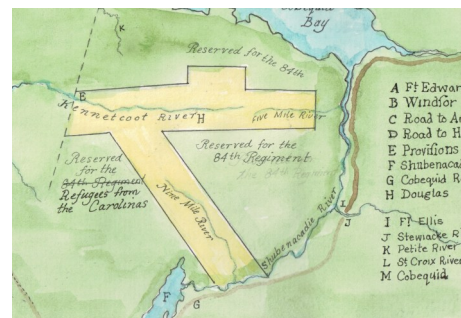


Where the heck is Douglas?! by Patricia Whidden

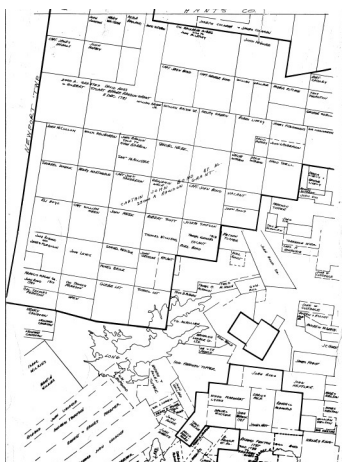
Recently, EHHS had a visit from a woman from Massachusetts researching her family. She said how frustrating it was to find a document that looked like it might be relevant, but she couldn't determine the location referenced in it because she couldn't find it on a modern-day map—place names like “Hants” or “Douglas.” For example, what one believes from family stories was the proper place name for the early residence of their family, such as Selma, instead was “Maitland” or “Douglas” in the document, which would lead one to doubt the accuracy of the information. Let's look at the place-name developmental sequence here in East Hants, starting as far back as the arrival of the earliest European settlers.

The Mi'kmaq were here first, occupying locations in East Hants and travelling the waterways and land to hunt and gather to support themselves. Names like “Shubenacadie” and “Kennetcook” are derived from the Mi'kmaw language. When the first French settlers arrived in 1604, they named the province (and the designation “province” grew as the French population grew) Acadie. According to Wikipedia, that name is a combination of “Arcadia,” a Greek term for “paradise” and so-named by the 16th century explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano, and the Mi'kmaw term “-cadie,” meaning “a place” or “abundance of.” The prime example here in East Hants is Shubenacadie, the English rendition of the Mi'kmaw name—Sipekne'katik, pronounced “Seh-beg-eh-neg-a-dy.” Early maps show today's Nova Scotia as Acadie and include what is now New Brunswick, as the French population increased and moved through the territory.

Then came the Scots in the 1620s, settled in Port Royal under the Royal Charter granted by King James I, naming the territory “Nova Scotia,” the Latin form of “New Scotland.” That charter included today's New Brunswick and the Gaspé Peninsula. Subsequent ownership of the territory was subject to the wars and various treaties between the French and the British until Cornwallis' settlement of Halifax in 1749 and naming it the capitol of Nova Scotia. Early settlements before and during the expulsion of the Acadians included the Foreign Protestants from the German states and areas close by in the early 1750s and settled in what is now Lunenburg County. Next came the Planters in the 1760s, mostly from the New England states—except the Densmores and O'Briens here in East Hants who were Ulster-Scots. These two sets of pre-American Revolution settlement marked the beginning of the mapping of land grants given to the settlers. County boundaries began to be formed with what is now Hants County originally part of Kings County and separated from it in 1781.



Douglas Township Map—by Peter Ashley



From EHHS files—Capt. John Bond Grant in Rawdon Township

The really vigorous ramping-up of settlement here in East Hants happened in 1784 following the end of the American Revolution with the formation of the Douglas and Rawdon Townships (patterned after the governance process in New England). Douglas Township consisted of 82,000+ acres along the Kennetcook, Five Mile, and Nine Mile rivers, and along the Cobequid Bay shore areas that had not already been given to earlier settlers, granted to Major John Small for the settlement of 84th Regiment of Foot soldiers disbanded after the war. West of it lay the Rawdon Township, named for Lord Francis Rawdon, British commander during the Southern Campaign of the war, and that township was settled by Loyalists fleeing the Southern States when the British lost the war.

