

# Surveyors of The Past

BY CHARLES FAIRHALL



**ALEXANDER J. NIVEN**  
**D.L.S., O.L.S.**

In the article entitled "An Introduction to Surveys, Surveyors and Exploration in Northeastern Ontario" appearing in the Summer 1977 edition of "The Ontario Land Surveyor", author John Halsall paid glowing tribute to Alexander Niven, P.L.S. for his outstanding contribution to this work.

Evidently Mr. Niven's contemporaries shared this sentiment, for at the Third Annual Meeting of the Association of Provincial Land Surveyors held in 1888, they unanimously elected him to the office of President for the ensuing year. Mr. Niven had been very active in the affairs of the Association since its organization in 1886 and had served on the first Land Surveying Committee.

In his presidential address Mr. Niven urged his fellow members "to combine the practical with the scientific and to learn from the experience of others by the interchange of ideas".

He also pressed for the adoption of a tariff of charges by which the surveyors of Ontario would be governed. Incidentally, that tariff called for a daily fee of not less than \$6.

At the end of the 1889 meeting, Mr. Niven was unanimously re-elected to a second term.

Over the next twenty years his name figured prominently in the annual reports and during a discussion at the 1906 meeting, again on the subject of a minimum tariff, he stated "when I started surveying over forty years ago, I commenced at \$6 a day, and stuck to that until about four years ago. Then I went up to \$8

and I have no difficulty in getting \$8. I get it just as easy as I got the \$6. That is my experience".

Mr. Niven was born at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1836. He became a Provincial Land Surveyor in 1859.

In 1868 he came to Haliburton as the residential agent for The Canadian Land & Emigration Company at an annual salary of \$1,000 with a commission of 5% on all sales of land effected throughout the year. In 1869, Mr. Niven's engagement with the Company was renewed at the rate of \$1,200 per annum, but no commission was to be paid him on sales. Over the next ten years Mr. Niven, whose ability, judgement and integrity were a by-word in this area, rendered the Company yeoman service surveying and exploring by foot and canoe every acre of the Company's holdings. Always a builder with an eye to the future, he zealously planned improvements and laid out and constructed a whole network of roads. His duties also included measuring logs cut on the Company's limits and drawing agreements and descriptions.

A year after his arrival in Haliburton, Mr. Niven had a house built for his bride Margaret, by one James Brown. This house still stands, and is now the office of Bishop & Wilson, Surveyors and Engineers.

Alexander Niven served his community as reeve of the Municipality of Dysart for ten years. He was also the first Warden of the Provisional County of Haliburton, an office he held for five

consecutive years.

An active member of the Presbyterian congregation, Mr. Niven often took the service in the absence of the regular minister. He was instrumental in the erection of a frame Gothic church constructed at a cost of \$1,600 and was the Superintendent of the Building Committee for the new Town Hall.

No surveyor in Ontario had a wider experience than Mr. Niven. He was employed by the Government in exploring and running survey lines in the wilderness of Northeastern Ontario. He was responsible for the first meridian and base lines in that area, and the line running from Georgian Bay to James Bay which bears his name was the backbone for later work. He also surveyed the interprovincial boundaries of Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec.

A quiet, dry, slow-talking man, Alexander Niven was a remarkable example of the men who accomplish things without show. He was famed among his peers for his management of men, being able to cut more line in a season than any other surveyor in the Province. However, statistics only tell half the tale. Incidents such as nearly starving on one base line job prior to the arrival of food, or the tragic loss of an Indian employee when their birch-bark canoe was cut through by ice while travelling by night, attest to the rugged endurance and the indomitable spirit of this remarkable man.

Mr. Niven died in Toronto in 1911, survived by his wife and two daughters. He and his young son are buried in the Haliburton cemetery.

(The writer gratefully acknowledges the background material for this article supplied by H. Curry Bishop.)





EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF ALEX NIVEN  
FOR THE YEAR 1869

February 9—In office in forenoon. Went to Sawyers Lake shanty at 1 p.m. and to lower Dysart shanty at 6 p.m. and staid all night. A fine day.

February 10—Went to upper shanty and then to Quarrys and returned to Haliburton at 3 p.m. Rec letter from Mr. Blomfield.

February 19—In office. Drew transfer Pamplin to Garratt and agreement to Pamplin. Measuring Lucas' logs in forenoon. A cold stormy day.

February 22—In office in the morning. Went with Mr. & Mrs. J. to Minden Bdy. and then walked to Sawyers Lake Shanty and staid all night. Snowing.

February 23—Left Sawyers Lake at 6.30 a.m. and went to Edwards shanty on Lot 3 Con 7 Guilford. Calling at Amrys clearing on S Grass Lake. A very stormy day. Heavy snowshoeing. Felt very tired. On a tree at Peterson Rd. in Guilford W. Bdy F. F. Foster, J. D. Evans, 9 Dec. 1863 in pencil.

