

FERGUSON'S FALLS

Richard Ferguson aka George R. Fergusson (1762-1842)

Today, the hamlet of Ferguson's Falls in Drummond Township is a picturesque cluster of several dozen homes, a community hall and a shuttered church strung along County Road 15 straddling the Mississippi River. In its 19th century heyday, however, the community boasted a sawmill, grist mill, tannery, brickyard, blacksmith, wagonmaker, cooper, shoemaker, cabinet maker, meat packer, schoolhouse, two stores, three hotels, post office, Catholic church and the homes of more than 500 people.



The site on which the village stands was designated Drummond Township C-12/L-17(SW) in the survey of the Perth Military Settlement and was first awarded to soldier-settler Captain George R. Fergusson on November 6, 1816.¹

As it developed over the next half century, the village on the Mississippi was known by the names Ferguson's Falls, Millford, Metcalfe, and then Ferguson's Falls again, memorializing the name of the original grantee -- a fascinating and colorful character of the Perth settlement's early history.

George R. Fergusson was born Richard Ferguson Jr. on December 23, 1762, at Fort Edward, Albany County, New York, one of the six sons and four daughters² of Richard Ferguson Sr. (1728-1791)³ and Charlotte Rachel Farrington (1735-1785)⁴.

¹ Numerous accounts of the history of Ferguson's Falls state that one Thomas McCaffrey was the first to 'settle' on the site in 1815. However, the only man of that name arriving in Drummond in its earliest years was Private Thomas McCaffrey, an Irish veteran of the 76th Foot who arrived two years later in March 1817, with a wife and daughter, and took up Drummond Township C-8/L-12(NE), where he appears to have lived for the remainder of his life. McCaffrey may have had some sort of early association with the C-12/L-17(W) site, but he did not settle there and was not the 'founder' of the village as often stated.

² Jacob (1754-1811), Phoebe (1759-1798), Anna/Hannah (1760-1850), Israel (1761-1790), Richard (1762-1842), Farrington (1765-1842), Millicent (1766-1829), Arra (1769-1853), Rozel (1773-1852), Rachel (1782-1859).

³ Born Chappaqua, Westchester County, New York, died Hallowell Township, Prince Edward County, Ontario.

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In 1774 the Ferguson family moved from Fort Edward to take up a tenant farm near Jessup's Burgh (Luzerne), Warren County, New York. Having built a small house and begun clearing a few acres of land, the following year they also leased 300 acres of land at Carmen's Neck⁵, Dutchess County, from colonial Governor Beverley Robinson (1721-1792)⁶. There was a larger house on the Robinson property and the previous tenants had already cleared about 60 acres where the Fergusons planted crops of wheat, corn and hay and raised livestock.

At the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War, Richard Ferguson Sr. chose loyalty to the Crown, enlisting as a Sergeant with the King's American Rangers. In 1777, when the rebels captured him carrying dispatches to British General John Burgoyne (1722-1792) at Ticonderoga, the Republican authorities confiscated the Ferguson family's property and chattels. Sergeant Ferguson shortly escaped, however, and spent the remainder of the war working with the British intelligence service, based in Lower Canada.

Three of Ferguson's sons followed him into British service. Israel (age 25) enlisted with his father's regiment in 1777, followed by Richard Jr. (age 17) in 1778 and then Farrington (age 14) in 1779. In that year their mother, four sisters, and youngest brother were jailed at Albany "for harboring & entertaining a number of Tories who come down from Canada with an intention of murdering the defenseless inhabitants on the western frontiers of this State".⁷ When released on bail, Rachel and the children forfeited their surety and followed the Ferguson men to Lower Canada.



Richard Ferguson Jr. had joined the King's Rangers as a volunteer but, by December 1783, when the regiment was disbanded at Fort St. John, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Lower Canada, following the Treaty of Paris, he had been commissioned an Ensign and, as a junior officer, qualified for the half-pay list.

The Ferguson family made their way from Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu to the Bay of Quinte in Upper Canada where, among an influx of loyalist⁸ settlers, they were granted land in the townships of Cataraqui (Kingston), Thurlow (Belleville) and Hallowell (Prince Edward County).⁹ In addition to their land grants, the Ferguson family also received £48 in compensation for their property losses from the Loyalist Claims Commission.¹⁰

⁵ In various sources 'Carmen's Neck' is called 'Cannon's Neck', 'Cameron's Neck', 'Cremmes Neck', or 'Carmon's Neck', but none of those place names appear on modern maps.

⁶ Robinson's wife, Susanna Philipse (1727-1822), had inherited a large share of the 250 square mile (650 km²) Philipse or Highland Tract on the east side of the lower Hudson River, about 50 miles north of New York City.

