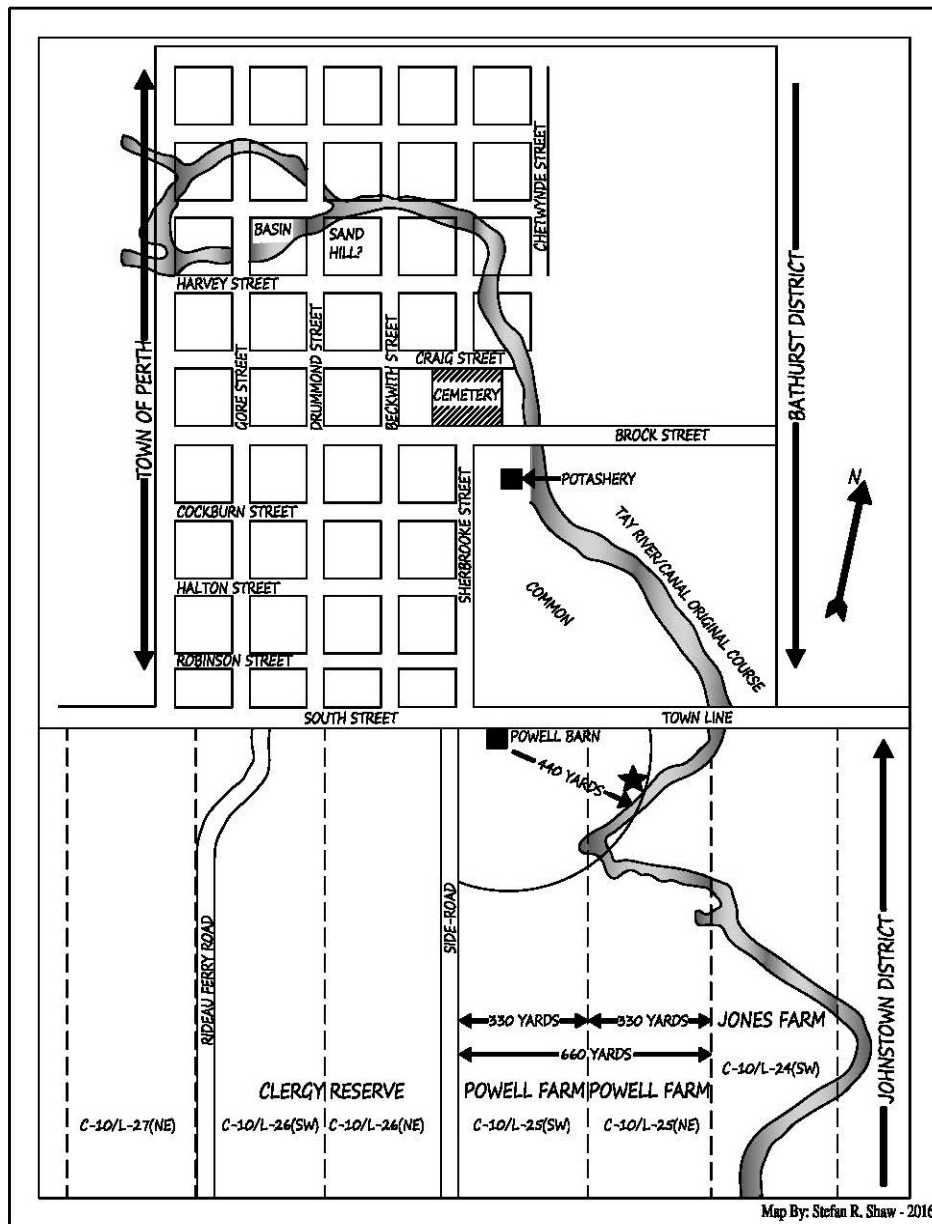


Field of Blood

Locating the Site of the Last Fatal Duel

Over the span of nearly two centuries the precise location of the 'Last Fatal Duel in Upper Canada' has become obscured, confused and misrepresented. A re-examination of all available evidence, however, leaves little doubt that the deadly combat between law students John Wilson (1807-1869) and Robert Lyon (1812-1833) was fought on Thursday June 13, 1833 at about 5:30 p.m., on the west bank of the Tay River, approximately 100 yards south of South Street, at a point midway across the width of Elmsley Township C-10/L-25(NE), then the farm of John Ambrose Hume Powell. (44.895601 N 76.231639 W)



Location of the 'Last Fatal Duel in Upper Canada', June 13, 1833

A 'Perth Historical and Antiquarian Society' paper (c1900)¹ states that;

The duel took place ... just beyond the Town Line on the right bank² of the Tay.

According to Judge William Renwick Riddell (1853-1945) the duel was fought;

In a ploughed field on the right bank of the River Tay ... a few feet beyond the dividing line of the [Bathurst & Johnstown] districts.³

Historian Jean S. McGill wrote;

... on June 13th the parties met by the Tay River, just outside of town.⁴

Writing in 1905, J. M. Walker⁵ describes Wilson and Lyon;

... crossing the bit of wood from the Scotch Line [South Street] to the river bank.⁶

A Province of Ontario historic plaque at 66 Craig Street, Perth, reads;

Here died the victim of the last fatal duel fought in this province ...



Craig Street Plaque

None of these accounts, however, tell us exactly where the fatal duel took place.

