where the present Village of Point Fortune is built. Col. Fortune settled here with his wife and six children about 1790, and claims he was the first settler on the Ottawa River. The size of his lot is given as 152 perches along the Ottawa (then known as the Grand) River, and 1,060 perches deep. The country at this time was absolutely in a state of nature, and the Colonel and his family passed through the usual severe trials of an early settler's life. Soon after his arrival he suffered a serious loss, in the death of his eldest son (who had studied surveying in South Carolina), and also his eldest daughter.

He does not seem to have done much surveying at first, but when the Province of Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada in 1791, William Fortune's name appears, with

eight others, in a list of Surveyors, who were to be considered by Lieut.-Gov. Simcoe as part of the Establishment of Upper Canada after 10th April, 1792. The following year Col. Fortune applied to Lieut.-Gov. Simcoe for employment as a Surveyor, and for the next six years did considerable work for the Government. In 1792-3 he ran the outlines of the Townships of Walford, Kitley, Bastard, Burgess, Elmsley and Montagne in the Rideau River District, and in conjunction with his son, Joseph, he subdivided parts of the Townships of Alfred, Plantagenet and Hawkesbury (East and West)—Patrick McNiff had commenced the survey of these Townships, but had apparently only staked out the Front Concession along the Ottawa River. Some interesting facts regarding the surveys of these Townships have been brought to light by Mr. E. T. Wilkie, O.L.S., in papers presented to this Association which appear in our Reports for 1900, 1904 and 1909.

Col. William Fortune must by this time have been quite an old man, for in a letter to the Surveyor General at York, in 1798, he complains of dimness of sight and old age, and his letters entirely cease in 1804, when there is a record of a mortgage of his property at Point Fortune. It is probable he died about this time, his work of surveying having been taken over by his son, Joseph Fortune, some years previously. Joseph, the second son, came to the front after the death of the eldest son, and obtained a Commission to practice as a Surveyor of Lands, from Lord Dorchester on 4th May, 1796. It is evident from this, that the right to appoint Surveyors was still retained by the Governor-General four years after the division into Provinces.

No record of the death of Col. William Fortune has so far been found. There is a report in Thomas' History of Prescott County, that the Colonel was buried close to his old residence at Point Fortune, and that his body was afterwards removed to Hawkesbury, but this cannot be substantiated—records of these early settlers are difficult to obtain.
