

The Clark Settlement (Wakeham)

by Morris Patterson

William, first member of the Clark family to settle in Gaspé, arrived about 1828 from England and settled in Wakeham on Lot #24; land he bought from the O'Hara family. He built his home on the south side of the road near the home that Ralph Clark, a great-grandson occupied until his death in 1980.



The British Government granted [John Clark](#), one of William's sons, a lot situated three miles from his father's home in Wakeham and two miles back from the river's edge. John was obliged by the grant to build roads into the property where he always cherished the hope that a new community, complete with a school and church, would someday develop. John married at 24 years of age and moved temporarily to his new property with both his bride and his mother. He was somewhat dissatisfied with his lot, however, and one day decided to move to Australia to make a new life for himself. Leaving his wife behind; but the cold and ill-suited, clothing apparently forced him to return to the Gaspe Peninsula. John thus moved back to his lot in the woods where he cleared enough land to build a one-room log house. Poverty continued to harass him, however, such that when his first child was born, she died of exposure. This prompted John to move once again to the settlement in Wakeham where his first wife had died and where he later remarried. John eventually returned to his lot in the woods when his sons, [Allan](#) and [Douglas](#), moved to the old property in 1902. John still clung to the idea that a community would be established there someday, but the only settlers to ever reside there were his two sons and their families.



Mildred, Olive, Irma & Douglas Clark

With the third generation of Clark's, lumbering achieved greater prominence as a source of revenue for the family. For example, when he was 18 years old, Allan Clark began working in lumber camps where he cut long wood which was sold in Gaspé. At the age of 26, he married and moved to York for two years



where he continued to work with wood. He later moved to the old wood lot where his father gave him a lot measuring three acres wide by 100 acres deep. With the help of his father and brother, Allan built his house, a barn and a chicken house from his own cut timber. Allan began cutting and selling wood from his land during his first years there. He later worked with private loggers for \$20 per

month, hardly enough to buy clothes for his twelve children.

In the spring, Allan went to the drive, pushing logs into the brook to float downstream to the mill in Gaspé. One fall he worked in Grand- Etang, on the north coast, building a log cabin for American sports fishermen. As his family grew up, part of Allan's income was also derived from the sale of eggs and butter. Allan further cultivated his land to the fullest since one of his daughters remembers being lost in a large field of oats. Similarly, when he was late in coming home from the drive one year, his oldest daughter had already prepared the soil for planting before his arrival. In addition, Allan also worked during the summer as a guide for American sportsmen whilst hunting wild animals supplemented his family's diet during the winter months.

As mentioned earlier, Allan brought his wife, Elizabeth Mary Patterson, to the Clark Settlement in 1902. They brought twelve children into the world. Douglas Clark had a family of three, one who died in childhood. In the years following, as the children became adults, many of them chose to leave the settlement for different reasons. Chester decided to marry Ellen and settle into a home in upper Wakeham. Gertrude chose to marry Thomas Patterson and live in Sunny Bank. Irma needed work and landed a job as house keeper for Austin Phillips in Peninsula. The other siblings seemed to follow similar paths except Edmond and his uncle Douglas who chose to remain on the homestead.

All the lumber used in construction of the homes and outbuildings was manufactured by hand. A long bladed two man saw was used to rip the logs into boards which were then hand planed to be readied for the construction. For the floors in the stable logs were laid together and then flattened on the top with a “dubbin” axe.

The families owned basic farm equipment such as the plow and the harrow for gardening. They also had mowing machines and rakers which were used for cutting and drying the hay and oats. Threshing the oats was not so easy. Since they did not have access to a thrashing machine it was done by hand. Douglas’ son John described the threshing process. They used what resembled two paddles of unequal size and with these paddles they would “flail” the oats back and forth to separate it from the straw and the chaff. The oats would provide feed for the animals and seed for next year’s crop. The straw was used to make mattresses or would serve as bedding for the chickens or even as insulation for the homes and the vegetable cellars. These cellars consisted of a large hole in the ground lined with logs and covered with an A-framed roof.

In the fifties the total population of the settlement consisted of two families, Edmond with his wife Elsie (nee Jean) his son Wilson and six siblings, and Douglas with his wife Elsie Garrett and two children, John and his sister. At that time this settlement consisted of two houses and some outbuildings including a barn for the cattle and horses. The families were originally Anglican but Douglas joined with the Jehovah Witnesses and became one of their ministers. He



helped establish a cemetery for his group on the south end of the property. This cemetery, though small, is well kept and can easily be located today. Douglas was one of the main contributors in the construction of the Kingdom Hall in Sunny Bank.