February 24—Remained at Edwards' all day. Jas. Walker clerk. Stormy.

February 25—Left at 11.30 and went via cadging team to Peterson Road and thence to Sawyers Lake. Stormy and cold.

February 26—Left for Haliburton at 6 a.m. Called at McFarlanes and got to Haliburton at 11 a.m.

March 3—Exploring Cons 10 & 11 (Dysart) Lots 19 to 21.

March 4—In office preparing plan of Dysart for lithographer.

March 5—Explored lots 22 to 25 con 11, Lots 18 & 19 Con 12 and lots 12 & 13 Con 11 Dysart.

March 8—Left H(aliburton) at 7.45 a.m. and went to Eagle Lake. Measured Coates' clearing—and then went to Edwards' shanty Lot 3 Con 7 Guilford. A fine day. Felt very tired.

March 9—Went to Mooney's & Links' shanties in Sherbourne via Keneses, Red Pine & Crate Lakes. A fine day. Staid at Links'. Crossed Bells line but could not find it.

March 10—Left Links' at 6 a.m. and got to Edwards' at 4 p.m. A very stormy cold day. Country to S-W of Keneses Lake very rough. Found Bell's line but could not follow it.

March 11—Went along W Bdy of Guilford & Dysart to McIntosh lower shanty in Dysart. A fine day. Walked about 15 miles.

March 12—Returned to Haliburton at 11 a.m. via Barnum's Lake. Mail came in yesterday and did not go out to-day.

April 1—G. Pettit, W. Holland and self left Haliburton at 8 a.m. en route for Clyde. Came across Lake of Islands, Moose, Oblong & Haliburton. Camped at 5.30 p.m. at Ross' camp on Lot 16 Con 6 Harburn. West side of Lake Haliburton. Good land south of Moose Lake. Good pine along Oblong River. A good crust on the snow to-day, walked without snowshoes to the East side of Oblong Lake. Walked 16 miles to-day by plan. Some pine around Lake of Islands and Oblong Lake. Norway on east side.

April 2—Left camp at 8 a.m. and went to East Lake. Camped on Lot 30 Con 12 Harburn in W. Hollands shanty or camp at 12 m. Snowing all the morning and afternoon. Remained at shanty. Tried fishing but only caught one small one. Commenced reading David Copperfield. Good pine between Lakes Percy and Haliburton and along side rd between lots 25 & 26 N of Lake Percy. Brought hand sleighs to this point.

April 3—Left camp at 8.00 a.m. and went northerly to Madawaska River thence easterly to side rd 5 & 6 Clyde. Camped on N side of Lake in Nightingale about opposite Lot 9 in Clyde. Pine along Madawaska in Clyde and along 5 & 6 Cons 12, 13 & 14 Clyde (scattering). A cold day but good snowshoeing. A cold night and uncomfortable in camp. All packed to-day. Carried my 50 lbs about 10 or 11 miles.

April 4—Left camp at 9 a.m. and followed Madawaska River & its expansions to Petty & Perlys lumber shanty on Long Lake about 8 miles (by cutting across portage) P. Forrest Foreman. below P & P. Second winter for P & P. Returned to camp at 5 p.m. Saw 3 Indians at Shanty on Lake N of the one we are camped on. Falls & Rapid 40 ft. outlet of Lake N of Clyde. A cold day.

April 5—Left camp at 7.30 a.m. and went along North Boundary of Clyde to East Bdy thence south to 15th & 14th Con Rd thence west to 15 & 16 Side Rd thence north & west to Camp at 5.30 p.m. Considerable pine up to (lot) 25. From 25 to E Bdy splendid Hardwood land. A Block of 2000 acres apparently in N E corner of Clyde. Jog at 25 & 26 in 14 & 15 Cons. A fine day. Wolves howling in eve. Wrote to Maggie on Birch Bark.

April 6—Left McKenzies Lake camp at 6 a.m. en route for Haliburton. Followed Madawaska River to Crow Lake and arrived at East Lake at 4 p.m. Staid in Hollands shanty. Pine along Madawaska most on east side. A cloudy day snowing a little occasionally.

April 7—Left Holland's camp at 6 a.m. got to Ross' on Lake Haliburton at 9 a.m. and came through by Drag Lake. Camped at Sand Point Drag Lake with Sawyers at 6.15 p.m. Examined Gossages Lots en route. Lot 8 Cons 11 & 12 Dudley good hardwood lots about 40 Pine trees on lot 8 Con 11. About 15 a of Pine on Lot 9 Con 12 and lot 9 Con 11 all pine. A blustery day. Snowing a little occasionally.

