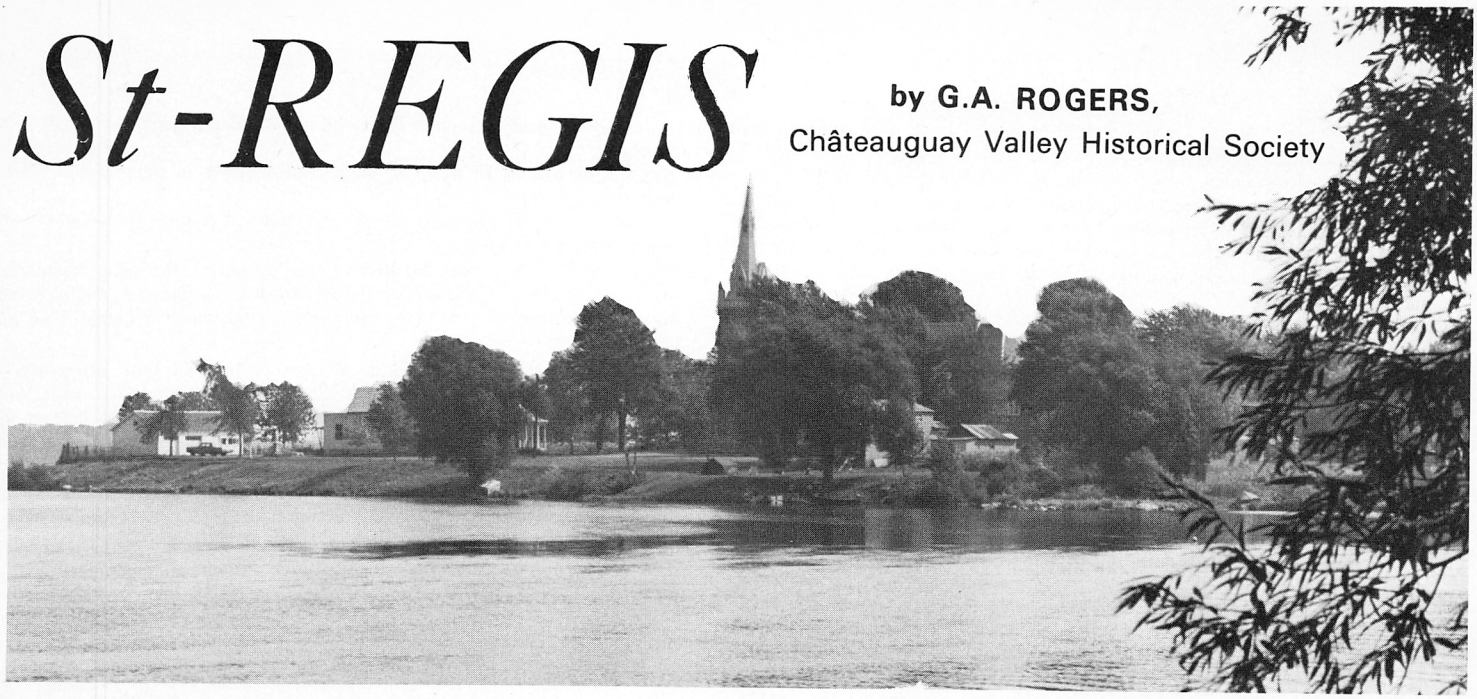
# St-REGIS

by G.A. ROGERS,
Châteauguay Valley Historical Society



As early as 1614 Champlain first invited the Recollets to undertake a mission to convert the Indians to the Catholic faith. Later in 1625 Father Lallemant and a few Jesuits arrived to begin their years of arduous toil and to labour with a zeal which has known no parallel, to locate the Iroquois in permanent villages. These were established first near Laprairie, then Sault St. Louis at the foot of the Lachine rapids and finally about 1720 at the village of Caughnawaga, to teach them the art of cultivating the earth and to provide some of the habits and conveniences of the Christian life.

Over the years the Catholic missionaries of New France were intimately connected with several other Indian villages including the Iroquois at St. Regis, an Iroquois, Algonquin and Nipissing nation at Oka on the Lake of Two Mountains, an Oswegatchie tribe of Iroquois at Ogdensburgh, New York, a colony of Hurons at Lorette and a settlement of Abenaquis on the St. Francis river at Lake St. Pierre.

