In Hindsight: Half a Century of Research Discoveries in Canadian History

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Episode 7: Sir Augustus d'Este and Egerton Ryerson

The Rev. Robert Alder, one of the secretaries of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in London, visited Upper Canada in 1834. Four years later in England he introduced Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) to the extraordinary individual Sir Augustus d'Este. Under the entry for 7 February 1838 Kahkewaquonaby, then on his second fund-raising tour of Britain, wrote, "In the evening I went with Mr. Alder to dine with Sir Augustus D'Este son of the Duke of Sussex, and a cousin of the present Queen Victoria. We found him much interested for the Indians in America, and very anxious that their lands should be secured to them" (*Life and Journals* (Toronto, 1860), page 394). Both Sir Augustus d'Este and Peter's friend of decades long standing, Rev. Egerton Ryerson, were among the closest allies of the Mississauga First Nations in the nineteenth century.

In addition to soliciting funds for the Methodist missions, Peter Jones made his second visit to Britain to fight the removal of the First Nations in southern Upper Canada to distant Manitoulin Island on the north shore of Lake Huron. Upper Canada's Lieutenant Governor Sir Francis Bond Head regarded the attempt to make them into Christian farmers a total failure. Bond Head

subsequently proposed to move them, including the Mississauga from the Credit, northward. He ignored the success of the Credit and other mission stations. Joseph Sawyer, head chief of the Mississaugas of the Credit, vigourously protested: "Now we raise our own corn, potatoes, wheat, &c; we have cattle, and many comforts and conveniences. But if we go to Maneetoolin, we could not live; soon we should be extinct as a people; we could raise no potatoes, corn, pork, or beef; nothing would grow by putting the seed on the smooth rock. We could get very few of the birds the Governor speaks of, and there are no deer to be had. We have been bred among the white people, and our children cannot live without bread, and other things, to which they are now accustomed."

Rev. Robert Alder's name remains alive in Indigenous Ontario today. In 1837 the Mississauga community from Grape Island on the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario relocated 100 kilometres to the northwest. Chief John Sunday or Shawundais led the Mississauga to their new settlement on the south shore of Rice Lake, not far from Peterborough, to "Alderville." Today the Mississauga community is still known as Alderville. The short welcome by Dave Mowat, Chief of the Alderville First Nation, and Second Vice President of the Ontario Historical Society, precedes each episode of "In Hindsight."

Sir Augustus d'Este had met John Sunday, or Shawundais, the Methodist leader of the Mississauga on the northeastern shore of Lake Ontario, on his 1837 tour of Britain. Sunday came to raise money for the Methodist missionary work in Upper Canada, and to raise awareness of Indigenous land rights. His Anishinaabe name "Shawundais" meant "sultry heat," the heat "which the sun gives out in summer just before a fertilizing rain." He was born around 1795 in the Black River country just south of the St. Lawrence River, in New York State. As a young man, Sunday grew up in the Belleville area, a member of the Bay of Quinte Mississauga. He stood rather above medium height, "of uncommon muscular

strength and muscular ability." Like Sir Augustus himself, he had fought for Britain in the War of 1812. He was a most effective speaker in English, his second language.

From summer 1836 to fall 1837, Shawundais gave many addresses. The Anishinaabe visitor learned a great deal in England. He recalled on his return to Canada that he had heard descriptions of the cave and tree dwellings of the ancient Britons. Seeing the country's big houses, churches, and steamboats, he now realized what had made the difference. He told a meeting of the Toronto Bible Society on his return: "What, my Christian friends, make this difference? It was the Bible. Then, Mr. chairman, send my poor brothers plenty of Bible, and they will soon have big steamboat, &c., and be happy Christian." In England John Sunday refused to appear in his Ojibwe costume. As he explained in Plymouth in late February 1837: "When I became a Christian, feathers and paint done away. I gave my silver ornaments to the Mission cause. Scalping-knife done away; tomahawk done away." Then he held up "my tomahawk now," a copy of the Ten Commandments in Ojibwe. He wanted the English and the British Canadians to know that he and his community had become Christians and had adopted a settled way of life.

