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A NEW SITE FOR DOLLARD AT CARILLON *

Report on a Research Project

Nearly all historians appear to be agreed that Dollard's battle with the Iroquois on the banks of the Ottawa River in May 1660 took place in the vicinity of Carillon, on the north shore of the river. Despite this agreement, or perhaps because of it, a concerted effort to find the actual location does not ever seem to have been undertaken. The only person who has done any research appears to have been Abbé Arthur Guindon during the years 1910-1923. He published the results of his work on Dollard in the journal « L'Action Française » in June 1918. This was followed by publication of a small booklet « Les Trois Combats du Long Sault » in 1923, dealing with the Dollard affair and two other engagements on the Long Sault of the Ottawa about 30 years later.

Anyone attempting today to find the actual location of Dollard's battle ground at Carillon is severely handicapped by the fact that the north shore of the Ottawa River in this area no longer bears much resemblance to its original state. The various construction works undertaken there during the past 130 years have extensively altered the appearance of the shore-line. The original Carillon canal work of 1830-33 was followed by construction of the new canal and the first Carillon dam in 1872-74. Today Quebec-Hydro has churned up a large part of this area for the third time.

Abbé Guindon seems to have surmounted most of these difficulties and we are in agreement with his references to a navigable current of slack water along the north shore of the river for nearly a mile above the foot of the rapids. We also agree that this current ended in a small bay with a backwater, which today gives access to both the old and the new canals in the centre of the village of Carillon. However, we cannot find ourselves in agreement with his view that canoes coming down the river would necessarily come in for a landing at the bay. On the contrary, if the canoe man came down over the portage he would put his canoe into the water again at the head of the navigable current. We may be sure he would then continue on

* Pièce à verser au Dossier Dollard, fournie par la Historical Society of Argenteuil County, r.r. no 1, Grenville, Qué.

down the river without stopping at the bay. If the canoe came straight down the river, running the rapids, the little bay would be a very good place for a landing, however, there was no assurance that a landing would be made.

For these reasons we must disagree with Abbé Guindon that Dollard made his stand near the little bay in the village of Carillon that today gives access to both the old and the new canals. We have to remember that Dollard made his stand at a place where he could expect the Indians to pass *without fail*. All contemporary authorities are agreed on this point. We believe the little bay at Carillon does not meet this requirement and therefore should not be accepted as the site of the battle ground.

In our view it is necessary to look first at the route of the portage around the Carillon rapid in order to find the answer to the question — « Where was Dollard's palisade ? » The portage was always the place where the Indians tried to catch their enemies and if the Algonquins had built a small palisade, as stated by the contemporary reports, it seems to us more than likely this would be located somewhere near the portage route.

We have been fortunate in locating an old surveyor's map of 1788 which gives an accurate survey of the area including the portage route. The portage around the Carillon rapid, according to the map scale, was approximately 1120 yards in length. The head of the portage was about opposite the centre of an island called Isle Perseverance, now known as Dewar's Island. It was not possible to tell immediately where the foot of the portage was located. The old map showed a small stream or inlet immediately to the east of the landing beach, however, this could not be found on any other map, ancient or modern. The old map also showed that the portage route followed the line of an escarpment along the north bank of the river. The beginning and end of the portage coincided with the beginning and end of the escarpment.

Since the location of the head of the portage could be identified, we started our calculations at that point. Projecting the indicated distance of 1120 yards onto a modern map, it was found that the foot of the portage would have been in the immediate vicinity of No. 2 lock of the present canal. This was also the immediate construction area for the first Carillon Dam of 1872-74. In addition, a substantial earthwork was constructed here for the original canal of 1830-33 as well as a drainage channel for waste water. The original shore-line at this point has also been enclosed within the embankment forming the southern side of the present canal. The prospects for locating the foot of the portage did not appear to be very promising.

The first point of identification was provided by an aerial photograph of the area of No. 2 lock. Although it was not indicated on any map, the photograph revealed there was a small drainage ditch leading into the canal exactly in the position of the stream indicated on the survey map of 1788. This encouraged further study of the immediate area.

The next step was to secure, if possible, a large scale map which would show the topography prior to the works of 1872-74. Through the combined efforts of the Public Archives at Ottawa and the Department of Transport, whose assistance is very much appreciated, we received a copy of the official plan prepared for the construction work. This showed the area in detail and also indicated exactly where the new works were to be located. The plan confirmed what we had suspected, that the location of No. 2 lock coincided with the eastern end of the escarpment. The landing beach, according to the old map, was to be found between the end escarpment and the small stream.

An investigation at the site has confirmed that the foot of the old Carillon portage with its landing beach can still be seen. It is an area scarcely 100 feet wide, the only section of the original shore-line in the vicinity which has been mutilated. To the west are the great bulwarks of the No. 2 lock and to the east are thousands upon thousands of yards of crushed stone dumped there by Quebec-Hydro out of their excavations. Menaced both from the east and from the west, the little beach has somehow survived. The nearby ditch is still draining, as it did in the beginning, the marsh lands lying along the north shore of the river.

