

ONE KNIGHT, GIRT WITH SWORD

Perth's First Election

On June 19, 1925 the Perth *Courier* published the item transcribed below. The lists of names included did not appear in alphabetic order in the original *Courier* story but have been re-arranged in the transcript for the convenience of genealogists.

- Ron W. Shaw 2018

Record First Lanark Election To the Legislative Assembly

Hon. Roderick Matheson, Returning Officer,
Preserved Documents Relating to Election of William Morris over Benjamin Delisle,
July 10th, 1820
Perth Held Important Place in Olden Days.

(Perth *Courier* June 19, 1925, Page-3)

The documents bearing upon the first parliamentary election ever held in this place are in the possession of the relatives of the late Honorable Roderick Matheson, of this town, formerly Senator in this division, and Legislative Councillor in pre-Confederation days. This election was held in the month of July 1820, or almost 105 years ago. The papers consist of a petition for representation in the Legislative Assembly, which is given below, following this a warrant appointing Roderick Matheson, Esq., Returning Officer; then full instructions for holding the election at the pending general elections in Upper Canada; and the record of the votes polled and lastly the certificate of the successful candidate in the election signed by five voters besides the Returning Officer.

The election was held on the 10th of July 1820, and there were two candidates viz., William Morris and Benjamin Delisle. The former was father of the late Hon. Alexander Morris and the late W. J. Morris, both formerly of Perth and familiar residents here. He was a native of Scotland and kept a general store then on Harvey Street at or near the present property of Miss Mary Walker and later in the building at the corner of Gore and Harvey Streets formerly St. John's Hall. The other candidate, Mr. Deslisle, was of French descent and was grandfather of the late Messrs. G. A. and A. F. Consitt. The election went badly against Delisle and he resigned after the first day's polling.

In those primitive days there was no County of Lanark, but we were included in the County of Carleton, which was part of the District then known as the District of Johnstown which embraced all the country in Upper Canada east of the present County of Frontenac.

It is a matter of historical importance, and one of pride, in a way that Perth was the headquarters for all political, municipal and judicial proceedings then for all the territory now constituting the Counties of Lanark, Carleton and Renfrew, for the Perth Settlement was older than any other in those counties and for many years was county town for all three. In 1820 the Perth

Settlement was hardly beyond the primitive log hut of the pioneer and the blazed tree marks as a guide through the pathless forest. Four years before, the first tree had been cut down by a Scotch Line settler and no doubt in 1820 there were yet nothing but log dwellings and stores.

The records referred to are now yellow with age, and the ink more or less faded but everything in them is yet clear and legible. Writing was then all done with quill pens, but for beauty in execution the 'grey goose quill' of over a hundred years ago need take no back place in comparison with the modern steel pens. The writing is regular and beautiful, including the signatures of the Returning Officer, Mr. Matheson, and the records of him in the poll book.

The documents are given below either in full or condensed forms:

The Petition From Perth

Petition from the inhabitants of the County of Carleton praying for leave to be represented in the Commons House of Assembly.

To the Honorable the Commons House of Assembly in the Province of Upper Canada in Parliament Assembled:

The humble petition of the magistrates, half-pay officers and other inhabitants at the Perth Settlement, County of Carleton, District of Johnstown, Upper Canada;

Your petitioners beg leave to state that the population of this county already exceeds five thousand souls and is yearly increasing.

That the settlement suffers many great disadvantages from its not being represented in the Commons House of Assembly;

That in a few months a large proportion of the settlers will have received the title deeds for their lands, which make them eligible to vote, we humbly pray that the Honorable Commons House of Assembly will take our case into their favourable consideration so that we may be permitted to return a member or members to the House of Commons at the first General Election for the Provinces and your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed - June 1st, 1819

Adamson, John
Bell, Rev. William
Blair, William
Cameron, Angus
Daverne, Daniel
de la Mothe, Rev.
O'Brien, J.P. Nfld. Fenc.
O'Hare, James, M.D.
Vaughy, W.

Delisle, Benjamin, J.P.
Ferguson, John
Fraser, Alexander, J.P.
Jackson, John
Marshall, William Q.P.
Mason, T. Monck, J.P.
Reade, George Hume, J.P.
Ritchie, John
Watson, F., Glg. Rgt.

Matheson, Alexander
Matheson, Roderick, J.P.
McGinnis, John
McMillan, Alexander
Morris, William J.P.
Murdock, John A.
Taylor, Josias, J.P.
Tommas, N. T.
Young, James

A Warrant Issued

Following the above is a warrant from Hon. Samuel Smith, Administrator of the Government of Upper Canada, by the power invested in him by action of Parliament, appointing Roderick Matheson Esq. Returning Officer for holding an election in the Upper Canada House of Assembly, the election writ returnable on or before the 24th July. The warrant having declared the administrator's confidence in the 'loyalty, integrity and ability' of the said Roderick Matheson entitles him to all the 'rights, powers, authorities, profits and emoluments' which did to the office appertain'. The document was dated the 12th day of June 1820, being the first year of the reign of King George the Fourth. Accompanying the signature of the Administrator was that of Samuel F. Jarvis, Clerk of the Court of Chancery. The official seal of the Province was appended to the warrant.

The Writ Issued

Another official document in this connection was one containing instructions for holding the election, signed by Samuel F. Jarvis. And it is this strange clause – at least in these more democratic days it would seem:

'And whereas by a certain Writ under the seal of the province of Upper Canada by me received, I am directed to cause one Knight, girt with a sword, the most fit and discreet to be indifferently chosen to represent the said County of Carleton' etc.