Some initial clues to the location lie in tracing the route the dueling party followed out of the Town of Perth. It would be very helpful to know their point of departure, but no known account provides that specific information. The first point of reference mentioned was near St. James Anglican Church;

... Robert Douglas, a contractor, going through the town a short time before, met the dueling party at the 'Sand Hill', near St. James Church, going toward the scene of the fatal meeting.⁷

¹ Author unknown (Possibly Marion Armour)

² The 'right bank' references a point-of-view of the river as it flows down-stream, away from Perth, i.e. the west bank.

³ 'The Canadian Law Times' (1915)

⁴ 'A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark' (1968)

⁵ James Murray Walker (1845-1938), Publisher/Editor of the *Perth Courier*. The *Courier* was owned by the Walker family 1863-1995.

⁶ 'The Wilson-Lyon Duel, The story Seventy-Two Years Old Retold', *Perth Courier* – J. M. Walker (1905). Note- Walker's account of the duel contains numerous errors and flights of fancy.

⁷ Ibid.

In a manuscript dated February 17, 1896, 'Early Days of the Perth Settlement',⁸ Mary A. B. Campbell, tells us that the 'Sand Hill' is 'Mount Myers'; the high ground along Drummond Street between Harvey and Craig Streets, on which stand the Court House and the 1833 home of James Boulton⁹ (also the residence of John Wilson). Campbell writes that St. James Anglican church was built;

... on the Sand Hill on Harvey Street.

The July 1833 diary¹⁰ of Reverend William Bell (1780-1857), records that;

It is worthy of notice that, on the way to the fatal meeting, he [Lyon] and all the rest of the party went by the back of the town, through the burying ground [Craig Street Cemetery] to escape observation ...

At the August 08-09, 1833 trial of John Wilson and his second, Simon Fraser Robertson¹¹, Deputy Sheriff Alexander William Powell (1815-1882)¹² testified;

I was suspicious that a duel was going on. I saw George Lyon¹³ [nephew of Robert Lyon] and stated my suspicion to him. We went together toward the spot where he supposed it would take place. We stopped at Dr. [George Hume] Reade's¹⁴ Potashery and asked if any persons had passed.¹⁵

William Charles De Benyon Reade (1818-1839) testified;

I was in my father's potash works with another young man. George Lyon and Alexander Powell came into the Potashery and asked if we had seen two persons pass. I said, "Yes, one had a cloak on". George Lyon said, "They are the persons". They ran down the commons.¹⁶

According to Judge Edward Shortt¹⁷, the Reade Potashery was



A Potashery

⁸ Transcribed by Charles Dobie

⁹ Summit House

¹⁰ Queen's University Collection.

¹¹ Also a law student; the son of William Robertson, formerly Captain and Adjutant of the Inverness Militia, who settled on Bathurst C-2/27/Block-3, and the brother of Mrs. Roderick Matheson.

¹² Deputy Sheriff Alexander Powell was the son of Bathurst's first Sheriff James Hamilton Powell (1773-1831) and, in 1833, was serving as Deputy to his elder brother John Ambrose Hume Powell (c1802-1843) who succeeded his father as Sheriff in 1832.

¹³ George Byron Lyon (1815-1876) changed his name to George Byron Lyon Fellowes when he married Mary Matilda Ottley Fellowes in 1842. He held the seat for Russell in the Legislative Assembly of Canada 1848-1861 and was the Mayor of Ottawa in 1876.

¹⁴ Apothecary George Hume Reade (1793-1854)

¹⁵ 'The Memorable Duel at Perth' - Judge Edward Shortt (1970). The Lyon relationship given within brackets is from Judge Shortt and not part of Powell's testimony. Apothecary George Hume Reade (1793-1854), was a half-pay officer with a residence at the south-west corner of Drummond and Brock Streets.

¹⁶ Ibid. William Charles Reade was the eldest son of Apothecary George Hume Reade.

¹⁷ Judge Edward M. Shortt (1915-1978)

situated on the west bank of the Tay River/Canal, between the river/canal bank and Sherbrooke Street, between Brock and Cockburn Streets.¹⁸

The location and extent of “*the commons*” is uncertain but Reade seems to refer to the area bordered by Brock Street on the north, Sherbrooke Street on the west, the Tay River/Canal on the east, and South Street on the south. In 1833, the area was probably largely undeveloped as in 1842 a portion of it was granted for use as the Methodist Cemetery.¹⁹

Adam Charles Muir (b.c1805)²⁰ testified;

*I went in the same direction, as far as Mr. Powell's barn. It was raining at the time. I went into the barn, where I remained till I heard a shot fired. After the fire I stepped out and saw the principals standing as placed and the seconds standing together. I could distinguish the persons.*²¹

In his testimony James Boulton (1801-1878) stated that;

“... [James] Hubble²² and I ... walked as quickly as we could towards the river in the direction of Mr. Powell's farm.

