

LINDSAY RUSSELL

With Compliments to Mr. F. H. Peters, D.L.S.,
Surveyor General, Ottawa

What is a biography? What purpose does it serve? Referring to the dictionary we find that a biography is the history of the life of an individual. The answer to the second question is that there are certain great lessons to be learned



from every important life, and the elements of great careers are disclosed. Impressed on memory they paint the foreground of worthy ideals and lure the youthful seeker on. Many a worthy career dates from the attractive force of an ideal formed as a result of biographical reading. New courage and resolve is gained from the study and lives of great men.

It has been often said that Surveyors are poor advertisers—we live through our deeds alone which are usually recorded in dust-covered field books and records.

Eminent lawyers, doctors, politicians and scholars are always in the public mind because of the colorful lives they lead, but the Surveyors

who endure all sorts of hardships and privations in order to make the road easy for those that are to follow are soon forgotten. Yet for every brilliant lawyer, for every noted doctor, for every great politician we can claim for our own such truly great characters as Franklin, Champlain, Mackenzie, Thompson, Dennis, Andrew Russell, Lindsay Russell, Deville, Klotz, King. These men have helped in no small measure to make Canada what it is to-day. They devoted their lives to the service of the country they loved so well and the things they stood for were those that had their base on the solid rock.

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It can surely be said that new courage and resolve would be gained from a study of their lives.

In a short biographical sketch it is not possible to do much more than summarize the various steps in the life of which you write and the following is a biographical sketch of Lindsay Russell, one-time Surveyor General.

James Russell, grandfather of Lindsay Russell, was a native of Glasgow, Scotland, and not long after the close of the war of 1812, purchased land in the Canadas, brought his family with him, and settled in the Eastern Township of Leeds, in Megantic County, Quebec.

Andrew Russell, a son, was born in Glasgow about 1810. He is styled the father of astronomic surveying in Canada, and was Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands under Sir William Eyre, 1857, who was Governor at the time. His office was located in the Chateau St. Louis, where the Chateau Frontenac now stands.

Mrs. J. B. Simpson, to whom we are indebted for much of our information, is a daughter of Andrew Russell and is well known through the work she has done in connection with the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa. Her daughter, Mrs. Amy Carr, is the author of the well-known book, "The Swinging Pendulum." Mr. A. L. Russell, her brother, was an O.L.S., whose biography appears in our 1923 Report.

Mr. A. J. Russell, son of James Russell, who was the father of Lindsay Russell, was born in Scotland about 1812, and was Crown Timber Agent for the Canadas. Lindsay Russell was born on March 4th, 1839, and from an early age showed a keen interest in Surveying. His uncle, Andrew, noticed his aptitude for the work, and from him Lindsay gained his early instruction in Surveying and Astronomy.

When about 18 he was working with Walter Shanley on the Georgian Bay Canal survey.

In 1858-59 he was with the expedition under S. J. Dawson, C.E., which explored the country between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement.

After this he was for some time employed as a clerk in the Crown Timber Agency at Ottawa.

In 1870 he was assistant in charge of construction of the Red River Road during the passage of the first military expedition to Fort Garry, under the late Field Marshal, then Colonel Wolsely, and is specially referred to in the published "Narrative" of the expedition.

In 1871 Colonel J. S. Dennis, who, as Surveyor General, had just inaugurated the survey of Dominion Lands, selected Lindsay Russell to direct operations in the field as Inspector of Surveys. Two years later he was made Assistant Surveyor General, and from that time he practically had charge of the Surveys of the Dominion, as Colonel Dennis' time was fully occupied with the land administration. It was in this year that the "Special Survey" came into being. Mr. Russell's plan was to connect Red River with Lake Athabaska by a chain of triangles from which the meridians and base lines of the Dominion Lands System could be started. He very properly contended that while the accuracy of the surveys could be controlled in a north and south direction, by latitude observations, a triangulation system alone would afford the necessary control in longitude in a country without telegraphic communication.

This "Special Survey" was carried from the principal meridian to the second meridian which was located by means of this system of triangles. That was in 1876, a time of general depression throughout the world. Canada was not a wealthy country, and the "Special Survey" was found to be too expensive and was abandoned for the time being.

Later on the work was continued by extending the meridians and base lines much as we are doing at present, and was carried by Mr. Russell and his staff to the fifth meridian.

In this year 1876, Mr. Russell determined the longitude of Pembina by exchanging telegraphic signals with Professor Safford of the observatory at Chicago.

In 1878 Colonel Dennis was appointed Deputy Minister of the Interior, and Mr. Russell succeeded him as Surveyor General. In 1882 on the retirement of Colonel Dennis, Lindsay Russell became Deputy Minister, which position he held till 1883, when he was relieved of his duty as Deputy Minister owing to the rapid extension of the surveys, but he retained his rank.

In 1884 he was superannuated on account of ill health.

Like other able men, Lindsay Russell was in advance of the times and among his abilities was the remarkable command he gained of the Ojibway language, which was of great assistance to him in the West in the early days of Surveying. He was noted as a keen sportsman and after his retirement much of his time was spent in hunting, yachting and fishing,

but at other times he devoted his time to the pursuit of astronomy in which he became remarkably proficient. He had a small observatory and workshop at his home and excluding the optical parts, made most of his own instruments.

His late years, unfortunately, were marred by the gradual loss of his eyesight and were spent partly in the woods and partly in his observatory. It was said of him that he was most happy in the woods, alone. He was a very kindly man, was totally unselfish and an idealist.

In 1862 he married Harriet, daughter of Daniel McLachlin, the founder of the well-known lumber mills at Arnprior. She was born in 1839 and died in 1924, and he died and was buried in Arnprior on September 8th, 1912, aged 73. He became a Surveyor for Ontario on 8th October, 1860.