From time to time the Caughnawaga Indians, together with the French, raided into New York and the New England States, engaging in numerous skirmishes and in the wars against the English. The Deerfield massacre was typical. At the end of February, 1704, Major Hertel de Rouville with about 200 French and 140 Indians, attacked Deerfield, killing over 50 inhabitants and taking nearly twice this number prisoner, including the Rev. John Williams and several of his children.

In 1706, Mr. Williams and many other captives were redeemed and returned to Boston, with the exception of his daughter Eunice who was then about ten years of age. She adopted the religion, dress and habit of the Indians, and later on married and settled at Caughnawaga. Later in 1740 and 1741 and long after her father's death in 1729, she visited Deerfield but no amount of persuasion could convince her to remain there with her relatives. Many of the young girls taken in this raid were placed in convents in Three Rivers and Quebec. The taking of white captives was quite common in those early days and in later years these captives and their descendants became very influential as chiefs and head men, not only in Caughnawaga but in other villages as well.

The Deerfield raid recalls the legend of the bell. Father Nicholas had erected a church in Caughnawaga at the mission of St. Francis Xavier and requiring a bell, ordered one from France to be paid for with a packet of furs collected by the Indians. The bell was shipped on the "Grand Monarque", sailing for Quebec. Taken by a New England privateer into the port of Salem, Massachusetts, she was sold as a lawful prize. The bell was purchased by the village of Deerfield for a church then being erected for the celebrated Rev. John Williams.

When Father Nicholas received news of this misfortune he implored the Indians to recover it. Their opportunity came when the Marquis de Vaudreuil resolved to send an expedition against the British colonies and the command given to Major Hertel de Rouville. Father Nicolas accompanied the Indians as they joined de Rouville at Fort Chambly for the long march to Deerfield. Legend has it that the bell was removed from the belfry and carried to the shores of Lake Champlain, buried for the time being and finally brought triumphantly to Caughnawaga in the spring of the same year.

About fifteen years after the Deerfield massacre two young brothers of the Tarbell family were captured in Groton, Massachusetts and taken to Caughnawaga where they were adopted into native families. They grew up in the habits and manners of the Indians and married chief's daughters. Their differences eventually caused a great deal of irritation and trouble, and together with their wive's parents, these four families left the village and settled on the beautiful and elevated point between the St. Regis and Raquette rivers, the future Indian village of St. Regis or AK-WIS-SAS-NE, "where the partridge drums".

In 1755, they were joined by Father Antoine Gordan, a Jesuit priest from Caughnawaga and several other Indian families. It was Gordan who established the first

gratitude envers le Canada français qui a favorisé l'essor du gouvernement responsable en notre pays. »

Le moment est venu, ce me semble, de vous indiquer par quel moyen, en parcourant à vol d'oiseau leur histoire, les Canadiens français peuvent découvrir rapidement et facilement leurs grands hommes d'État. Comment dresser, en un tournemain, un palmarès des patriotes canadiens-français qui ont servi, en des conjonctures souvent tragiques, les intérêts supérieurs de la patrie ?

Voici la formule.

Les vrais patriotes canadiens-français sont presque toujours ceux que, pendant un quart de siècle, un demi-siècle ou plus, le Canada anglais a craints, détestés, méprisés, calomniés, vilipendés.

Triste vérité, sans doute; mais, hélas ! incontestable vérité.

Une première illustration de cette vérité ? C'est évidemment Papineau. Cent ans après sa mort, le 7 mai 1971, un timbre à l'effigie de Papineau, un timbre représentant cette même tête, mise à prix en 1838, élève officiellement sur le pavois le chef des patriotes de 1837.

Une deuxième illustration : La Fontaine.

Le 25 avril 1849 une émeute éclate à Montréal. Émeute dirigée principalement contre La Fontaine. Après avoir incendié les édifices du Parlement, la populace se rue vers la résidence de La Fontaine qui est mise à sac et préservée du feu par la police. Le 12 août un complot d'assassinat est tramé contre lui. Complot heureusement éventé par deux amis du premier ministre. Le 15 août, nouvel assaut de la demeure de La Fontaine. Durant quatre mois, Montréal respire une atmosphère de terreur sous les menaces de meurtre et d'incendie.

Et Donald Creighton [19] de commenter ainsi l'hystérie collective des Anglo-Canadiens de Montréal :

> "In a day [April 25, 1849] the Conservatives of Montreal had gone almost as far as the rebels of 1837 in their appeal to force."