Robert Alder, Sir Augustus d'Este, and allies in the new Aborigines Protection Society (APS), secured an appearance in March 1837 before a select parliamentary committee on Aboriginal affairs. Here Chief Sunday made his plea for a secure title to their new settlement, to allow them to "hold their lands from generation to generation in their families." In mid-August Shawundais joined Robert Alder and APS spokesperson Sir Augustus d'Este in a meeting with Lord Glenelg, the Colonial Secretary, to request recognition of their ownership to their new Rice Lake settlement. Alas, no titles deeds were forthcoming. All the British, still in charge of Indian Affairs in the Canadas for two more decades, would grant was the right of occupation.

Sir Augustus, now in his early forties, had long been interested in North American First Nations. The English aristocrat had been to North America. In 1815 he had participated in the unsuccessful British assault on New Orleans in the War of 1812. Sir Augustus had excellent connections at the highest level of government: on his father's side he was a first cousin of the Queen and on his mother's side he was the first cousin of Charles Augustus Murray, master of the Queen's household. Extremely bitter about his country's callous treatment of John Sunday, Sir Augustus with the support of Robert Alder and prominent APS member Dr. Thomas Hodgkin, a medical doctor who was the first to describe the disease that now bears his name, gave Shawundais on his departure back to Canada a letter dated 22 August 1837 for the Anishinaabeg in Upper Canada. It urged them:

> Go to the Governor [of Upper Canada]
> And say to him,
> "We have cleared the land from trees,
> We have sowed, and we have cut corn,
> We have built houses and barns:
> Give us a title deed for our land."

Surprisingly, despite his kinship connection with the Queen, Augustus d'Este was not a royal insider. His grandfather George III had instigated the Royal Marriage Act which declared that marriages of descendants contracted without the monarch's consent should be invalid. Much displeased at the marriage of his youngest son, the Duke of Sussex, the King was pleased to see it annulled by The Arches Court presided over by the Dean of Arches, an ecclesiastical court of the Church of England. After George III's death, Sir Augustus fought unsuccessfully throughout the 1830s and 1840s, until his death in 1848, to have his rights as a legitimate son of the Duke of Sussex restored.

Peter Jones came to know well this remarkable friend of Indigenous people, who suffered terribly from the mid-1820s

onward from the attacks of a disease that dominated his life until his death in 1848: multiple sclerosis. The various cures had no effect on the progression of the illness. As a parting gift in 1838, Sir Augustus gave Peter a ceremonial peace pipe to use at the opening of councils in Upper Canada. It was lit and smoked by Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg chiefs in the 1840 re-affirmation of the treaty of friendship between the two communities. Today the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation regard the pipe as a national treasure. It is an integral part of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation's modern-day logo. Over the years Peter corresponded with Sir Augustus. The two men would meet once again in England on Peter's third British tour. On 1 January 1845 Kahkewaquonaby wrote: "I found my excellent friend, Sir Augustus d'Este, as kind and as much interested for the welfare of the Aborigines of our country as ever but I regret to say, that he is quite an invalid, and is not able to walk without assistance."

Peter Jones's relative Maungwudaus, who travelled with a dance troupe throughout Britain in the mid-1840s, also found Sir Augustus most welcoming. He provided him with financial support and invited him on several occasions for tea at his London home. Maungwudaus's activities in Britain appalled Peter Jones who wrote on 5 September 1844: "In my opinion such exhibitions before the British people by men who have professed Christianity and civilization are well calculated to injure and impede the benevolent intentions of our good Government and the Missionary societies for the amelioration of the Indian tribes." But Sir Augustus chose no side. He treated Maungwudaus with the same warmth as he did Kahkewaquonaby. In Maungwudaus's booklet, *An Account of the Ojibway Indians* (Boston: Published by the Author, 1848, page 6), the Credit Mississauga wrote: "Sir Augustus d'Este, cousin to the Queen, son of the Duke of Sussex, invited us very often to take tea with him. He is a great friend to

the Indians; he introduced us to many of his friends. This great man is an invalid, and not able to walk alone."