⁷ Quoted from *Descendants of Richard Ferguson: Database of Dr. Paul Douglas Cole, Kingston, Ontario*, <https://www.uelac.org/Loyalist-Info/extras/Ferguson-Richard/Ferguson-Richard-genealogy.pdf>

⁸ United Empire Loyalist (UEL).

⁹ Israel Ferguson briefly operated a trading post at Carrying Place, Prince Edward County.

¹⁰ The Ferguson Evidence of Claim presented to the Loyalist Claims Commission valued their total losses at £445 including a small house at Jessup Burgh £25; a house and good improvements at Cannons Neck £175; 2 horses & 2 Oxen £43; 3 cows, 13 hogs & farm utensils £34.50; 100 bushels wheat & corn £ 60; 6 tons of hay £13.10; household furniture £38.10; other produce & sundries £56.5.

Before departing Fort St. John, Ensign Richard Ferguson Jr. and Frederica Grant (1762-1847), a native of Prince Edward Island, were married on March 11, 1784 by Rev. Robert Gilmore, chaplain to the King's Rangers.



Uniform Button Royal Canadian Volunteers

A decade later, Richard Ferguson Jr. returned to active military service as senior Lieutenant of the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment (RCVR) when it was raised in 1794 amid increasing tensions between Britain and the United States surrounding negotiation of the Jay Treaty.¹¹

A unit of the regular British Army, but meant to serve exclusively within North America, the RCVR was the first British corps recruited and officered by exclusively Canadians. Its 1st Battalion was manned by Francophones while Ferguson's 2nd Battalion was predominantly Scots. The full Regiment was quartered at Quebec until 1798 when the 2nd Battalion was transferred to Fort George (Niagara-on-the-Lake) in Upper Canada, with detachments posted to Kingston, Fort Erie and Amherstburg.

At the time of his transfer to Upper Canada, Lieutenant Ferguson secured a Captain's commission by paying one of the regiment's captains £100 to resign. This was a major infraction of British Army rules but seems to have been ignored because he had demonstrated considerable success in raising recruits.

While Captain Ferguson served at Fort George in 1799 his marriage to Frederica Grant foundered. Divorce then being a practical impossibility, they negotiated a 'Deed of Separation' through which they agreed,

*.. henceforth for and during their respective natural lives to live separate and apart [and that Ferguson] not to ever frequent her company or converse at any time with her and shall not sue or disturb any person or persons that shall receive her into their habitations.*¹²

The agreement also stipulated that while Ferguson "*remained in His Majesty's service*", he would pay Frederica £50 annually for the first two years of their separation and £66.13.4 annually thereafter. He was also required to "*pay any debt she incurs*".

¹¹ The Jay Treaty addressed issues still outstanding from the 1783 Treaty of Paris that had ended the American Revolutionary War, and facilitated 10 years of peaceful trade between the United States and Britain in the midst of the French Revolutionary Wars which began in 1792.

¹² As quoted in *Captains of the Canadian Fencibles in 1812*, by Robert Henderson, War of 1812 Website https://www.warof1812.ca/capt_cf.htm

Emblazoned on its colors, the Royal Canadian Volunteers' regimental motto was 'Try Us', but when disbanded in 1802 it had never been 'tried' under fire and Captain Richard Ferguson returned to the half-pay list.

Three years later, in 1805, the Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry arrived in Canada as a broken corps, having mutinied in Britain and seen most of its rank-and-file disbanded.¹³ As it undertook to rebuild its ranks in the Canadas, 44-year-old Richard Ferguson again returned to active duty at the rank of temporary Captain with the Fencibles. In consideration of his Revolutionary War service with the King's Rangers, a unit that had specialized in close combat, irregular warfare, raiding, reconnaissance, and tracking, he was given command of the Fencible's Light Company.

When Captain Ferguson joined the Fencibles he did so under a new name, presumably in an attempt to evade the punitive terms of his wife's Deed of Separation. From 1805 onward he called himself George R. Fergusson or George Richard Fergusson, adding both the given name 'George' and a second 's' to his surname. His brother Farrington later remarked: "*How he came by the name of George R. is best known to himself*"¹⁴ and in an 1843 affidavit his sister Anna swore that,

*... the addition to his name of 'George' which has appeared in the latter part of his life I cannot tell from where it came – but say that my brother was recorded and known always amongst us by the name of Richard Ferguson ...*¹⁵

While posted at Quebec City, in addition to his duties with the Fencibles, Ferguson also performed staff duties, serving as paymaster to the 10th Royal Veteran Battalion in 1810-1811 and then paymaster to the 41st Regiment of Foot 1811-1812.