À ce sujet, le professeur Burt [20] a utilisé une formule pittoresque :

> "Though it is not true in arithmetic, it is true in Canadian history that 49 = 37."

Cible, en cette année tragique, des francophobes montréalais, La Fontaine obtint néanmoins cinq ans plus tard, exactement le 28 août 1854, de Sa Majesté Britannique, le titre héréditaire de baronnet du Royaume-Uni, le premier décerné à un Canadien. Ultérieurement un timbre-poste rendra hommage à la mémoire de La Fontaine.

Une troisième illustration, peut-être la plus fulgurante : Louis Riel. Le pendu de 1885 qui, quatre-vingt-cinq ans plus tard, en 1970, obtient lui aussi, du Gouvernement fédéral, un timbre commémorant le centième anniversaire de sa nomination au poste de président du premier gouvernement régulier du Manitoba.

Une quatrième illustration, éclatante, elle aussi : Henri Bourassa.

Au début du siècle, Bourassa personnifiait, dans presque tout le Canada anglais, l'abomination de la désolation. Au pays de Québec, ce petit-fils de Papineau incarnait en quelque sorte, ce que les francophobes détestaient le plus au monde : le nationalisme canadien tout court et Sa Majesté la Langue française au Canada.

Si Bourassa passa la majeure partie de sa vie à combattre l'Empire britannique, ce n'était pas parce que cet empire était britannique, c'était parce que cet empire était... un empire : ("It is not because it is British, but because it is imperial"). Tout empire lui inspirait de la répulsion.

Ses ennemis fermaient les yeux sur cette distinction essentielle. Et, dès l'année 1915, un an à peine après le début de la Première Guerre mondiale, le **Montreal Star** appelait Bourassa « Von Bourassa », l'associant ainsi au Kaiser.

Pourtant Bourassa préconisait tout simplement un nationalisme de bon aloi, un canadianisme sain, un bilinguisme et un biculturalisme que l'administration officielle, à Ottawa, tente actuellement d'établir d'un océan à l'autre.

Bref, aujourd'hui Bourassa, même aux yeux des Anglo-Canadiens, prend figure de grand homme.

« Le premier parmi les hommes publics du Canada », a écrit Frank Underhill [21], « Bourassa a forcé les Anglo-Canadiens à réfléchir sur la situation qui leur était faite dans un empire qu'ils servaient, mais dont la maîtrise leur échappait. »

Depuis trois ans, un timbre à l'effigie de Bourassa popularise la physionomie du grand homme, de l'Atlantique au Pacifique. Papineau et Bourassa, le grand-père et le petit-fils unis dans une commune gloire et promis à la commune gratitude de la postérité : fait unique dans les annales du Canada.

Enfin cinquième et dernière illustration, celle-là la plus douloureuse : sir Wilfrid Laurier.

Au début du siècle, Laurier était certainement la plus grande gloire du Canada français et même du Canada tout court.

Si, en 1919, il y avait un Anglo-Canadien en mesure de prononcer un jugement sur Laurier, c'était sir Robert Borden. Le premier ministre conservateur ne pouvait être taxé d'admiration irraisonnée à l'endroit de son puissant adversaire politique.

Pourtant les **Mémoires** [22] de Borden renferment une lettre que le mémorialiste adressa à sir Thomas White, le 24 février 1919, sept jours après la mort de Laurier. Et le premier ministre de rendre à Laurier cet hommage suprême et mérité : "On the whole I think there never has been a more impressive figure in the affairs of our country."

Nulle figure plus imposante que celle de Laurier, au dire de son adversaire victorieux. Hommage de grande taille !

Veut-on un autre témoignage tout aussi éloquent ? Il émane lui aussi d'un ancien premier ministre conservateur : Arthur Meighen [23] :

> "Before the funeral [of Laurier]", raconte Roger Graham, "Meighen visited Sir Wilfrid's home to pay his respects, taking Lillian, who was then nine years old, with him. "You are too young to understand", he told her as they made their way from Cooper Street, "but I want you to be able to say that you saw one of the finest men I have ever known."

Comment ne pas être profondément ému à la lecture de cette phrase si simple, si sincère, si candide ?

C'est pourtant à ce géant qu'osa s'attaquer, en 1917, toute une tourbe d'ignobles pygmées. Ils prennent figure de serpents essayant de ronger une lime.