In 1905 J. M. Walker wrote that;

*... the field of blood stands ... on the level banks of the Tay ... part of the farm on the Scotch Line, North Elmsley, known long afterwards as the Presbyterian clergy lot. The present owner of the farm, Archibald McLaren, can show the exact place in the clearing, now a meadow ... the placid river flows peacefully by as it did 73 years ago.*²³

Walker also wrote that;

*... in June 1833 a party of three men from Smith's Falls, paddling a canoe up the Tay River on their way to Perth, landed on the McLaren farm ... to rest and eat their breakfast ... they heard a shot and voices. Pushing through the underbrush ... they came to a clearing at the bank of the river ... just in time to see a second shot fired and one of the men there turn half round, throw up his arms and fall stone dead.*²⁴

In addition to the question of place, the Walker account above demands some examination of time and weather as well. If Walker's version is accurate, that the canoeists stopped to “*eat their breakfast*”, the duel took place in the morning, and presumably in clear weather if a picnic on the river bank was in progress. Walker is not alone in this version of

¹⁸ ‘*The Memorable Duel at Perth*’ - Judge Edward Shortt (1970).

¹⁹ Now administered by St. Paul's United Church.

²⁰ Possibly the son of Adam Charles Muir (1770-1829) and Mary Elizabeth Alexowina Bender. Adam Charles Muir Sr. was Major of the 41st Regiment of Foot and served with great distinction during the War of 1812.

²¹ ‘*The Memorable Duel at Perth*’ - Judge Edward Shortt (1970). Adam C. Muir had been Robert Lyon's first choice as ‘second’ but had declined. Lyon then turned to Henry Touncel LeLievre (1802-1882) who agreed to serve as his ‘second’.

²² James Lawrence Hubbell (1810-1884), another law student. In 1842 he married Mary Eliza Lyon, George Lyon's sister.

²³ ‘*The Wilson-Lyon Duel, The story Seventy-Two Years Old Retold*’, Perth Courier – J. M. Walker (1905). L-25 was owned by the McLaren Family from 1841 through 1915.

²⁴ *Ibid.* The veracity of this story is also in doubt as, had there been three additional witnesses to the duel, it seems strange that none of them were called to give evidence, or even mentioned, at the Wilson-Robertson trial.

events. Ken W. Watson writes that *"It was dawn when they [the duelists] slipped out of town"* and *"the scene played out ... on a bright and sunny morning"*²⁵. A 'Council of Heritage Organizations of Ottawa' article also says the duel took place *"on the morning of June 13"*²⁶, as do several other accounts.

An early morning confrontation under bright and sunny skies, however, is not supported by the sworn testimony of eye witnesses at the subsequent trial. Adam Muir told the court the duel took place *"in the evening"*. James Boulton testified that he *"learned about 5 o'clock, on the 13th, that a meeting was expected between Wilson and Lyon"*²⁷. As regards the weather, both Muir and Boulton testified that *"it was raining"* and William Reade said *"it was raining very hard"*. Reverend William Bell wrote that *"just before the fatal meeting took place, dark clouds covered the sky, and thunder roared ... the rain poured down in torrents"*²⁸. The combat clearly took place, not on a sunny morning, but in foul wet weather at about 5:30 p.m. on June 13, 1833.

Although no known account states specifically that the duel was fought on the Powell farm, from the frequent references to the 'Powell farm' and 'Mr. Powell's barn', from which as many as six eye-witnesses watched the duel, and the later references to the 'McLaren farm', one can only conclude that the combat took place somewhere on what was the Powell farm in 1833.

In 1818 Major James Hamilton Powell (1773-1831), of the 103rd Regiment of Foot, received a total of 1,000 acres in location tickets at the Perth Military Settlement. Among these was the 200-acre lot at Elmsley C-10/L-25(NE&SW). In 1824, however, the Crown Grant for that property was titled to his son, James Ambrose Hume Powell (c1802-1843) and, in 1833, the L-25 property was still owned by James A. H. Powell. Major James Hamilton Powell had been Bathurst District Sherriff until his death in 1831 when he was replaced by his son, James A. H. Powell, while another son, Alexander Powell (1815-1882), was Deputy Sheriff. James A. H. Powell sold the full 200 acres of L-25 to William McLaren in 1841, father of the Archibald McLaren cited by J. M. Walker in 1905.

From 1817 the land adjoining the Powell farm to the west, C-10/L-26(E&W), was a Clergy Reserve, apparently leased in 1833 to one John McKay. In 1855 that property was granted to *"Roderick Matheson & others in trust"* for the *"Kirk of Scotland"*. By the time Walker was writing in 1905, however, the east half of that property was also owned by the McLaren family. In 1874 the Presbyterian Church Trustees had sold L-26(NE) to William McLaren and /L-26(SW) to John Poole.

To the east, the Powell farm bordered C-10/L-24(W), a property owned, in 1833, by Charles Jones²⁹.

²⁵ *The Last Duel: The Story of the Last Duel in Upper Canada* – Ken W. Watson, <http://www.rideau-info.com/canal/tales/last-duel.html>