During the American War of 1812, from a strength of about 600 men, elements of the Canadian Fencibles saw action at the raid on Plattsburg (July 1813) and the Battles of Chateauguay (October 1813), Crysler's Farm (November 1813), and Lacolle Mills (March 1814). Captain George Ferguson's Light Company was the first ashore at Plattsburg and at Châteauguay, supported by 22 Indians, held the most vulnerable part of the line, a position exposed to flanking attack from the Americans.



Canadian Fencible Soldier
(Courtesy Suliva Pecota)

¹³ See *Mutiny: Highland Regiments in Revolt 1743-1804*, by John Prebble (1975), pages 445-489.

¹⁴ As quoted in *Captains of the Canadian Fencibles in 1812*, by Robert Henderson, War of 1812 Website https://www.warof1812.ca/capt_cf.htm

¹⁵ Affidavit of Anna Ferguson (1760-1850) sworn July 31, 1843, in relation to the widow's pension claim of Frederica Grant-Ferguson following the death of half-pay Captain George Richard Fergusson.

*In the four-hour engagement the Canadian Fencibles suffered 3 killed and 4 wounded ... Ferguson is noted armed with a shot gun and joined in the fire fight. ...*¹⁶

The American army having been driven back, Lieutenant Colonel Charles-Michel d'Irumberry de Salaberry (1778-1829), who commanded British troops at Châteauguay, wrote in his dispatch to Major General Louis de Watteville (1776-1836), commander of the District of Montreal,

*I cannot conclude without expressing the obligation I owe to Captain Ferguson¹⁷ for his cool and determined conduct and his extreme readiness in executing my orders."*¹⁸



Canadian Fencibles Light Company at Chateauguay
(Illustration By Charles W. Jefferys)

In acknowledgement of his conduct at Châteauguay, temporary Captain George Fergusson was granted the permanent rank of full Captain.

When the Canadian Fencibles were disbanded in July and August 1816 at Kingston and Montreal, Captain Fergusson, with 90 other men of the regiment, made his way to the Perth Military Settlement where he drew location tickets for 775 acres of land.¹⁹ At the rank of Captain, he should have been allocated 800 acres, but one of his 100 acre half-lots, Drummond C-12/L-17(SW), contained only 75 acres. The remainder of that property lay

under a stretch of shallow rapids in the Mississippi River. In compensation, Fergusson was awarded the associated water rights and privileges.²⁰

Fergusson, however, never resided on his Ferguson's Falls property, or elsewhere at the Perth Military Settlement. He took up residence at Brockville and hired laborers to perform the required settlement duties at his Drummond Township lot on the Mississippi.

¹⁶ As quoted in *Canadians Know How to Fight: The Canadian Regiment at the Battle of the Châteauguay*, by Robert Henderson, War of 1812 Website <https://www.warof1812.ca/chatgy.htm>.

¹⁷ The British Army did not always use Captain Fergusson's new, preferred, spelling of his surname, but from 1805 army records consistently used his new given name of 'George'.

¹⁸ As quoted in *Canadians Know How to Fight: The Canadian Regiment at the Battle of the Châteauguay*, by Robert Henderson, War of 1812 Website <https://www.warof1812.ca/chatgy.htm>.

¹⁹ November 6, 1816, Drummond, C-12-L17(SW), 75 acres; November 6, 1816, Drummond, C-2/L-7, 200 acres; June 14, 1817, Drummond C-8/L-18, 200 acres; June 14, 1817, Beckwith, C-3/L-14(SW), 100 acres; July 31, 1817 Wolford, C-5/L-2, 200 acres.

²⁰ The Ferguson's Falls Women's Institute Tweedsmuir History says that Ferguson paid £500 for the water rights.

On May 27, 1823, 62-year-old Captain George R. Fergusson was married for the second time to 23-year-old Clarissa Sherwood (1800-1890), notwithstanding that his first wife, Frederica Grant-Fergusson, was still very much alive.

Clarissa was the daughter of Reubin Sherwood (1774-1851), another veteran of the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, and the Provincial Surveyor responsible for laying out the Perth Military Settlement. Although both the bride and groom were residents of Brockville, their wedding took place across the St. Lawrence River at Ogdensburg, Lawrence County, New York, -- no doubt with a view to eluding any bigamy charges that might be proffered by Frederica, then living near-by at Kingston.

Fergusson owned his Drummond Township property on the Mississippi River until 1825 when he sold it to Billa Flint (1805-1894) of Belleville for £500. Flint was a businessman with interests in the timber trade, including cutting and milling operations at Actinolite, Flinton and Bancroft. He was also a Reform/Liberal politician.²¹

Flint harvested the timber from the lot and, 13 years later, in May 1838, sold Drummond C-12/L-17(SW) back to Fergusson for just £100. Then, only four months later, Fergusson sold it again to Eleazor Woodward²² of Drummond Township for the same price, £100. It was Woodward who subdivided the property into village lots, naming his project 'Metcalf'. Over the next eight years Woodward sold more than 20 building lots of various sizes at prices ranging from £5 to £25 and, in 1843, sold mill sites at the rapids to Robert Blair for £600.