Au cours de la campagne électorale de 1917, pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, toujours partisan du volontariat, Laurier prétendait que la conscription ne produirait pas les effets espérés par les impérialistes.

Les Anglo-Canadiens menèrent alors contre Laurier une campagne des plus dégoûtantes :

> "Then", a consigné noir sur blanc D.M. Le Bourdais [24], historien anglophone en dépit de son nom français, "followed a campaign the like of which had never been before experienced in Canada. With ample money, with almost the entire English-language press, with high-priced speakers and writers, with newspaper advertisements, with the Protestant pulpit largely become an adjunct of the hustings, a steady barrage of abuse was rained upon Laurier and his supporters. From billboards in type four feet high, voters were warned that "A vote for Laurier is a vote for the Kaiser". And they were asked : "How would the Kaiser vote ?"

Laurier, suppôt du Kaiser ! Le chef de la loyale opposition de Sa Majesté au Canada, un traître ! La bassesse des calomniateurs s'étalait ainsi sans vergogne aucune. Telle était pour Laurier la récompense d'une vie consacrée à l'édification d'une patrie où devaient cohabiter les représentants de deux grandes cultures.

Étrange retour de la fortune ! Ce Canada français, petite patrie d'un Laurier, d'un Bourassa, d'un La Fontaine et d'un Papineau, cet érable que certains croyaient mort ou sur le point de mourir, parce que quelques feuilles sèches s'y accrochaient obstinément pendant les hivers durs, cet arbre toujours plein de sève devait connaître bientôt un regain de vitalité, un étonnant réveil, une révolution tranquille non encore terminée.

Comme quoi, selon la belle parole de Guillaume le Taciturne, « il n'est pas nécessaire d'espérer pour entreprendre, ni de réussir pour persévérer. » Maxime qui résume l'histoire du Canada français de 1608 à 1760 et depuis la Conquête jusqu'à nos jours. Maxime qui fut, semble-t-il, celle d'un Laurier, d'un Bourassa, d'un Riel, d'un La Fontaine et surtout celle d'un Papineau. Maxime qui devrait être nôtre en ces années décisives où sont définitivement engagées les destinées du Canada français.

SÉRAPHIN MARION

19.—**Dominion of the North**, Toronto, 1957, p. 261.
20.—**The Evolution of the British Empire**, Boston, 1956, p. 266.
21.—**The British Commonwealth**, p. 33.
22.—**His Memoirs**, Toronto, 1938, Vol. I, p. 274.
23.—**Arthur Meighen**, Toronto, 1960, p. 222.
24.—**Nation of the North**, London, 1953, p. 159.

mission and who named the place St. Regis, after Jean Francois Regis, of the Society of Jesus, born at Foncouverte, France, in 1597, of an ancient and noble family. He died in 1640 and for his labours among the poor, was cannonised in 1737 by Pope Clement XII. A painting of St. Regis exists in the mission church. It was presented by Pope Charles X.

Among the first duties of Father Gordan was the building of a church, of logs covered by bark and with one end partitioned off for his residence. This church was lost by fire together with the parish records. The first record extant bears the date of February 2, 1762, when Margarita Theretia, an Abenaki woman was married and baptized. Since that date the parish records have been kept in detail, in both Latin and French. Soon afterwards a small wooden church was erected, furnished with a cupola and bell. There were many who believed that this was the Deerfield bell but we must bear in mind that a period of fifty years elapsed between the taking of this bell and the founding of St. Regis.

Father Gordan's health failed and he returned to Caughnawaga where he died in 1779. For some years the mission was without a regular priest and the parish records show that Father Denault from the Cedars and Father Lebrun from Caughnawaga visited infrequently until 1785. In December of that year Roderick McDonnell, a Scotch priest from Glengarry, succeeded and remained until his death in 1806. The present massive stone church was erected about 1792 and the old frame church demolished. Preashing was performed in the French and in the Mohawk dialect by succeeding priests including Fathers Rinfret, Jean Baptiste Roupe, Joseph Marcoux, Nicholas Dufresne, Joseph Valle and the Rev. Francis Marcoux until 1853. Father Joseph Marcoux, a cousin of Francis Marcoux, spent six years at St. Regis before leaving for Caughnawaga where his illustrious career until his death in 1855, is still remembered and revered. He undertook and carried to completion the building of the present stone church in 1845 with its famous paintings, bells and artifacts and lies buried beneath its floors.