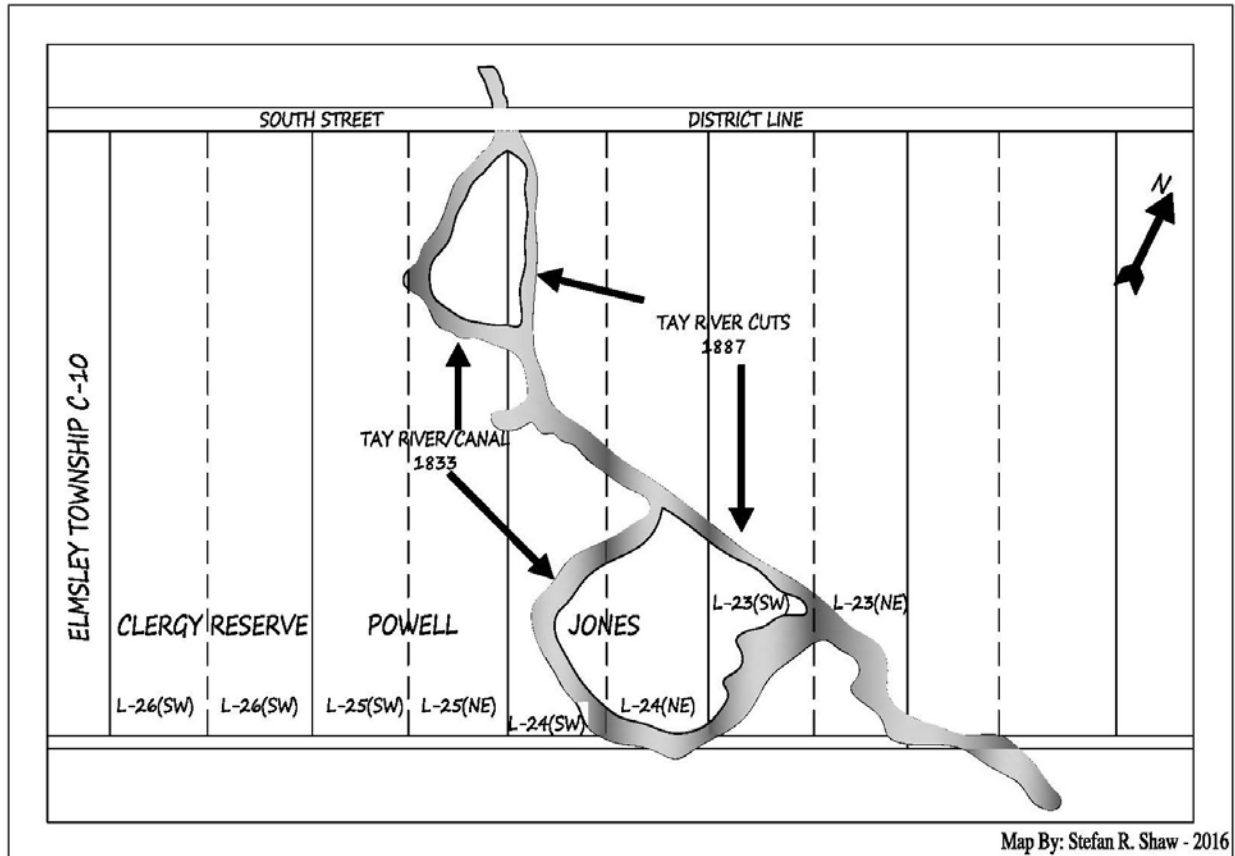
²⁶ CHOO - <http://www.choocopo.ca/canadas-last-fatal-duel-fought-in-perth-on-june-13-1833/>

²⁷ In his *The Memorable Duel at Perth* (1970) Judge Edward Shortt concludes the duel took place at *"about six o'clock in the afternoon"*.

²⁸ As quoted in *The Memorable Duel at Perth*, Judge Edward Shortt (1970)

²⁹ Granted to Jean Young in 1806, purchased by Charles Jones in 1810.

In that year the Tay River (then in the process of being dredged and locked to create the Tay Canal³⁰) bent slightly at the District Line, flowed south into and diagonally across the L-25(NE) portion of the Powell farm before turning west, at the division between the east and west halves of L-25, and flowing onward into L-24(SW), the Jones Farm. Reconstruction of the Tay Canal in 1887 would eliminate this loop across L-25(NE) Powell Farm with a dug cut flowing directly down the west side of L-24(SW), the Jones Farm, but in 1833 the first half mile of the Tay River/Canal after it entered Johnstown District (Elmsley Township) lay entirely within L-25(NE), the east half of the Powell Farm.



Most accounts indicate that, when the dueling party left the Sand Hill headed south, the objective was to leave, as quickly as possible, the jurisdiction of the Bathurst District Magistrates and Sheriff, lest law enforcement interfere with their plans. Therefore, they would probably have followed the shortest and most direct route possible, but that criteria could have been met by three slightly different routes.

Departing from near the Court House ('Sand Hill') they probably walked south on Drummond Street, east along Harvey or Craig Street, through the Craig Street Cemetery, and then continued more-or-less southward to South Street and the District line;

- 1) Along Sherbrooke Street, or
- 2) Along a cow path across 'the commons', or

³⁰ This was the first Tay Canal, completed in 1834. The reconstructed second Tay Canal was completed in 1887.

- 3) Along a foot or cart path on the west bank of the river/canal.

Any of these routes would have taken the dueling party from the Craig Street Cemetery, past the Reade Potashery, to South Street, the administrative border between Bathurst and Johnstown Districts.

The possibility that the dueling party crossed to the east bank of the Tay River/Canal by way of the Brock Street bridge³¹ is eliminated by the fact that trial testimony shows they passed the Reade Potashery travelling south.