Were the members of the Assembly officially known as 'Knights' in those days and did they wear a sword at their installation in Parliament? It seems so by this. ¹

The qualification of voters was thus set out:

"The member or members shall be chosen by the majority of votes of such person or persons as shall be possessed, for their own use and benefit, of lands and tenements within the said County of Carleton, such land being by them holden in freehold or in fief or in return or by certificate under the authority of the Governor in Council of this province of Quebec, and being of the yearly value of forty shillings sterling or upward over and above of all rents and charges payable out of or in respect of the same."²

This document bore the date of June 12th, 1820.

¹ The wording of the writ dates from the earliest elected parliaments in England. In 1340, King Edward III (1312-1377) dropped enforcement of the knighthood qualification for candidates, but the wording was retained and was still in use in 1820.

² In 1820 the franchise was not limited to men only and that year one woman, Ellen Simmons, exercised her franchise at Perth, voting for William Morris. Although by custom few women of the era voted, there was no legal prohibition in Upper Canada against them doing so until 1849. Ontario Women did not re-gain the franchise until 1917.

The Poll Book

The poll book dated the 10th day of July 1820, contained the names of the following 156 who voted for Mr. Morris:

Adams, John	Ferrentz, Jacob	Lenwalder, John
Adamson, John	Fiddler, Samuel	Lester, George
Allan, Francis	Flett, Magnus	Mackey, William
Bailee, Samuel	Flood, John	Marshall, William
Barrie, Thomas	Fraser, Alexander	Massey, William
Bedord, Simon	Fraser, Alexander	Matheson, William
Bell, William	Fraser, James	McDonald, Duncan
Blackwell, John	Fry, George	McGregor, Donald
Blair, William	George, Anthony	McLaren, John
Blondham, Henry	Goodhall, Saunders	Mclaren, John
Bowie, James	Goodman, Moses	McLeash, John
Bray, Thomas	Goudie, Samuel	McLeod, James
Bright, Thomas	Gray, John	McMillan, James
Brown, William	Greenly, John	McNeil, Archibald
Bryce, James	Griffiths, Evan	McPhail, John
Buchanan, Daniel	Hally, George	McTavish, Alexander
Budd, Moses	Harris, John	Michelle, Pierre
Burrough, Nicholas	Hay, John	Miller, James
Cameron, Angus	Herbert, Samuel	Miller, John
Cameron, Duncan	Hollinger, Jacob	Mills, Silas
Cameron, John	Hoover, George	Montey, James
Cameron, John	Horrox (Horricks), William	Montgomery, James
Campbell, Donald	Hughes, John	Moore, James
Campbell, John	Hunter, Thomas	Morris, John
Campbell, Peter	Hunter, William	Myers, John
Campbell, Peter	Imeson, Richard	Newholt, Leopold
Caril, John	James, John	Nichol, John
Chambers, James	James, Thomas	Olde, William
Cherrist, John	Johnson, Benjamin	Oliver, George
Clark, John	Johnson, Martin	Pearse, William
Clark, Richard	Johnston, John	Pennett, Louis
Collier, John	Kerr, Thomas	Perrett, William
Coonrod, Martin	Kidd, Alexander	Power, Robert
Darou, Benoit	King, John	Rasp, John
Deacon, James	Kirkham, Jacob	Rice, John
Deans, Nathaniel	Knight, Thomas	Richardson, Thomas
Dick, Jacob	Leaver, Peter	Ritchie, John Jr.
Doherty, Thomas	Ledger, William	Robblin, Archibald
Ferguson, John	Legary, Joseph	Robertson, Hugh
Ferguson, John	Lentz, John	Robertson, James
Ferguson, Robert	Lentz, Samuel	Robinson, John

Scott, John
Sergeant, John
Sheldon, Richard
Simmons, Ellen
Smith, George
Spalding, William
Speidal, Gaspard
Spratt, Hugh
Stillar, Andrew

Suslay, Jacob
Taylor, Josias
Thom, Alexander
Thompson, Robert
Trueman, Samuel
Warner, Thomas
Watson, John
Watson, William
Wattanbuck, Jacob

Westerdick, Francis
White, John
Willcox, Francis
Wilson, George
Wilson, William
Witzell, Joseph
Wood, Robert
Yakowsky, John

The 36 who voted for Mr. Delisle were the following:

Bartholet, Theo.
Bertram, Thomas
Blade, John
Burwood, John
Clark, John
Connor, John
Crump, John
Cummings, F. N.
DuPerry, James
Fitzmaurice, Ulysses
Fownelle, James
Gould, Mathew

LaRose, Joseph
Leroux, James
Macdonnell, Alexander
Macdonnell, John
Mackie, John
Manion, Thomas
Matheson, Alexander
McGan, Thomas
McLellan, John
McNaddon, Henry
Moore, Robert
Murphy, Michael

O'Brien, J. N.
Pappin, Joseph
Playfair, A. W.
Porter, Joseph
Publow, John
Robinson, James
Roy, Louis
Swan, Samuel
Vaniren, John
Webbe, Angus
Webbe, William
Yeldon, John

Six Signed For Morris

After the election a certificate dated the 11th of July 1820 was given signed and sealed by the Returning Officer, Roderick Matheson, and five electors who voted for the winning candidate viz, Angus Cameron, William Blair, James Morris, J. Mckay and Richard Sheldon, declaring that "we have chosen William Morris, Esq., to be member and representative to serve for us in the Assembly" at York (now Toronto) in the Province of Upper Canada.

The poll clerks at this election were Messrs. A. Murdock and Alex. Cameron, both chosen, no doubt, for their educational fitness and other qualifications. The former was father of the late Mrs. John G. Campbell, of Perth, and was afterward inspector of schools for Lanark County.