Life was not easy for the two Clark families but in many ways it was similar to that of many other residents of Gaspé. They had a small farm which included a vegetable garden, a small orchard, and some chickens, and a barn which housed horses and cattle. The

chores often seemed to be endless but each was expected to do his share. There would be cows to be milked, chickens to be fed, stables to be cleaned Summers were busiest as there was hay and oats to be cut and dried, fences to be repaired, gardens to be planted and weeded not to forget harvest time. John noted that there was little time to get into mischief. Still everyone seemed happy and content. John recalls he occasionally found a little spare time to take his 22 rifle and go hunting partridge and rabbits.

A lot of planning was required in order to ensure they would not run out of staples for the home, supplementary feed for the animals, and other necessities. They were able to cut their own firewood for their wood stoves. Cutting logs and pit props provided some income for the families. Edmond worked for around nine years with the Fire Association. This job required travel by horse from his home to Little Fork frequently to inspect the forest to determine fire risks or notice fire outbreaks. Douglas managed to find work in Gaspé. He gained employment as a cook at Battery Park Hotel and later at the York Lumber Company in Sandy Beach. In the days before he had a car he would walk to and from work, coming home on weekends (not an easy walk by today's standards).

Lighting for the homes consisted of coal-oil lamps as hydro was not available. Wilson Clark remembers fetching some light oil from the oil wells in the area to serve as fuel for the lamps. Since telephone lines did not reach the settlement contact with the outside required a journey to Wakeham. Isolation did not seem to be a major problem, however, as they had family connections in Wakeham. Also there were many reasons for people circulating in and around the area. Woodsmen cut logs in the nearby woods. One of the camps was located about nine miles in the bush and the men would move in a week at a time. There were workers on the oil rigs in the area drilling in search of oil. Including fishermen and hunters as well as family visitors, there was often someone passing by. Douglas bought an old Ford car which served as transportation to and from the settlement during the months when there was no snow. The families also often made use of taxis to do their errands in Gaspé. When a trip to Gaspé was required they would try to combine all the chores in the one trip, often including a stop at the local grocery store. Winter travel was usually by snowshoes or horse and sleigh.

If a member of the group required medical attention a message would go out for a call to Dr. Guy Fortier or Dr. Pelletier. Winter or summer one of them would be willing to visit the home to tend to the needs. When asked about the cost of the visit the Dr. Fortier would reply, "Just \$2.00", or maybe in winter, "Just \$3.00".

Each week the families would make contact with the local merchant in Sunny Bank and place their order for groceries and feed for the animals for the week. Bruce Patterson recalls making weekly deliveries. In summer the delivery was made to the settlement by van. However in winter the groceries had to be hauled by dogsled from the paved road to the settlement (a good half day's work). Thankfully the bulk items such as flour and feed for the animals for the winter would be placed before the roads were snowed up in November.

Schooling became somewhat difficult because of the distance. The students had to find their own way out to the paved road, a distance of about a mile, to meet the school bus. In summer they could walk or bike the distance. Sometimes, in winter, if conditions were good the snowmobile would make some, or all, of the journey up the hill. In spite of these conditions they did attend school quite regularly.

As one would guess there were many animals in the area and this often presented some exciting moments. Often on the mile stretch of road they would see a moose, a bear, a deer or some game birds. Bobcats and porcupines were not uncommon in the area. On one occasion Wilson recalls driving his bike between a bear and her cub. A dangerous move but Wilson thought nothing of it. Another time he recalls being chased by a bull moose. Once he recalls his uncle John opening the door of the house only to be terrified by a bear standing on the doorstep.

The views of the surrounding countryside were very memorable to Wilson. One view from a nearby hill was particularly impressive. From that vantage point one could see the entire York River bay and the surrounding hills. He wishes to this day that he had had a painter standing beside him with brushes and palette so he could capture the breathtaking view from that hill. At one time the lights of the settlement could be seen from Sunny Bank. Unfortunately many of the

trees have been allowed to grow tall in the settlement and many of these scenes are hidden.

Wilson concluded the discussion by indicating that he had very fond memories of his childhood in and around the settlement, a part of his life he would never forget. He wishes that he could relive those days again.

Douglas had been ill since the late fifties he moved to Montreal and subsequently died in 1964. John moved out in 1959 and found work as a guardian at the Middle River Salmon Club with Charlie Palmer. The settlement came to an end when Edmund and his family moved out in 1960. Although the two Clark families chose not to continue the life in the settlement, it seems certain there are still great memories in the minds of the family members.

Sources:

The second, third and fourth paragraphs were extracted by permission from an essay written by Lorna Miller nee Clark entitled "Lumbering in Upper Wakeham".

Interviews with Wilson Clark and John Clark, both presently living in Upper Wakekam

Brief interview with Bruce Patterson and Bessie Patterson