Upon reaching South Street, and thus the southern limit of Bathurst District, the dueling party would have then taken one of four directions;

- 1) West (right) from Sherbrooke Street a few steps along South Street and then a turn immediately left (south) into Johnstown District along the side-road allowance lying between Elmsley Township C-10/L-25(SW) and C-10/L-26(NE), and then a turn east (left) into the Powell farm L-25(SW)³², or west (right) into the L-26(NE) Clergy Reserve, or
- 2) A turn east (left) on South Street, from Sherbrooke Street, and then a turn south (right) into either the L-25(SW) or L-25(NE) half of the Powell Farm, or
- 3) From the 'the commons' along a cow-path directly into the Powell Farm, on either the L-25(SW) or L-25(NE) half of the lot, or
- 4) From a path along the west bank of the river/canal directly into the L-25(NE) half of the Powell farm.

Available evidence suggests no reason or motivation for the dueling party to have crossed the South Street bridge, and then turned south into Elmsley Township on the east (left) bank of the Tay River/Canal (into the Jones farm). Their objective being to take their quarrel across the District line, why would they walk another mile or more to do so when Johnstown District lay directly in front of them as they reached South Street by any of the routes noted? Furthermore, surviving accounts place the duel on the 'right bank' (west bank) of the Tay while none make reference to the left (east) bank. Finally, trial testimony and other evidence places the duel within sight of the Powell barn and such a route (further east over the South Street bridge) would have taken them to a destination on the Jones farm not visible from the Powell barn.

Although some testimony does suggest that they passed through a stand of trees, the same testimony states that the view of the duel at a quarter mile distance was unobstructed by trees. The confrontation clearly took place in a cultivated farm field and not in a grove as mentioned in some accounts. John Wilson later told James Boulton;

*... I saw LeLievre point Lyon to a furrow running in the direction where I stood ... the ground being ploughed.*³³

³¹ The Brock Street bridge had been constructed in 1831.

³² The side-road allowance, owned today by the Town of Perth as a right-of-way for sewer mains and a power line to the municipal sewage lagoons and pumping station, runs south from South Street, and was probably in use as a side-road or farm lane in 1833.

³³ 'The Memorable Duel at Perth' - Judge Edward Shortt (1970).

At the Wilson-Robertson trial Deputy Sheriff Alexander Powell testified;

*We traced them across the line of the District ... We stopped about a quarter of a mile from the parties. We could see them, but not so as to distinguish the persons ...*³⁴

Reverend William Bell's diary tells us that Deputy Sheriff Powell's location, a quarter mile from the shooting, was in the Powell barn;

The deputy sheriff, and Mr. Boulton ... looked on at a distance – the sheriff through a hole in the barn, in which he had taken shelter from the rain.

As he had been travelling with Powell, George Lyon was probably in/at the Powell barn as well. According to his own testimony, so was Adam Muir. Although an integral part of the dueling party, Dr. William Hamilton also seems to have been in or about the barn until after the first shot was fired when, according to Muir;

... I saw Dr. Hamilton, who said he would go down and try to settle the matter, he passed me and went and spoke to the seconds and to the principals ...

James Boulton, who was in/at the barn as well, testified that;

*... a shot was fired. This was a quarter mile off ... [I] did not go to them as I supposed all was settled. Shortly ... another shot took place ... I was not looking at the parties at the moment of firing, but saw the smoke from both pistols ...*³⁵

William Reade, upon hearing the first shot, ran south from his father's Potashery (apparently across 'the common') and was as close as 110 yards when the second shot was fired. On his way he had passed Boulton and Hubble. This suggests Boulton and Hubble were, by that time, at some location other than the Powell barn, but they must have been nearby because Reade told the court of then seeing George Lyon and George Fraser (who appear to have been in or near the barn) running toward the duelists;

I ... ran down towards the wood. On the way I saw Mr. James Boulton sitting on a log and Mr. James Hubbell standing by him. I passed them and heard another shot, about twenty rods [110 yards] distant. Immediately Boulton, Hubbell, Lyon and Fraser ran towards the place, I ran also.

For those pursuing the duelists out of town (Powell with Lyon, Boulton with Hubble and Adam Muir, George Fraser and William Reade apparently arriving independently) all roads seem to have led to, or close by, the Powell barn. At this point, no one was taking the duel

³⁴ Powell may have stopped near the Johnstown District line (South Street) because he saw his jurisdiction as limited to Bathurst District. The idea, apparently in the minds of the dueling party and repeated in many accounts over the years, that the duel was fought in Johnstown District to avoid interference by the Magistrates or Sheriff of Bathurst District, may have limits in legal fact. As a Crown peace officer, could Bathurst Deputy Sheriff Andrew Powell still not have intervened in Johnstown District? It is fact, however, that Deputy Sheriff Powell did not do so, and also fact that Wilson and Robertson were, in the end, arrested in Bathurst District. They returned to James Boulton's law office in Perth, Boulton sent for a Magistrate, and they were arrested at Boulton's office. Deputy Sheriff Powell, however, did collect the pistols (evidence) from the duel site in Elmsley Township. At the Wilson-Robertson trial he stated that "... when I came on the ground I took both of the pistols into my possession putting them in a hat; I afterwards concealed them in the town ... I afterward delivered them to Mr. Morris and Mr. Burford, Magistrates for the District of Johnstown at the inquest". The more likely reason that Powell did not interfere is that he assumed, as in almost all incidents of the kind, the dispute would be resolved by 'mutual explanations' and the confrontation would come to nothing.