Another extraordinary friend of the Credit Mississauga was a Methodist minister, the first missionary to the Mississauga, who later became a civil servant and laid the foundations of the Ontario public school system, Rev. Egerton Ryerson. At age 23 Ryerson set out in 1826/27 to help the already converted Mississauga of the Credit "grow in their newly acquired Christian faith." The future Mississauga chief, Kahkewaquonaby (Sacred Feathers), known in English as Peter Jones, became Egerton's interpreter and chief Indigenous advisor. The two men, approximately the same age, became life-long friends. Years later Ryerson described his Indigenous ally as "a man of athletic frame as well as of masculine intellect; a man of clear perceptions, good judgement, great decision of character." Kahkewaquonaby wrote of Egerton some years later that he was friend "in whom I had the greatest confidence." Egerton Ryerson and Peter Jones might best be described as 'blood brothers.'

The first Methodist church worker to live with the Credit Mississauga joined them in their fight to secure a title deed to their reserve at the mouth of the Credit River. Ryerson worked to protect their remaining land base, supported their transition to Euro-Canadian farming, and began to learn their language. He set up a school in which the children were taught in Ojibwe and English. The Credit Mississauga admired their non-Indigenous friend, a farmer's son who joined them in the fields and ate and lived with them. He taught them to enclose and cultivate their first fields and gardens. At a council fire in December 1826 the Credit Mississauga gave Egerton the Ojibwe name of a well-regarded recently deceased chief: "Cheechock" or "Chechalk," who had belonged to the Eagle doodem. The name "Chechalk" meant "Bird on the Wing." The designation referred in Ryerson's case to "his going about constantly among them."

The Mississauga school, first established by the young missionary, was a great addition. In the 1830s Jesse Hurlburt, Acting Principal of the Methodists' Upper Canada Academy in Cobourg (later to become Victoria College), estimated that in Upper Canada only one child out of 20 received an elementary education. In the late 1820s and 1830s, young Credit Mississauga became literate in English, when many of their non-Indigenous neighbours could neither read nor write. With a working knowledge of English and a growing awareness in the late 1820s and 1830s of British law, Mississauga leaders now advanced Indigenous Title claims to many sites in their traditional territory at the western end of Lake Ontario, and on the northeastern shore of Lake Erie. Unable to read English and unaware of the conventions of public accounting, the Anishinaabeg had been totally disadvantaged in their dealings with the Indian Department. By one historian's estimate, the British paid in 1805, for a huge tract of Credit Mississauga territory between present-day Toronto and Hamilton, about 2.5 per cent of what was, at the time, its market value (Leo A. Johnson, "The Mississauga—Lake Ontario Land Surrender of 1805," *Ontario History,* 73,2 (1981), page 249).

Ryerson assumed many church responsibilities after he left the Credit Mission in 1827. This young man of great energy in 1829 established and became the dominant editorial voice for the *Christian Guardian*. When he edited the Methodist paper, he included a great deal of correspondence from missionaries and Indigenous converts. It also ran occasional editorials criticizing government policy on Indigenous affairs. In 1836 he founded the Upper Canada Academy in Cobourg, east of Toronto, and in 1841 became the first principal of the Academy's successor, Victoria College. Day schools would continue for boys and girls as before, children could remain with their families, but a door opened for higher education. From 1836 to 1842 approximately ten Indigenous children enrolled in the Methodist college. In the mid-1840s, Head Chief Joseph Sawyer urged the replacement of the

current Credit schoolteacher by "one whose acquirements would be such as to fit some of the Boys for the college at Cobourg."

Apart from the letter he wrote in May 1847, upon the request of the Indian Department of the Union of the Canadas, Ryerson had no direct involvement with Indigenous education. From his appointment in the early 1840s to the top job in the education department for Canada West, as Upper Canada was now generally called, he had no responsibility for the First Nations. His only contribution was a hastily written sketch that George Vardon, assistant superintendent general of Indian affairs, had requested. It took Egerton two months to find time to do so. In his submission he recommended the establishment of agricultural training schools, or Industrial Schools as he called them, to teach young men the most up-to-date European-style agriculture. He also advocated apprenticeship programs with tradespeople in neighbouring communities around the reserves. Certainly, Egerton knew of Kahkewaquonaby's determination to see manual labour schools established in Canada West, schools run by Indigenous people themselves.

