

## **The Mississauga of Balsam Lake: A Genealogical Study of Forgotten Families of Old Victoria County**

by Grant Karcich

Abbé Claude Bernou's 1680 map of "Lac de Taronto" (Lake Simcoe) depicts the area north and east of Lake Simcoe as the lands of "les Missisage" (the Mississauga). Records from late 18<sup>th</sup> century English fur traders and surveyors show that the region around Balsam Lake was populated by Chippewa and Mississauga groups. Prior to this, the area was well travelled by traders, both aboriginal and European. We know this because of the many French trade axes found in at sites around Balsam Lake. The many Mississauga village sites attest to a large population. Before the Mississauga moved to Curve Lake around 1790, Balsam Lake seems to have been a major focal point. The Scugog band returned to Balsam in 1836 after their village site on Lake Scugog was disturbed by the rising lake waters, due to the construction of a dam at Lindsay. For a few years the band build a modern community on Balsam only to find the land unsuited to farming. The band returned to Lake Scugog in 1843 where they bought a reserve. Chief Jacob Crane had brought the band up to Balsam Lake and carried out their return to Lake Scugog. By the 1850s, all the Mississauga settlements had disappeared from Balsam Lake.

Nevertheless, Scugog families continued to hunt around Balsam Lake during the spring and fall seasons well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Chippewa and Mississauga families shared the hunting area along the Talbot Portage which linked Balsam Lake to Lake Simcoe. According to Peggy Blair in *Lament for a First Nation: the Williams Treaties of Southern Ontario* (2008), the Rama First Nations family of Same Snake (Sache) and Alder York hunted around Balsam Lake, as did the families of Isaac Johnson and Thomas Marsden from Scugog Island, some as early as the 1700s. When the Williams Treaty was being negotiated in the early 1920s, the families of Isaac Johnson and Joseph Whetung are shown on a map of hunting territory encompassing Balsam Lake.

Thanks to genealogy, it is possible to show that the historic Mississauga at Balsam Lake are part of a continuum that extends up to the present day. However, most First Nations families, with the exception of those descended from prominent individuals,

are often not traceable further back than the 1851 Upper Canada census. Often Mississauga family history is derived from oral history. In the case of the Scugog Mississauga band, there are the testimonies from the Williams Treaty negotiations, testimonies that help to create a link from present-day Scugog families stretching back over two centuries, showing that the Mississauga have a long documented history within Victoria County.

Many of the Scugog witnesses to the Williams Treaty commission in 1923 testified that their fathers and grandfathers had hunted in the Balsam Lake area. Chief Thomas Marsden (1863-1931) claimed his father had hunted there. The commission also interviewed the last known resident from Balsam Lake, Marsden's mother, Sarah (1839-1924). Her late husband, she remembered, used to hunt in the Burnt River area. Sarah claimed to have been married at age fifteen, and she lived at Balsam Lake, a fact confirmed by her death record which lists her place of birth as Balsam. At the William's commission, Enoch Shilling (1870-1940) testified that his father Joseph hunted north of Rama until 1872. Enoch appears in the 1871 census, as does his father, who is listed as a hunter and fisherman and sixty-six years old, which would place his birth in 1805. Another source, the 1851 census, places Joseph's birth around 1816.

A signatory to the 1923 William Treaty on behalf of the Scugog is Isaac Johnson (1847-1927) described as seventy-eight years of age at the time. He can be found in all the provincial censuses from 1851 to 1921. In the 1871 census he is listed as a hunter and, in the 1851 census, he is about three years of age, while in the same census his father, Chauncy, is 30 years old. It is more likely that Chauncy was born in May of 1813 as stated on his 1893 death certificate. Another document lists his birth at Balsam Lake, which would place it before the temporary migration there of the Scugog band. The death certificate indicates that Chauncy lived at Balsam. Therefore, the Johnson family had a connection to Balsam Lake stretching back at least to the late 1700s.

The Johnson family continues to this day. Florence Johnson (1893-1945), Isaac's daughter, married John Johnson Paudash (ca 1879-1959), a member of a First Nations family from Hiawatha. The Paudash family has a long lineage of its own in the Rice Lake region. John's father Robert Paudash (ca 1842-1928) and his son Johnson had their oral family history recorded by the Ontario Historical Society in 1905. Robert's father was

Mozang (ca 1817-1892). His father was George or Cheneebesh (ca 1785-1869), son of Gemoaghenassee or Ogiimah Binese. John Johnson Paudash had several children. Son Larry (Lawrence Vincent Paudash), died in 2015, predeceased by his sisters Florence Emma (1922-2010) and Nellie Charlotte (1925-2001). So for the Paudash family a direct continuity exists from the present back to the earliest known ancestor, Gemoaghenassee, likely born before 1760 around Rice Lake. Through the marriage of Florence Johnson and John Johnson Paudash, this family finds a direct genealogical link to the late 1700s at Balsam Lake.

Within Victoria County, families retained hunting grounds that were passed on in the family. Isaac Johnson had acknowledged Mississauga hunting rights to Balsam Lake, while Thomas Marsden had hunting rights in Verulam and Somerville, townships north of Sturgeon Lake. Others from the Scugog Mississauga band hunted north of Cameron Lake on the Burnt River as far as Kinmount. Still others from the band used the Gull River which flows into Balsam Lake as their hunting area. Enoch Shilling who was originally from Rama, inherited hunting grounds from his Chippewa father and grandfather, which were further northwest of those of the Scugog band.

Though records are sparse, the Mississauga families of today can show a direct continuity with the people who resided at Balsam Lake in the late 1700s. Their family histories present a picture of continuity of present-day families back more than two hundred years, before the arrival of the first European settlers in the area.

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