

Old Toll Gate on Scotch Line Scene of Strange Happenings in Early Days

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By Mrs. Ann Chabot¹

Over the past few years, I have read a good deal about the history of Perth and district, and I am always disappointed that there is never any mention of the toll gate on the Scotch Line. I do not know why this bit of history has been ignored. I know that such a toll gate existed because my maternal grandmother was the keeper of the gate.

My grandmother was born Mary Scott, daughter of William Scott Sr. of Fallbrook, Ontario.² She met and married my grandfather, Richard Reynolds around 1878.³ My grandfather was a lumberman who followed that trade most of his working years.

My grandparents emigrated to Michigan in the early 1880s where they lived for a few years, returning to Ontario in May 1889.

The family was settled near St. George's Lake (Oso Township) and my grandfather went to work at Allan's Mill, near Glen Tay⁴. As a work week at that time included Saturday, it was very hard for him to spend time with his family, and he was anxious to move them closer to his place of work. The present old mill at Glen Tay was the 'New' mill then and was very busy, which made housing very scarce in that area. The only vacant house in Glen Tay was one reputed to be "badly haunted". However, my grandparents decided to rent it, ghost or no ghost, as they told the story later.

They lived in the haunted house until 1893 when they moved to the toll house on the Scotch Line. I do not know whether the toll was a new venture for the township or whether a vacancy arose at that time.⁵

¹ Marilyn Ann Chabot (1951-2003) married Cedric Pearson.

² Mary Scott (1861-1940) was born at Fallbrook, the daughter of George M. Scott (b.1842) and Elizabeth Jane Riddell (b.1871).

³ Mary Scott (1861-1940) married Richard Ray Reynolds (1858-1940) at Perth in 1877.

⁴ Allan's Mills, named for William Allan (1833-1908), was a hamlet on Grant's Creek, 11 kilometers west of Perth. It got its start in 1856 when Allan built saw and grist mills and at its peak had a post office, general store, blacksmith shop, waggon maker and shoemaker.

⁵ The Scotch Line Toll Road was never owned by Bathurst Township. It was established in the mid-1850s by the private Scotch Line Road Company and later came under the sole proprietorship of Brockville businessman John Wardrope (1816-1893). Shortly before Wardrope died in 1893 (the year the Reynolds moved into the toll house), he offered to sell the company to the Town of Perth and/or Bathurst Township but there were no takers. The company struggled on until 1901 when it became insolvent, leaving maintenance of what had become a public toll-free road to the township. For the full story of local toll roads see *Barbaric Relics* elsewhere on this website at <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/toll-roads.pdf>

When I moved to Glen Tay with my husband and family in 1961, my mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Jones⁶, with the help of Mr. Guy Leonard⁷, was able to show me almost exactly where the toll house had stood. It was on the west side of the straight stretch of road just before the Y where the Scotch Line separates from the paved road.⁸ The road past Dr. Allan's farm was referred to by both my mother and Mr. Leonard as the 'Kingston Hill'. They agreed that the toll house had been a light colored, two storey frame building, sitting very close to the road with a twin stile between the house and the gate. The gate itself was a wooden one with a box of stones on the back end to made it easier to operate.

Many were the evenings I sat in my grandparents' home and listened to them reminisce of their years at the toll house.

The gate was to be closed as much as possible on the weekdays and when closed must be attended. It was left open on Sundays and for funerals or when no one was there to attend it. The toll was five cents, for a single horse vehicle, ten cents for a team, and walking was free through the turnstile. The first seven dollars collected monthly went to the council⁹ and anything over that was my grandmother's wages beside the rent-free house. If the gate was closed at night, a lantern was lit and placed on the gate post. This was left to my grandmother as to whether she wanted to stay up and tend the gate.

Sitting in the yellow lamplight of a winter's evening or the soft twilight of summer, they told us of their memories – of the time a gypsy caravan paid their toll and went quickly up the Kingston Hill – and how in minutes she heard someone calling "Open the gate, Mrs. Reynolds, the gypsies have stolen our boy!" ... Of how she hurried and pointed the way, and in a little while the riders returned with the child on the saddle with his father.



An abandoned toll gate

They told of the time that a travelling medicine show came through and asked her to pass the word that there would be a show that evening just on the vee of land near Mr. Kelford's present home.¹⁰ Many people came to see the show and hear the music, but the main attraction was a trained bear act. During the act the bear became angry and killed his trainer and one of the men from the show shot the bear ... how the women and children ran screaming from the place, but some of the men stayed on including my grandfather.

⁶ Elizabeth Blanche Reynolds (1889-1982), married (1907) William Charles Jones (1877-1944).

⁷ Guy Leonard (1896-1969).

⁸ The Scotch Line Toll Road encompassed the first eight miles (13 Km) of Bathurst Concession-1. It was controlled by two toll gates, one at its intersection with Perth's Gore Street and the Rideau Ferry Road and the second at the intersection of the Upper and Lower Scotch Line Roads. Mary Scott-Reynolds was keeper of the second (west) gate.

⁹ The tolls collected were not payable to the township council, but to the private toll-road company.

¹⁰ The site now bounded by Upper Scotch Line, Lower Scotch Line and Kelford Drive.

He said that the bodies were loaded into a wagon and driven to the Stanleyville turn where they buried the man and the bear side by side in the grove of trees across the road from the turn-off. This particular incident was also remembered by Mr. Leonard who told me it was talked about for years after.

Not all my grandparents' memories were sad ones. There were many happy ones as well. Memories of weddings and of loads of young people going to dances at Stanleyville. They would tell my grandparents that they would pay on their way back to Perth, knowing that by then she would be in bed and the gate would be open ... how occasionally she would light the lantern and wait up for them and they would laughingly admit their surprise.

She told of an Irishman who kept a general store at Stanleyville and drew his wares from Perth by team. She recalled that he was often 'the worse for drink' on his return. Of a trip he made at Christmas one year when a case of hard candy was spilled and a path of bright candy lay on the snow. My mother remembers picking them up and having the most candy in her young life.

Sometime in the mid to late 1890s my grandparents left the toll gate and settled in the village of Crow Lake (Oso). My grandmother lived there to be a very old lady. The last few months of her life she was very ill and by this time I was old enough to take my turn to sit with her.

Sometimes, in the quiet hours, she would stop her constant mumbling and would call out in a clear voice, "Open the gate, Mrs. Reynolds", and we would know that in her dear confused mind she was once again the keeper of the toll gate on the Scotch Line.

(Transcribed & notated by Ron W. Shaw)