During the revolutionary war of 1775-1783, many of the Indians at St. Regis joined the British cause, while others under Colonel Louis Cook, remained with the Americans. We have very little information of this period but do know that Father Gordan in June 1777, marched as chaplain with his Iroquois warriors to Fort St. John. From 1795 on we have a more detailed record of the many treaties entered into by the Indians of St. Regis and Caughnawaga with the State of New York pertaining to lands in the northern part of the state, St. Regis although lying mainly in New York state, was also part of both Canada and the United States. In fact a census of 1852 shows 630 Canadian and 490 American Indians residing at St. Regis. Many of the chiefs and head men at St. Regis were of white extraction, several in fact, descendents of New England children captured in early raids. Up until 1820 the names of Colonel Louis Cook, William Gray, Captain Thomas Williams, Loren, Lesor and Peter Tarbell appear on treaty papers. They were then followed by sons and nephews; William L. Gray, Charles Williams, Michael, Loren and Charles Cook, Thomas and Joseph Tarbell. Thomas Williams was originally a Caughnawaga chief but by 1816 had become one of the chiefs at St. Regis. Peter "The Big Speak" Tarbell was a son of Lesor Tarbell, one of the boys taken from Groton by the Caughnawaga Indians.

Joseph Tarbell, in 1826, was invited to visit Europe and while there obtained an interview with Pope Charles X, who presented him with three fine paintings, a large sum of money and other valuable articles including a set of books, silver plate and a jewelled rosary. He returned in 1828 and although robbed of many of the gifts described, was able to keep the rosary and paintings. Two of these are at St. Regis and the other at St. Francis Xavier mission in Caughnawaga. The former are portraits of St. Regis and St. Francis Xavier and the later is a portrait of St. Louis as a king in royal robes, bowing in the attitude of prayer. Colonel Louis Cook was one of the great men of the St. Regis and enjoyed great influence with his people who always relied upon his council.

He was born about 1740 at Saratoga. His father was a coloured man and his mother a St. Francis Indian. He strongly resembled his father. In a raid on Saratoga in 1755 he and his family were captured and accompanied their captors to Caughnawaga where the Jesuits persuaded Louis to live, with them as an attendant. During this period he learned the French language. In the Seven Years War Louis took up arms with the French and in 1756 was wounded in a skirmish with Roger's Rangers near Ticonderoga. He was with the French troops on the Ohio, at the taking of Oswego, at Ticonderoga and in the attempt to retake Quebec. Following the English conquest he returned to private life but on the breaking out of the revolutionary war in 1775 we find him visiting General George Washington to report on the temper and disposition of the Indians.

At that time he reported five hundred Caughnawaga Indians able to bear arms but that they and the French preferred to remain neutral and at peace. However at a later date he and a handful of Canadian Indians joined the American cause and received a commission on raising a company of Oneida warriors to fight with him. The great majority of the Mohawks, influenced by their memory of Sir William Johnson and in sympathy with his son, Sir John, remained loyal to Britain.

Captain Thomas Williams, a St. Regis chief and descendant of the Rev. John Williams of Deerfield and William Gray, a chief and interpreter, negotiated many treaties with Louis Cook. William Gray was white by birth but an Indian in tastes and habits. He was born at Cambridge, New York, and joined the revolutionary army at seventeen, spending several years a prisoner at Quebec. From Caughnawaga he moved to St. Regis, married an Indian woman and


The interior of the actual church



The "Lost Dauphin" cottage, home of Eleazer Williams



The original stone church of St. Regis, similar in design to one at St. Andrews near Cornwall. Both erected by the Rev. McDonnell, parish priest, (1789 until 1806).

raised a family. He erected a sawmill at Gray's Mills (Hogansburgh) and engaged in business and commerce, acting as interpreter at most of the treaty sessions and in his own petitions for land grants. He was active in the War of 1812 and guided the Americans through the woods from Fort Covington to St. Regis when a British company was surprised and captured. He himself was captured near St. Regis in December of 1813 and taken to Quebec as a prisoner for the second time in his life. He died there the following April or May.

Louis Cook on the declaration of war in 1812, although borne down by the weight of more than seventy years, joined the American cause. He was at Sacketts Harbor in 1814 and later that year with his sons and several St. Regis warriors was actively engaged on the Niagara frontier, directly opposed to other St. Regis Indians who were with De Lorimier and Ducharme at Beaver Dams. A fall from his horse proved fatal and he died near Buffalo in October of 1814. He had the misfortune to be illiterate, so common among his race, but spoke several languages fluently and possessed prudence, discretion and excellent judgement.