April 8—Left camp at 7 a.m. and explored all Dysart north of Spruce Lake. Returned to Haliburton at 5.30 p.m.

May 17—Walked to Harcourt 30 miles 9½ hours. Staid at J. Roberts.

May 18—Remained in Harcourt all day settleing various business matters staid at J. Roberts.

May 19—Returned to Haliburton at 4 p.m. having left Harcourt at 7 a.m. 30 miles 9 hours. Rec. letter from Manager. One year in employ of Company.

May 20—In office. Sundries. John Carnegie & Bird came to Haliburton on survey of PH. R.R.

May 21—Went with Carnegie & Bird and wm. Holland and explored line for P. & H. Railway from Haliburton to SW angle of Dysart.

June 13—Sunday. Raining all day. Went to Mr. Hollands funeral. Went to church in the afternoon Mr. Reeve.

June 14—In office. Talk with Coates. Wrote description of Cemetery. Charge council \$2.00.

June 15—Surveyed in part of Haliburton Road at George Thompson's and 5 & 6 Con Rd at Peter Borden's lot 6. Charge Council \$2.50 and 62½ for P. Fergusson.

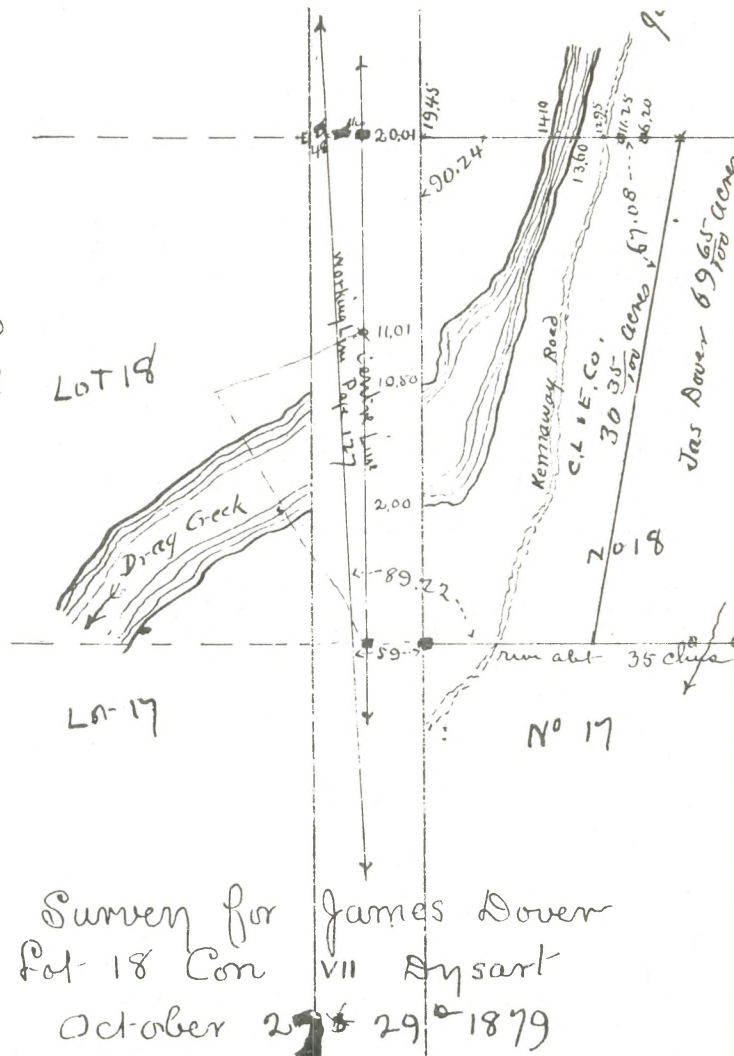
June 16—Blazed out Guilford Road across Cons 1 & 2. Took level of Eagle Lake mill site. Received letters from C. J. Blomfield) and others and Maggie and answered same writing till 3 a.m.

June 17—Explored lot 14 Con 3 Dysart and surveyed 3 & 4 Con Rd across (lots) 16, 17 & 18. Charge Council \$2.50 and 62½ for Fergusson.