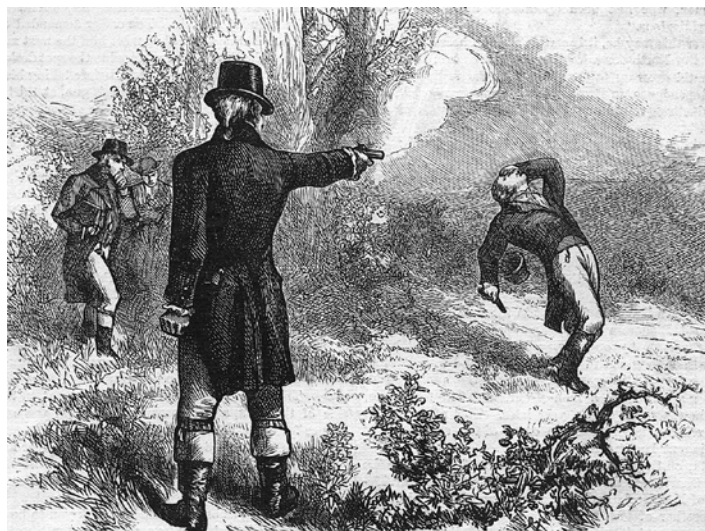
³⁵ 'The Memorable Duel at Perth' - Judge Edward Shortt (1970).

seriously. Assuming that, through a last minute 'exchange of explanations', a reconciliation would be arranged without bloodshed (as was almost always the outcome of these affairs) the spectators apparently chose avoid the rain and watch events unfold from the shelter of the Powell barn. They were only prompted to action when the first shot was fired.

An account of the duel appearing in the New York Spectator of June 26, 1833³⁶ states that; "... *the parties met about half a mile south of the village of Perth in the Johnstown District*". While the duel was probably fought "*about*" a half mile south of the village itself, the field of combat appears to have been much closer to the town/district line. The testimony of Alexander Powell, James Boulton, Adam Muir and William Reade, combined with Reverend William Bell's account, indicate that Powell, Lyon, Fraser, Muir, Reade, Boulton and Hubble all witnessed the duel from a distance of about one quarter mile, or approximately 440 yards, from a vantage point in or near the James Powell barn. William C. Reade, probably having arrived via a footpath along the river/canal, then saw the second shot fired from a different location at a distance of about 110 yards.

It is essential to keep in mind, however, that while Powell and Boulton testified they were standing "*about a quarter of a mile from the parties*" when the first shot was fired, and Muir mentions "*110 yards*", that was their best estimate of the distance. No evidence was entered at trial of a detailed investigation having actually measured the distance.

The original Elmsley Township land survey laid out 200 acre lots measuring 30 chains X 66.67 chains; 1 chain equals 66 feet so a 200-acre lot measured 1,980 feet X 4,400 feet or 660 yards X 1,467 yards. Each half lot, NE and SW, therefore measured 330 yards X 1,467 yards. One quarter mile equals 440 yards.



Multiple accounts of the duel refer to the site as, "*by the Tay River*", "*on the right bank of the River Tay*", "*on the level banks of the Tay*", on "*the river bank*", etc. While some of these accounts are no doubt drawing upon the same source (and each other), they do point to a location on or near the west bank of the Tay River/Canal. That being the case, the witnesses sheltering in the Powell barn, or standing nearby, were looking more or less eastward, over falling ground, at a location about a quarter mile (440 yards) away, near the west bank of the Tay River's original (1833) course.

The location of that barn is an essential point of geographic reference in fixing the site of the Last Fatal Duel; but the exact location of the 1833 Powell barn is uncertain.

³⁶ Reprinted from the *Montreal Courant* of June 19, 1833

As it was the 'Powell Barn' there can be little doubt that it stood on the 'Powell farm'³⁷: i.e. somewhere across the 660-yard (603-meter) width of the 200-acre C-10/L-25 property; but where? It must have been located very close to South Street, as all accounts agree that the duel took place only a short distance across South Street into Johnstown District (i.e. into the north end of Elmsley C-10). A good possibility is that it stood where the stone foundation of an old barn still stands (2016) about 100 yards east of Sherbrooke Street and the side-road allowance delineating the west side of C-10/L-25(SW). That surviving foundation, however, is almost certainly that of a later building. Nevertheless, it may be reasonable to suggest that the more recent barn, replacing the barn of 1833, was built on, or close by, the site of the earlier Powell barn.

From a barn so located on the south side of South Street, about 100 yards east of Sherbrooke Street, the view over the quarter mile of land sloping down to the old river course would have encompassed nearly the full width of Powell's L-25(NE) property (excepting that portion of the lot that lay on the east bank of the River/Canal).

Testimony at the Wilson-Robertson trial tends to confirm this as, when the shooting ended, the witnesses in and near the Powell barn ran along the fall of ground.

James Boulton told the court;

We immediately ran down towards the party; when about half way met Wilson and Robertson ...

Alexander Powell recounted that;

I ran down with the others; I met Wilson and Robertson coming up ...

William Reade told the court;

I ... ran down towards the wood.

Adam Muir stated that Dr. William Hamilton;

... said that he would go down and try to settle the matter ...