Thomas Williams was born about 1758 at Caughnawaga, the third in descent from the Rev. John Williams of Deerfield, whose daughter Eunice married De Rogues, a young chief. She bore him three children, Catherine, Mary and John. Thomas was the son of Mary who died young and he was raised by his aunt Catherine. In 1777 he became a chief and soon after joined the American army in the revolutionary war. He was not completely sympathetic and in 1778 he returned home. In 1783 he first visited his relatives in New England and made other visits over the years to his grandmother's friends in Massachusetts and Vermont. In 1800 he placed his two sons, John and Eleazer, in school at long Meadow, Mass. The next year found him in the Rocky Mountains with the Northwest Company. During the War of 1812 he held a commission and was engaged in service for the Americans. His two sons took active but opposite sides in the contest. Later, the younger, the Rev. Eleazer Williams, became an episcopal clergyman and teacher and served for many years as a missionary among the Oneidas and Onondagas, as well as at St. Regis. He was there at his father's death on August 16, 1849. During the War of 1812 he had caused a great deal of trouble at St. Regis in stirring up the Indians against Canada and in introducing the Protestant religion in a predominately Catholic mission. His loyality was long suspect. In 1852 we read of his attempt to secure appointment as agent for St. Regis and Caughnawaga.

There is a legend that Eleazer or Razar Williams, as he was known as a child, was actually the son of Louis XVI, the missing heir of the French Bourbons. He possessed certain physical characteristics common to this missing heir and it is said that sums of money were given to his father, Thomas Williams to pay for his education. It was well known that he had been an adopted son, raised in Caughnawaga by his stepmother, Marie Anne Williams.

We have mentioned that a great deal of New England blood flows in the veins of the Iroquois at St. Regis and Caughnawaga. Jesuit priests have tried to trace the ancestry of the English names of Tarbell, Rice, McGregor, Hill, Williams, Jacobs, Stacey, Delisle, Macomber and many others. Eunice Williams, for example, has left a posterity of over two hundred descendants and Silas Rice, captured at Marlboro, Mass. in the summer of 1703, several hundred. Likewise the two boys taken near Albany in 1755, Jacob Hill and John Stacey. Gervase McComber, a native of Mass., was not captured but refused to leave Caughnawaga after deciding to live there and take an Indian wife.

The St. Regis Indians settled on the beautiful and elevated point facing the St. Lawrence and on several of the adjacent islands. They did not occupy the land east of the Salmon river, although when Chewett the government surveyor laid out the townships, he left sufficient territory in Dundee for their needs, running the Godmanchester line ten miles inside the international border. These were long known as Indian lands or "the reservation of Kintall" and not opened to white settlers until after 1800, when many American families, some United Empire Loyalists, Scots from Glengarry and Scotch emigrants, moved in and settled the ridges.

They leased their lots from the Iroquois chiefs at St. Regis for very low rental fees and exceptionally long leases, some "as long as grass grows or water runs". The area was first surveyed in 1825 and the township of Dundee incorporated in 1831. In 1889 the Quebec government agreed to pay the Indians a lump sum of $50,000.00 for the 21,000 acres and the surrender of all Indian hereditary rights.

The early economy of the settlement was dependent on the trade and commerce of the Salmon river, an economy shared with French Mills (Fort Covington), a named derived from General Leonard Covington, fatally wounded at the battle of Crysler's Farm and buried at French Mills. In 1793 the chiefs of St. Regis leased to William Gray, a tract on the Salmon river for the erection of mills. James and Alexander Robertson of Montreal purchased the lease in 1798. The first mill erected in 1804 was swept away in a flood. The new mill was leased to Robert Buchanan who operated it with his brothers Walter and Duncan Buchanan, all natives of Sterlingshire, Scotland.

On the Dundee side of the river, John Davidson was one of the first to open a store in 1819. Patrick Buchanan, a cousin of the mill operator, arrived the same year and as Captain Buchanan, operated boats for over half a century. There was a great trade in potash and timber and for years Dundee lines was a regular port of call for Durham boats, followed by the first steamboats, as the country opened up and trade flourished. It has always shared a close association, as has Fort Covington, with the Indian village of St. Regis.