The next step within the townships was to decide where the district boundaries within would be and then who would be responsible for the various governance roles within each. The Douglas Township Book shows that by 1799, a governance structure was in place. By 1818, Douglas Township was divided into four districts: Nine Mile River, Kennetcook, Noel, and Shubenacadie. Rawdon Township would be similarly subdivided—Rawdon North and Rawdon South.

Regular meetings were held to determine who would fill the various roles necessary for governance and accountability, that is, do the work, within the township. These roles included: Overseers of the Poor, Overseers of Highways, Assessors of Rates and Taxes, Collector of Rates and Taxes, Constables, Surveyors of Lumber, Appraisers of Drainage, Fence Viewers, Hog Reeves, Cattle Inspectors, Pound Keeper. A Town Clerk would be chosen to oversee all those performing these functions within their specific districts, and Windsor was the county seat the Town Clerk would report to. [See below for Douglas Township, 1815]

In 1861, Hants County was split into two distinct areas—East Hants and West Hants—for court sessional purposes. By that time, the Rawdon and Douglas townships were further sub-divided to create Walton, Uniacke, Maitland,

and Shubenacadie townships, clearly because of the increase in population. Until that time, all court-related business was conducted in Windsor, and establishing a jurisdiction in East Hants made travel simpler for the eastern part of the county; a courthouse in Gore was built soon after. By 1879, both East and West Hants were officially incorporated as municipalities, and the townships were ended. The districts within them continued on to serve as boundaries for polling and census districts, modified over the years as population densities changed. By 1908, East Hants districts were named and numbered as follows:

Maitland, No. 11	Shubenacadie, No. 13A
Shubenacadie, No. 13B	Noel, No. 9
Gore, No. 15	Nine Mile River, No. 10A
Nine Mile River, No. 10B	Walton, No. 14
Rawdon, No. 7	Rawdon and Uniacke, No. 8

Which brings us to the naming of communities within East Hants. Let's look at Nine Mile River district as an example. Following Confederation in 1867, Nine Mile River district included the communities of Nine Mile River, Upper Nine Mile River, Belnan, Elmsdale, Enfield, Renfrew, and parts of adjacent border communities such as Lantz, Hardwoodlands, MacPhee's corner, West Indian Road, etc. If you look at census records from 1871 onward, unless you know the names of the neighbours of the person you are searching for, you may not know which community a family lived in. Likewise, if you are searching early property deed records, the location given as "Nine Mile River" might actually be in Enfield. In most areas in the 19th century and earlier, the district the community is located in is the name given for a community, rather than the specific name residents have given it.

Another factor is that names originally given a community may have been changed. For example, Rockville became South Maitland, Carleton is now Urbania, Wickwire Station became Milford Station, then just Milford. Enfield, part of the Nine Mile River district and originally The Crossing, got its current name, suggested by Thomas Donaldson, as agreed upon by other members of the community. Places became named after families that lived there, such as Barr Settlement. And then there are places like Glencoe, off the Georgefield Road and once a plaster-mining community, that don't appear on any modern maps.

Another aspect of "changing the name" is that communities may have been divided into two and renamed. For example, the more northerly part of the Nine Mile River district was first called Nine Mile River and then was divided into Upper and Lower Nine Mile River. Today, Lower Nine Mile River is labelled just Nine Mile River. On the Cobequid Shore, we have "Moosebrook and then, finally, Minasville.... Moosebrook split in half in 1879, and the eastern section became Minasville, putting the actual Moose Brook in Minasville." [Thanks to Pat Dixon for this]

Many of us depend on Google Maps to help us navigate or locate a site we are not familiar with, but Google Maps makes mistakes too. The best example I have is in Noel Shore. If you look at the Cobequid Bay coast of Noel Shore, you will see two creeks—Shad Creek and King's Creek. The problem is that Google Maps has incorrectly named them: King's Creek is actually Shad Creek, and vice versa. I know this because my mother's family owns King's Creek Farm, and Shad Creek is a bit farther west.

And finally, some of us will have heard of places like Hennigars and Burtons and likely wondered where in East Hants they were located. Hennigars was the postal way station in Northfield, and Burtons, also a way station was located in Latties Brook.