Several accounts of the duel, including that of Parks Canada, have it that Robert Lyon, carried from where he fell, died at Inge-Va, then the home of lawyer Thomas Mabon Radenhurst (1803-1854);

In 1833 Upper Canada's last fatal duel was fought near Inge-Va ... Lyon, who was Radenhurst's nephew and boarder, died at Inge-Va following the duel.³⁸

Reverend William Bell, however, wrote that;

The corpse I found laid upon a bed, in the farm house, a short distance from the fatal spot.

³⁷ In his *The Memorable Duel at Perth* (1970), Judge Edward Shortt states that "the duel occurred ... on the farm of Colonel Powell" (referring to James Hamilton Powell 1773-1831 by his Upper Canada Militia rank).

³⁸ Parks Canada - Canada's Historic Places - <http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=8178>

Although James Hamilton Powell, original owner of the C-10/L-25 farm, had (until his death in 1831) lived in a large frame house at the southeast corner of Drummond and Brock Streets³⁹, Reverend Bell's account would suggest that there was also a house on the Powell farm, no doubt near the barn. That farm house may have been the residence of then Sheriff John Ambrose Powell, of his brother Deputy Sheriff Alexander Powell⁴⁰, or perhaps of a tenant. Unfortunately, no trace of that house remains.

As there can be no doubt the duel was fought to the west of the Tay River/Canal within a few yards of South Street, one must also account for the well-known 'Williams' Landing' post card⁴¹, which says that the 'landing' was "*the site of the Lyon's duel*"?



Williams' Landing Postcard

The postcard apparently shows a pleasure boat sailing south on the Tay Canal and thus implies that the visible (west) bank was 'Williams Landing' (or thereabouts); but 'Williams Landing' was not "*the site*" as the caption claims. It could have been 'near' the duel site if 'Williams' Landing' was near the point where South Street intersected the river/canal, but it was not. In 1852 (20 years after the duel) one James Williams purchased a part of Elmsley C-10/L-23 along the Tay River/Canal which came to be known as 'Williams' Landing'. That property, however, lies nearly a mile south-east of the intersection of South Street and the river/canal and as far from the Powell Farm. The postcard photograph appears to have been taken in the early decades of the 20th century, up to 100 years after the duel, and at least 20 years after the canal

³⁹ James Hamilton Powell owned the entire block bordered by Drummond, Brock, Cockburn and Beckwith Streets.

⁴⁰ James Hamilton Powell had at least five sons, although only three seem to have been in the Perth area in 1833; Bathurst Sheriff John Ambrose Hume Powell (c1802-1843), Andrew Powell (b.c1804), Bathurst Deputy Sheriff Alexander William Powell (1815-1882), Francis C. Powell (1824-1860), and William Frederick Powell (1825-1889), later Sherriff of Carleton County. Five years later Andrew Powell would engage in a duel with John Egan at Bytown but that contest was not 'fatal', both men escaping without injury.

⁴¹ In the collection of the Perth Museum.

had been realigned moving that entire portion of the waterway onto C-10/L-24(SW), property that had been the Jones Farm. The claim that the postcard depicts “*the site of the Lyon’s duel*” can be put down to no more than a bit of boosterism for the then emerging local tourist industry.

As the tourism industry has grown in importance over the century since publication of the ‘Williams’ Landing Postcard’, the Last Fatal Duel and its location have been appropriated by the Town of Perth.

The Town of Perth website claims “*the duel was fought on the banks of the Tay River where the [Last Duel Park] campground is situated*”.⁴² This error is repeated by other local government and civic organizations; Perth BIA: “*Perth was the site of the last fatal duel*”⁴³; Lanark County Tourism: “*Canada’s Last Fatal Duel ... was held in Perth*”⁴⁴; Heritage Perth Ontario: “*the last fatal dual in Canada was fought in Perth*”⁴⁵; Perth Hub: “*This town was the site of the last fatal duel in Upper Canada*”⁴⁶; ‘Watson’s 2016 Guide to the Rideau Canal’: “*The site of the last fatal duel in Upper Canada is now home to Last Duel Park*”⁴⁷; Stewart Park Festival: “*Last Duel Park ... is the site of the last recorded fatal duel in Canada*”⁴⁸. A multitude of other websites, brochures, newspaper stories, magazine articles, blogs, books, etc. make the same erroneous claim.

Many of the above examples, and others, also hype the Wilson-Lyon duel as “*the last fatal duel in Canada*”⁴⁹. It was not. The last fatal duel fought in Canada was a confrontation between British Army Major Henry Warde and Militia Colonel Robert Sweeney at Verdun (Montreal), Quebec on May 22, 1838.⁵⁰ The 1833 duel in Elmsley Township should be more correctly described as the last fatal duel in Upper Canada (Ontario).⁵¹

In an effort to romanticize the duel for popular consumption the vast majority of accounts also grossly misstate the cause and conduct of the event. The duel was not fought by competitors for the affections of Elizabeth Hughes. It was, as Judge Shortt described it, about a “*punch in the nose*”⁵²; i.e. Lyon’s assault on Wilson. Nor was the duel “*aggravated by the prompting of Henry LeLievre, a bellicose army veteran*”⁵³. As second to Lyon, LeLievre (who

⁴² See <http://www.perth.ca/content/last-duel-park> - The website claim contradicts the Town’s own ‘*Highest & Best Use Study*’ (prepared by Bray Heritage - 2004) which acknowledges that “*The duel took place just east of the Last Duel Park on the other side of the Town limits, in what was then Johnstown District*”.

