

A Surveyor Begins Anew In Canada

BY GORDON MILLER

Determination to Emigrate

BY JANUARY, 1975, many of our friends and relatives who were mainly of the professional and entrepreneurial classes had left Jamaica to reside in safer, if less salubrious, climates. My family and I were still determined to disregard the disastrous changes in the island. We were members of several old Jamaican families ("The Pink People" as Bernard Shaw called us on his visit to the island), that had survived the tropical decay by infusions of fresh blood from Scotland and Ireland, from time to time, and many crosses of Creole Jamaican.

Our three daughters had all been to Canadian universities, two to Guelph and one to York. After visiting the youngest girl at Guelph during Easter 1975, I returned to Jamaica with one thought in mind, a determination to emigrate, come hell or high water. I explained to my wife that I had slept peacefully through ten nights without fear of being attacked by gunmen, and that one could walk the streets without keeping a careful watch over one's shoulders. On the lighter side, unlimited quantities of Kellogg's All Bran were available in the food marts, a cereal which was then unobtainable in the island and which had kept me healthy, moderately well-off, and wise for some thirty-five years.

So approaching my fiftieth year, I wended my way to the offices of the Canadian Immigration in New Kingston and there to my consternation, was invited to join a line of about 400 of my fellow Jamaicans, impatiently and noisily lined up, like a huge snake in the bright, hot sun. I retreated to the nearest doorway, which fortuitously turned out to be the entrance of the Canadian High Commission, and in despair, entered. A most charming girl told me they could do nothing to help me. On the spur of the moment, I begged her to telephone Immigration and ask them to expect a visit from Gordon Miller, and not to throw him out. Doubtfully, she phoned. I rushed out and with my best military stride, marched past the 400 impervious to all hisses and rude remarks, demanded entrance from the door porters and so was admitted to the office of an immigration officer.

I was not successful – too old, lived

too easy a life in Jamaica, cold in Canada, might be very unhappy, but thank you very much for wanting to move to Canada.

"Never, never give in!" said Sir Winston Churchill, and so with the help of my Guelph friends, the Hammills, an offer of a job with Guelph's Black, Shoemaker, Robinson and Donaldson, Ontario Land Surveyors, service with the "Canadian Irish Fusiliers" during the War, and my wife's experience as Vice-President of the Jamaica Red Cross, we found ourselves on Air Canada on July 21, 1976, bound for Toronto International Airport.

As the plane soared up, I looked down at Kingston Harbour with that narrow peninsular, the Palisades, guarding it, and beyond Kingston to the Blue Mountains, cloudy and shimmering in the heat. Then over the mysterious hills and valleys of the Cockpit Country, the Land of Look Behind, to the golden beaches of the North Coast with the green and blue sea border, and I wondered whether I had made a ghastly mistake. And so we flew away – all suffering from nervous stomachs but with great expectations.

Guelph

I now commenced a time of re-education, readjustment and learning to live as the majority of human beings do, in this great country. I quickly learned how to boil water, wash a dish or two, clean, dust and oil furniture – although, sad to relate, I was eventually fired from the cleaning job by an annoyed family who claimed that I tidied things away so well that they were forever lost.

We were fortunate to settle in Guelph, a small university city of some 70,000 souls. It is at the confluence of two small rivers, the Speed and the Eramosa, and is dominated by the Church of Our Lady. Ill-fated Emperor Maximilian of Mexico gave the original funds to start building the church as he was attracted by the English royal surname, Guelph. The university, famous for its agricultural pursuits, is the city's main attraction, complemented by beautiful parks and old buildings and the Kortright Bird Sanctuary that resuscitated the once vanishing Canada Goose.

Earning a Living

Fred Black and his partners own an old and well-established surveying firm with a large practice in Guelph and the surrounding County of Wellington. During the three years I worked there, I was treated with great consideration and kindness, not only by the partners but by every member of their staff. During the first six months, I did office work, subdivision designs, condominium plans and title searches at Registry Offices, the latter from Orangeville to Milton. In 1976, my first taste of a Canadian winter came on a trip to the Orangeville Registry Office. Driving up was bad enough, but the return trip after a day of continual snow was a prolonged nightmare of slipping and sliding. Gunmen in Jamaica did not appear to be such a threat that night.

Early in 1977, I made an application to the Ontario Land Surveyors' Association for membership, and with the sympathetic aid of our remarkable lady Secretary, Lorraine Petzold, I received a reply which required me to attend Erindale College of the University of Toronto and to do five courses, one year at least as a party chief in the field; and on satisfactory completion of these tasks, to take a professional examination set by the Association. After the initial shock of these requirements had worn off, and with the encouragement of the partners, Fred Black and Frank Robinson, I started out to gain my field experience as a Survey Party Chief and commenced attending Erindale lectures for two nights a week.

A Jamaican Surveyor

Fortune smiled on me when I was assigned Bob Marston as my assistant in the field. He became over the next two years, not only my mentor, but a good friend. Bob was an experienced woodsman as well as a field surveyor and knew where every boundary stake was to be found in the County of Wellington. This knowledge was of incalculable value to me when one considers that the County of Wellington is about one-quarter the size of Jamaica and that the immense size of Ontario could be daunting to a small-island man.

One of the more amusing incidents that I remember was due to the paucity

of public washrooms in the small towns and villages where we surveyed. Most Canadian surveyors, I noticed, have the propensities of a camel, but having explained my urgent needs to Bob, he showed me the solution, beneath our feet, so to speak. He took me along to a manhole in the street, raised the cover and pointed down. In the next two years, I climbed down the steps of many a manhole and emerged vastly relieved.

I approached my first winter in the field with some trepidation as I really did not understand how one surveyed in deep snow and low temperatures. I was soon to find out that work proceeded as usual but at a slower pace because of the additional clothes and the digging through ice and snow for survey monuments. In fact, during the winter months, very little time was lost through bad weather. My muscles recovered some of their youthful hardness and by the end of the first winter of walking, snow-shoeing and spade-work, I had become extremely fit and mentally alert.

In the meantime, the courses at Erindale were proceeding. George McFarlane, the past president of the Jamaican Land Surveyors' Association, had been assessed by the Ontario Land

Surveyors' Association and required to do a similar set of courses. I was unable to attend the lectures of the first Law course so David Lambden gave me the notes and told me to read Winston Churchill's "History of the English Speaking Peoples." However, all was not fun and games. I found that the grey matter between my ears would retain nothing for more than a few hours and the first month of lectures and reading produced nothing but a growing sense of defeat. My first test added to my despair. "Absolute nonsense," wrote Lambden. I went to his office and he told me that George and I wrote so well that we could not possibly fail the examinations and that we were to keep reading and reading and reading.

With some doubt, but great determination, we followed this advice and a few weeks before the first examination,

everything became plain sailing and we passed the examinations with something to spare. George McFarlane and I, now having got our tails up, continued and were commissioned as Ontario Land Surveyors in 1979 and in 1981 as Canada Land Surveyors.

My family and I are now Canadian citizens and my wife and I now reside in Toronto. She is happily employed with The Canadian National Institute for the Blind and I have been fortunate to have been employed for some eight years by two outstanding surveying firms, Black, Shoemaker, Robinson and Donaldson Ltd. in Guelph, and by J. D. Barnes Ltd. of Toronto and presently by The City of Toronto. My first job in 1943 was with the Surveyor General of Jamaica as a civil servant and I now hope my final job will be as a civil servant in the City of Toronto. ●

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