Egerton's plan was designed for a pre-industrial Canada, one in which farming was the motor of the economy. At the schools, special attention would be paid to instructing the students in "book-keeping and farmers' accounts." The churches would run the residential school. An important supervisory role existed for government, to inspect the institutions and to receive the "detailed reports" they must regularly furnish at least once or twice a year. In Egerton's own words, "It would be a gratifying result to see graduates of our Indian industrial schools become overseers of some of the largest farms in Canada, nor will it be less gratifying to see them industrious and prosperous farmers on their own account." Entrance to the residential school would be by application not coercion.

After the spring of 1847 Ryerson said nothing more about Indigenous education. He had his hands full establishing a system of free mandatory schooling for an entire province. As Canadian historian Jan Noel wrote in a summary in a letter to me in May 2022: "Ryerson worked tirelessly to survey the best public systems elsewhere. From Germany he adopted going beyond rote learning to engage all the faculties, adding singing to engage the heart. He adopted Irish textbooks acceptable to Catholics and Protestants, created a supply chain of books and equipment to remote districts and log schools. He set up Normal schools to train teachers, and farm boys and girls flocked there to take up the opportunity. He travelled around the province to talk up public education, stayed up at night writing encouragement to teachers ('no, the family you're boarding with should not require you do their mending at night')." In addition, it must be remembered Egerton Ryerson had no responsibility for First Nation education.

Egerton had hoped Peter Jones would head the new Mount Elgin boarding school near London. Unfortunately, the Mississauga chief's deteriorating health obliged him to resign his position as superintendent just before the school's opening ceremony in July 1849. Subsequently the school was never transferred to the Christian Anishinaabeg's control. Within several decades the First Nations obtained the full-blown opposite of independence: the disastrous federal Indian Residential School system imposed in the late nineteenth century, the results of which the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Final Report, vol. 1, The History, Part 1. Origins to 1939* clearly outline. This is not at all what Ryerson proposed in May 1847. The federal Indian residential schools that developed in the early 1880s became, in effect, "boot camps" controlled by non-Indigenous individuals for the coercive entry of the First Nations into settler society. Underfunding, mismanagement, and lax federal oversight multiplied the shortcomings of these institutions. They bore little resemblance to the boarding schools earnestly called for by

Indigenous leaders in the 1840s. The system they received was entirely different from what they had requested.

In 1847 the tragic removal of the Credit community from their established mission to a corner of the Six Nations Territory on the Grand River occurred. Despite becoming Christians, and adjusting to Euro-Canadian farming, they had failed to gain recognition of their title to their Credit lands. Wishing to be separate, not amalgamated with the settlers, the Credit Mississauga accepted the Six Nations of the Grand River's 1847 invitation to settle beside them near Brantford, 100 kilometres to the west. Again, they began the arduous task of clearing farms, erecting new homes, a comfortable place of worship, and a school. Named after their old mission, the new settlement was designated New Credit.

Peter and Eliza stayed with the Ryersons for over a month in Toronto in the spring of 1856 in an unsuccessful attempt to find a cure for Peter's declining health. Clearly, he was dying. His demise in sight, the Mississauga and his English wife now returned to their home in Brantford. The Credit Mississauga brought a respected Anishinaabe healer from Rice Lake, northeast of Toronto, to intervene. It was too late. Egerton gave the eulogy to Kahkewaquonaby at his cherished friend's funeral in late June. The bonds between the two men ran so deep. On 1 November 1847, for instance, the Mississauga leader thanked his non-Indigenous friend for his dispatch of "a set of your School Reports" from which "I trust I shall receive much valuable information which may prove beneficial in our Indian School schemes." Peter added, "My brother, I thank you for all the kindness you have ever shown to me and my dear family, and I hope and pray that the friendship which was formed between us many years ago will last forever."

Egerton's nearly year-long residence with the Credit Mississauga in 1826-1827 influenced his views of the Indigenous Peoples. He believed the First Nations could become fully equal with the settlers. Nevertheless, it did not dislodge his fundamental belief,

one shared by nearly all Euro-Canadians of his day, that the Indigenous Peoples must eventually enter the mainline Euro-Canadian world. The dominant society regarded European civilization and the Christian religion as superior to Indigenous culture. They did not realize the Indigenous Peoples' deep-seated sense of separateness and their determination to maintain it.