If this was the foot of the portage then the Algonquin palisade, we felt, could not be far away. The area north and east of the landing beach was wet and boggy. It was obvious the portage path would turn to the west immediately and climb up the slope beside the river, onto the top of the escarpment. We went down to the old landing beach and measured out 200 paces, commencing at the water line and following the old foot-path up the hill. The contemporary accounts tell us the palisade was 200 paces from the water. At the end of 200 paces we found ourselves on a small plateau on the top of the escarpment, high above the river. We felt this was exactly the place a canoe man would choose to make his camp. Looking around we saw that close by, to the northwest, there was a small slope overlooking the plateau. This recalled immediately that Dollier de Casson in his History of Montreal described the place as being overlooked by some adjacent rising ground (« commandé par un

côteau voisin »), which is one of the most specific details that we have.

We felt right away there was no need to look further for the site. Every aspect is in accord with the descriptions available to us from the contemporary records. It is 200 paces from the water, it is on a hill, it is overlooked by some nearby rising ground, and there is no water. In addition, the location is a very strategic one, high on the escarpment overlooking the river and the surging waters of the Carillon rapid. The view in each direction, up and down the river, is extensive. No one could approach this place without being seen. It is protected by a swamp at the rear and to the east. Obviously it would be a very attractive location for a military man like Dollard, seeking an engagement with the enemy.

The more we studied this plateau the more we were impressed with this idea of a strategic location. Going back to the surveyor's map of 1788 it was apparent immediately that canoes descending the river would have no option but to come down inside Isle Perseverance and along the north shore into the navigable current that by-passed the rapids. There was no other possible route. This would bring them close in underneath the escarpment. Those standing on the plateau on the top of the escarpment would be in absolute command of the passage of descending canoes. Since the plateau was actually situated on the portage route it was thus in command of all travel up or down the river. It is not difficult to understand the strategic importance of such a position at the time of the Iroquois wars on the Ottawa, when the whole of the Long Sault was a bloody battle ground with constant ambush around the rapids and on the portages. No one could enter or leave the Long Sault without passing the place where this plateau was located.

We have studied the topography of the upper parts of the Long Sault with care; the rapid and the portage at the Chute à Blondeau, and the long rapid of six miles from Grenville to Grece's Point with the portage on the north shore near Grenville. We are satisfied there is no other location in the whole of the Long Sault area, anywhere between Carillon and Grenville, where all travel routes must pass through one narrow defile. There is no other point where all movement on the river could be controlled from one location. The strategic importance of the plateau on the escarpment, in the days of canoe travel on the Ottawa, must have been absolute and complete.

Inevitably we asked ourselves whether Dollard and his companions had come to this strategic place by accident or by design. Going back to the accounts of the contemporary historians, so

often quoted in today's debates about the location of the battle, we found they had an entirely new meaning for us. Dollier's History of Montreal says that when Dollard had placed himself in position, he waited for the Iroquois as if he were in an infallible passage (« il attendoit les Iroquois, comme dans un passage infaillible au retour de leurs chasses »). In the Jesuit Relations there is the statement that Dollard took up his position, there to await the Iroquois who, according to their custom, had to pass that way in single file (« pour y attendre les chasseurs Iroquois, qui selon leur coustume le devoient passer file à file, en retournant de leur chasses d'hiuer »). Radisson says that Dollard made an arrangement with his Indian allies « to goe and wait for the Iroquois in the passage at their retourne with their castors ».

In our view these statements tell us that Dollard knew all about this strategic point and had selected it for his battle ground, before he left Montreal. It was his plan of campaign, to come to this place and make his stand there, and wait for the Iroquois who must inevitably pass that way, on descending the river. This was « the passage » of the contemporary historians.

This is an entirely new conception of Dollard's expedition to the banks of the Ottawa but it appears to be very well supported by the statement of the contemporary historians when these are studied in the light of the strategic importance of the plateau on the escarpment. We tend to forget that Dollard was a military man and his expedition had a military character. The purpose of the expedition was to wage petty warfare with the Iroquois, to have skirmishes with small bands of the Indians. What is more reasonable than to assume that Dollard would prepare a careful plan of campaign, and select his battle ground with the greatest care, the more so as he had such a small party at his command ? What is more logical than that his choice would fall on this plateau which commanded all travel on the river ?

It was not Dollard's plan to intercept the great masses of Iroquois which were gathering for an all-out attack on the young French settlements. He was not prepared for that and was seeking only to have engagements with small parties of the Indians, returning from the winter hunt. When he found himself attacked by the overwhelming forces gathering for a massive attack on the infant colony, there is no doubt as to the bravery and determination with which he and his small party, not forgetting the five loyal Indians, resisted the Iroquois, literally to the last man. All contemporary accounts are agreed that the result of Dollard's determined stand, was that the Iroquois postponed their attack on the young colony for another year, giving it another year in

which to strengthen its defences. The statement that Dollard's battle was « the salvation of the country » does not appear to be any exaggeration.

Dollier de Casson wrote his History of Montreal in 1672. He was then the Superior of the Sulpician Order in Canada and well qualified to judge the events of his time. Discussing Dollard's battle, Dollier tells us :

If ever Canada becomes of any importance, the act ought to be held in esteem for ever by posterity, since by its means Canada was saved on this occasion, not to mention others.

Recognition of the site of the battle would appear to be the first essential in according this event its proper place in Canadian history. We would suggest that consideration might be given to immediate recognition of the plateau on the escarpment. Unfortunately the area is going to be covered under many feet of water when the Carillon Dam is closed early next spring and, in fact, the waters have already begun to rise. There is no time to be lost.

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