Woodward's 'Metcalf' project was not a complete success, however. On October 6, 1846, the *Bathurst Courier* advertised the Sheriff's sale of the undeveloped balance of Drummond C-12/L-17.



Billa Flint (1808-1890)

*... being the site of the rapidly improving village of Metcalfe, situated on the banks of the Mississippi River ... to be sold by Public Auction at the said village site ... unless the monies due on the said mortgage be paid before that time.*²³

²¹ Reeve of Elzevir Township, Mayor of Belleville, Warden of Hastings County, Legislative Assembly member, Legislative Council member, Senator.

²² Eleazor Woodward, with a family of eight, all born in the USA, appears in the 1842 census living in Drummond Township at Ferguson's Falls (C-12/L-17), having arrived (in Canada) in 1830. Woodward was naturalized at Perth by Judge John Glass Malloch (1806-1873) in the same year. Nothing further is known.

²³ The mortgage holder was William Fraser (1802-1870) of Perth, Lanark County Treasurer.

MORTGAGE SALE.
By virtue of a power contained in a Mortgage executed by Eleazer Woodward of the township of Drummond, to William Fraser, Esquire, of the town of Perth, and dated the twenty fifth day of February last past, a part of the west half of 1st No. 17 in the 13th concession of the said township of Drummond, containing about seventy acres, more or less, (being the site of the rapidly improving village of Metcalfe, situate on the banks of the Mississippi river,) or so much thereof as may be necessary, will be sold by Public Auction at the said Village site, on Friday the 4th day of September next, at 12 o'clock noon, unless the monies due on the said Mortgage be paid before that time. Dated at Perth this 1st day of August, 1846.
 HENRY W. SACHE,
 Solicitor for the said Mortgagee.

From the earliest days of settlement, the site at the Mississippi River ford on C-12/L-17(SW) was commonly known as Ferguson's Falls, although there was, in fact, no fall of water there until 1841 when Robert Blair (1812-1891) built a dam at the rapids to power a sawmill on the north bank and a grist mill on the south bank. Blair's investment did much to spur expansion of the village over the next three decades; the river was bridged in 1847, a post office established in 1853, a market fair licensed in 1854, tradesman workshops established, stores opened, and the population grew.

Despite the important part the Blair mills played in the development of Ferguson's Falls, the dam was unpopular because it flooded farmland and damaged the mill of Colonel William Playfair (1799-1868) 11 miles upstream. Blair twice paid damages when he lost lawsuits filed by Playfair. In the mid-1860s Blair sold the mills to brothers George (1821-1904) and Abraham (1828-1898) Code²⁴ but antagonism over the dam grew. Saw blades were bent when saboteurs drove iron spikes into Code's logs and, in 1871, both the sawmill and the grist mill were burned, accidentally or otherwise. Responding to petitions from local farmers, the government shortly ordered the dam removed and the 'falls' returned to its natural state of shallow rapids.



Robert Blair (1812-1891)



Abraham Code (1828-1898)

Peter McVicar (1830-1909) later built a steam powered sawmill at Ferguson's Falls and the village went on to enjoy a long history in which the timber trade figured prominently.

Shortly after the collapse of Eleazor Woodward's 'Metcalfe' subdivision scheme, the location was once again renamed. From 1853, when the first post office was established, it was briefly known as 'Millford', but six years later the postal department changed the name back to Ferguson's Falls.²⁵ By that date, the man for whom the community was named had already been dead for a decade.

²⁴ The Codes owned mills at Innisville and Carleton Place. Abraham was Reeve of Drummond Township 1860-1879 and represented Lanark South in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario 1869-1879.

²⁵ Ferguson's Falls Post Office was closed in 1918.



The rapids that gave Ferguson's 'Falls' its name.

Captain George R. Fergusson, aka Richard Ferguson Jr., died at Brockville on July 21, 1842, leaving two wives to battle over which was his lawful spouse and thus entitled to the widow's pension payable by the British Government. As the dispute unfolded, wife number-one, Frederica of the 1799 'Deed of Separation', found support from her husband's siblings and several former officers of the Royal Canadian Volunteers. For her part, second wife Clarissa secured the backing of at least two officers of the Canadian Fencibles then living at Brockville. It appears that adjudication of the dispute was still outstanding when Frederica Grant-Ferguson died at Coburg in 1847, leaving Clarissa to collect the spoils. Clarissa Sherwood-Ferguson died at Brockville in 1890.

There were no children of Fergusson's union with either Federica Grant or Clarissa Sherwood.

- *Ron W. Shaw (2024)*