One example in reference to Egerton will suffice. In an 1850 letter written to the Indian Department on their behalf by Peter Jones, the Credit Mississauga claimed Long Point on the northeastern shore of Lake Erie. The letter reads, the "Peninsula and Islands were Reserved by our Fathers as hunting and fishing grounds." (Peter Jones to T.G. Anderson, Brantford, 30 March 1850, RG 10, vol. 409:445, microfilm C-9615, Library and Archives Canada. In 1847 the Mississauga of the Credit had re-located from the Credit River to their new community they named New Credit beside the Six Nations Territory near Brantford.) Did Egerton know this? He was born and raised on a farm at the Long Point Settlement, one of the oldest British Canadian communities in Upper Canada. His father owned a small island off Long Point that he willed to Egerton in 1854. It became his haven. Did Egerton ever learn that "Ryerson Island" was, in the eyes of the Mississauga, disputed territory? Later evidence suggests Kahkewaquonaby had not introduced the subject. In 1897 the Credit Mississauga forwarded a land entitlement claim to the federal government. Dr. Peter Edmund Jones, Peter's third son who had become a medical doctor, signed the Credit community's petition that specified "Long Point and Ryerson Islands" belonged to them. Peter Jones and Egerton Ryerson were true friends and allies, but they retained their own outlooks and beliefs. Good friends often keep some topics to themselves.

Bibliography

My interest in King George III's sons dates back to my reading in high school years of several of my mother's favourite history books. She loved popular history, particularly British. One of her cherished titles was Roger Fulford's *Royal Dukes, Queen Victoria's 'Wicked Uncles*,' first published in 1933. Nearly a century later it still reads well, this marvellous account of the sons of the King and their unofficial wives and strings of illegitimate children.

For background information on Peter Jones and references to Sir Augustus d'Este, see my *Sacred Feathers. The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto, 1987), and the individual chapters on Maungwudaus (pp. 126-163) and John Sunday or Shawundais (pp. 212-244) in *Mississauga Portraits. Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto, 2013). I wrote a short piece on Sir Augustus's gift, "Historic Peace-Pipe," *The Beaver*, outfit 315;1 (Winter 1984):4-7. Goldwin French has written a short sketch of Rev. Robert Alder.

A full bibliography on Egerton Ryerson appears in my essay "Egerton Ryerson and the Mississauga, 1826 to 1856," *Ontario History*, 107,2 (Autumn 2021): 222- 243 (https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081114ar). His memoir, *"The Story of My Life,"* edited by J. George Hodgins (Toronto: William Briggs, 1883), published posthumously, is available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/24586/24586-h/24586-h.htm. Chapter Four, "Missionary to the River Credit Indians" and Chapter Five, "Diary of Labours among Indians," are very important. A wonderful introduction to the private Ryerson is provided in *My Dearest Sophie. Letters from Egerton Ryerson to his daughter*, ed. C.B. Sissons (Toronto, 1955). Hope MacLean's M.A. thesis for the University of Toronto (1978), "The Hidden Agenda: Methodist Attitudes to the Ojibwa and the Development of Indian Schooling in Upper Canada, 1821-1860," provides the

best overview. Her two published articles on the Methodists and the education of the Mississauga based on her thesis are available on the Web: "A Positive Experiment in Aboriginal Education: The Methodist Ojibwa Day Schools in Upper Canada, 1824-1833," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 22,1 (2002): 23-63 (https://cjns.brandonu.ca/online-issues/vol-22-no-1-2002/); and "Ojibwa Participation in Methodist Residential Schools in Upper Canada," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 25,1 (2005): 93-137 (https://cjns.brandonu.ca/online-issues/vol-25-no-1-2005/). Lynn McDonald provides a review of modern interpretations of the founder of (free) public education in Ontario in her essay, "How a 'Maker of Canada' was framed: The unjust treatment of Egerton Ryerson," in *The 1867 Project*, ed. Mark Milke (N.p.p.: The Aristotle Foundation for Public Policy, 2023), pp. 108-118, 292-293.