⁴³ <http://www.downtownperthbia.ca/bia-news>

⁴⁴ <http://lanarkcountytourism.com/files/2012/02/Map-of-Downtown-Heritage-Perth.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.perthontario.info/perthhistory.htm>

⁴⁶ <http://perthhub.ca/town-history/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.rideaufriends.com/documents/watson-guide.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.stewartparkfestival.com/camping-in-and-around-perth/>

⁴⁹ The Perth 200th Anniversary website, for example, describes the pistols appearing in the anniversary logo as those “*used in Canada’s last fatal duel*”; <https://perth200.ca/about/the-perth-200-logo/>.

⁵⁰ Wade had sent an amorous letter to Sweeney’s wife.

⁵¹ Even the claim to being the last fatal duel in Upper Canada may be in some question. In 1836 a man named Cooper was murdered in Toronto. No perpetrators were ever arrested, but the circumstances of his death all pointed to his having fallen in a duel.

⁵² *The Memorable Duel at Perth* – Judge Edward Shortt (1970).

⁵³ Province of Ontario historic plaque, 66 Craig Street.

never served in the army), did no more than ensure compliance the Roscommon rules of dueling by gentlemen.⁵⁴

Finally, Robert Lyon did not die at Inge-Va as stated by the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board plaque located at the entrance to that house at 66 Craig Street⁵⁵ and by Parks Canada⁵⁶. Lyon, shot through both lungs, died where he fell in Elmsley Township. Eye witness Dr. Hamilton testified at trial that Lyon “*died in a few minutes ... the four men [Wilson, Robertson, LeLievre and Lyon] were on the ground all the time*”. Lyon’s body was first moved to the farm house on the Powell Farm in Elmsley Township where the inquest was convened. The body was later moved to the Radenhurst home (later named Inge Va) in Perth⁵⁷. Inge-Va, was never a “*farm house*” and was not “*a short distance from the fatal spot*” but located more than a mile away. Although a relative of the Radenhurst family it is also untrue, as many accounts have it, that Lyon lived at Inge Va. He may have at some point, but Reverend William Bell records that, at the time of the duel, Lyon lived as a boarder with a “*Mrs. Glass*”⁵⁸, not with the Radenhurst family.

While the cast of characters involved in the Last Fatal Duel were all residents of the then Village of Perth, and while the duel was fought within sight of the municipal limits of Perth, the duel was in fact fought in what was in 1833 the Township of Elmsley and is today the Township of Drummond/North Elmsley.

A perfectly exact location for the duel remains somewhat elusive, but analysis of the above outlined evidence, by process of elimination, narrows the field considerably.



Radenhurst Home, later called Inge-Va

The duel was not fought within the village of Perth. All surviving evidence, confirmed by the fact that Wilson and Lyon were tried for murder at Brockville, judicial seat for the District of Johnstown, places the event in North Elmsley Township.⁵⁹

The duel was not fought on the Clergy Reserve, C-10/L-26(E&W), as stated by J. M. Walker in 1905. The Clergy Reserve was west of the Powell Barn (whatever its exact location)

⁵⁴ See *Tales of the Hare: A Prequel and Sequel to the Last Fatal Duel* – Ron W. Shaw (2014).

⁵⁵ Placed there in 1957.

⁵⁶ Perhaps drawing from the plaque or the Parks Canada statement the ‘Perth Walking Tour’ also incorrectly states that “... *Inge-Va House ... was the home of Robert Lyon*”, <http://www.drummondhouseperth.com/pdfs/HeritagePerthWalkingTour.pdf> .

⁵⁷ Lyon was buried the following day in the Old Burying Ground (Craig Street Cemetery).

⁵⁸ This probably refers to the grog-shop and inn kept by Henry Glass who also ran a merchant store 1829-1832 in partnership with his brother-in-law Malcom Cameron and, from 1833 to 1839, owned what is now Bowes Mill at Glen Tay.

⁵⁹ North Elmsley Township remained a part of Johnstown District until 1842 when it became part of Lanark County. In 1833, if Lyon had been killed within the limits of Perth, Wilson and Robertson would have been tried at Perth, judicial seat for the District of Bathurst.

and witnesses watching the duel on the west (right) bank of the river/canal, from the Powell barn, or from any point on the Powell farm, would have been facing east with their backs to the Clergy Reserve.

The duel was not fought on the east (left) bank of the Tay river/canal as is occasionally suggested. The Jones farm, C-10/L-24, is never mentioned in trial testimony or other documentary evidence. In any case, a duel fought on that property would have been well beyond a quarter mile from the Powell barn and at too great a distance to have been seen by witnesses in/at that barn (whatever its exact location), especially so in overcast and rainy conditions.

Drawing upon all available evidence, it may be reasonably concluded that the 'Last Fatal Duel in Upper Canada', between law students John Wilson and Robert Lyon, was fought on the west bank of the Tay River, about 100 yards south of South Street, at a point midway across the width of North Elmsley Township C-10/L-25(NE), then the farm of John Ambrose Hume Powell. (44.895601 N 76.231639 W)

The site of the duel now lies on private property but, although overgrown by brush, it can still be seen from the east end of South Street.

Ron W. Shaw (2016)

**With contributions by
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