June 18—In office all day. Writing up field notes &c.  
 June 22—Surveying Road through Stewart & Pogue places. A warm day. Party at Emigration House in evening.  
 June 28—In office. Wrote to C. R. Stewart. Commenced grading Buckhorn Road. Raining in forenoon. Settled with Mrs. Garratt to date.  
 June 29—Left Haliburton at 9 a.m. and walked to Harcourt arriving at 7.30 having staid at J. Roberts an hour. A fine day. Flies very bad. Tea at Scotts. Staid at Roberts.  
 June 30—C. Roberts and self explored line for Road from Mill to Peterson Road. Bridge 135 or 140 feet over Madawaska. A fine day.  
 July 1—Dominion Day 3rd. Finished exploration of Burleigh Road bet. Lot 23 & River. Build bridge on 9 & 10 Con line 135 ft and 6 ft above water level marked on a small tree on West of River. Walked over 9 & 10 Con Rd and side Road 20 & 21 to Peterson and explored around hills on same. Mr. Ritchey came to Harcourt.  
 July 2—Examined Noisy Creek and Mill sites and positions of dams on same to Papineau Lake. Saw mill required flume 12 rods to give Head of 20. Grist mill flume 15.5-16½ head and 200 ft 21-4 locate mill near small blazed birch. Ritchey says saw mill is a bungle. Pd. Barnard 50c for canoeing. A fine day.  
 July 3—Left Harcourt at 6 a.m. and arrived at Haliburton at 6 p.m. Ritchey Roberts C & Burton. Raining part of the day. Bear at Eagle Rock.  
 September 3—Exploring for pine in S. Guilford. Camped on the Peterson Rd on Lot 6 Con 1 Guilford. Wastell shot in arm to-day.  
 September 4—Finished exploring S 4 Cons of Guilford and returned to Haliburton at 7.30 p.m. feeling very tired. 15,000 standards (of) 250 ft in limit. 600 pieces square timber 90 ft.  
 September 9—Holland, Murray & self left Haliburton at 9 a.m. for Harcourt. Camped at beaver meadow west of Yankton Lake in Dudley. Fine day.  
 September 10—Left camp at 7.30 a.m. and went to lake on 6 & 7 Cons Harcourt at 1 p.m. Examined pine around same and to West and camped on 12 Con 7 for the night. A fine day.  
 September 11—Left camp at 7.30 a.m. and went to Bernards on Branch. Examined pine on west of Elephant Lake in afternoon. Returned to camp at Bernards at 7.00 p.m. A fine day.  
 September 12—Sunday. Went to Roberts, Scotts & Peevers. In camp most of the day.  
 September 13—Explored pine on west of Branch in Harcourt from Elephant Lake to Bernards. J. Barnard assist. C. Roberts & W Holland hunting deer. Murray east of Branch all left for Bruton at 2 p.m. Camped on 26 Con 3 Bruton. A fine day.  
 September 14—Murray, Holland, Roberts & self exploring. J. Barnard canoeing self went up both branches of Madawaska to 9th Con. A fine day. Heard wolves howling at 5 p.m.  
 September 15—Moved camp to Lot 18 Cons 8 & 9. All exploring in afternoon. A fine day. Wolves howling at 5 p.m. and after dark.  
 September 16—All exploring. Finished all east of 10 & 11 in Bruton. A fine day.  
 September 17—Left camp at 8 & 9 Con Bruton and went to Harcourt. Camped at Scraggly Lake same as on 10th. 12 Con 7. Raining in morning. Fine afternoon.  
 September 18—Left camp at 7 a.m. for Haliburton. Shot deer (buck) in Yankton Lake. Arrived at Haliburton 7 p.m. A fine day.  
 December 27—Measuring square timber with West on Drag & Spruce Lakes.  
 December 28—Measuring logs in Garratts limits.  
 December 29—Measuring logs in Austins limits.  
 December 30—Measuring square timber Drag Lake &c.  
 December 31—In office. Examining Lucas & Ritchey's mill property. Soiree in Eve. Sang Brave old and read Sam Weller in Witness Box.



**FROM THE 1906 ANNUAL REPORT**  
**ONTARIO LAND SURVEYORS' MINIMUM TARIFF**  
 MOVED BY G. ROSS, SECONDED BY T. B. SPEIGHT

Field work in the city and suburbs, per day of eight hours	\$8.00
Assistant, per day of eight hours	2.00
(Time taken going to and returning from survey to be included in above eight hours.)	
Marking out single lots in city and suburbs	7.00
(Understood that dividing same up into more than two parcels, for each additional parcel \$1.00, that for street line without terminations shall be \$6.00.)	
Surveys for Title, including sketch or certificate	6.00
(Rebate of \$1.00 on above item where work amounts to \$100 or upwards annually, and no other commissions or rebate will be allowed.)	
Not more than two adjoining parcels; if above that number, for each additional parcel	1.00
Ordinary description	1.00
Affidavit or Statutory declaration	2.00
Measurement or giving of levels other than the above, per hour	2.00
Services at Registry Offices and at Consultations per hour	1.00
No charge to be less than	1.00
All expenses, such as railway fare, hotel expenses, conveyance of any kind, posts and monuments, are to be charged for as extra.	

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