

History of the Name of the Herbert River in Hants County, Nova Scotia

By P. Michael Hebert¹

Because the surname “Hebert” looks so much like “Herbert”, it is frequently misspelled, and when I first saw reference to the Herbert River in Hants County, Nova Scotia, what came to mind was the Bear River at Digby, Nova Scotia. It appears as “Hebert R” (probably for early explorer Louis Hébert) on Lescarbot's 1609 map². By 1720, “Hebert R” had become “Beare R”.³ When spoken, the name Hebert is pronounced in French as “a BEAR” and in my native Louisiana as “A bear”. So, it is understandable that an English-speaker on hearing it would write it as “bear”. Likewise, when the name is written, human instinctive pattern recognition causes people to add an extra “r” to write the familiar English version of the Germanic name, “Herbert”. In Cumberland County, Nova Scotia, the name is spelled correctly in River Hebert and is pronounced by local residents as “Hibbert”.⁴

A Search for Maps

In 2011, I was given a copy of a map showing today's Herbert River in Hants County, Nova Scotia as “R. Hebere”. It is labeled in hand “Piziguit, Les Mines 1755”. Since then, I obtained a copy of this same map hand-dated “1749”. Subsequent research proved that this map is a detail of *A Map of that Part of Nova Scotia contain'd Between Lunenburg and the Bay Vert by Halifax and Pisiguit including Cobiquit and Tatmagouch*. A copy can be found in Libraries and Archives Canada.⁵ It shows no author and no date. Historian Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc⁶ believes that it is possible to date

¹ Mr. Hebert is a resident of Austin, Texas. He holds degrees in history and law from Georgetown University and Louisiana State University, respectively.

² A copy of this map can be found at <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/prmap.htm>.

³ A copy of the 1720 map can be found at <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/prmap.htm>. Sometimes before the early eighteenth century, the French had already renamed it “River Imbert”.

⁴ The likely reason the spelling remained unchanged is because after the Treaty of Paris of 1763, Joseph Frederick DesBarres brought Acadians to the area to work the dykelands. By 1812, these Acadians had mostly relocated to present-day New Brunswick. See *The Acadians of Nova Scotia Past and Present*, by Sally Ross and Alphonse Deveau, Nimbus Publishing, 1992, p. 102. Other Nova Scotia place names that contain the name Hebert are present-day Port l'Hébert on the southeastern coast and historical Hebere village on the Shubenacadie River. See the *Scenic Travelways Map of Nova Scotia* by Nova Scotia Tourism and Culture, and see also the map cited in footnote 5, below.

⁵ See citation details in the attached Appendix.

⁶ Now retired, M. LeBlanc is a former archivist at the Centre d'études acadiennes and historian at Parks Canada Agency.

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it to 1755-56 because when it was drawn, Fort Beauséjour had already fallen to the British who renamed it Fort Cumberland in June 1755.

In August 2014, I contacted Tracy Lenfesty, Librarian for the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. I asked if she could help me verify my supposition that surveyors' field notes in the original grants along the river might have spelled the river as "Hebert". She conclusively proved my supposition by locating in her records the following:

- A grant dated 1812 with a drawing by Charles Morris, Surveyor General, locating the river and calling it "River Hebert",
- A grant dated 1813 with a drawing by Charles Morris, Surveyor General, locating the river and calling it "River Hebert",
- An undated map in the portfolio for Hants County and apparently quite old, showing the map as "River Hebert", and
- A map dated 1928 drawn by C.H. McClare and in the same portfolio titled *Plan of Central Hants, Nova Scotia Showing Original Grants in Rawdon Made in 1784 & 1786*, which shows the "River Hebert".

(It was later determined that the "undated map in the portfolio for Hants County" is a portion of the original 1761 Newport township map which was drawn in large sections.) Tracy Lenfesty also found that the river is called "Herbert River" on the A.F. Church map of 1871 and on the Faribault Fletcher geology map of 1909. She determined that the river was not officially named until 1951.

The river was described in *The Report Upon the Condition of the Rivers in Nova Scotia in Connection with the Rivers of that Province*, printed 1884, that contains the diary entry of noted observer Frederick H. D. Veith dated July 1881 referring to the river as "River Hebert".

Further aiding my search, both Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc and Halifax Archeologist Sara Beanlands⁷ furnished me with other maps and references, as follows:

- Map of the Township Newport, by Surveyor General Charles Morris⁸, undated but containing a detail describing a deed dated 1825. According to Tracy Lenfesty, this map is a copy of the original plan of Newport Township that has been dated by the Department of Crown Lands at July 1761. It shows "River Hebert".

⁷ Sara Beanlands is a Principal and Senior Archaeologist with Boreas Heritage Consulting Inc., specializing in cultural resource management.

⁸ Three men, father, son, and grandson named Charles Morris held the title Surveyor General. They succeeded one other in 1781 and 1802, respectively. See <http://www.biographi.ca/en/results.php/?ft=Morris%2C%20Charles>

- *A Plan of the Township of Newport Nova Scotia by Geo. Hallyburton, April 10, 1775, Copied July 27, 1866, by Dept. of Crown Lands*, containing additional grantee information added by John V. Duncanson, cartography by Walter K. Morrison. It shows the river as “Herbert”. It also shows the “Avon (Pisiquid) River” and the “River St. Croix (Dugas)”, and it shows the Meander River continuing beyond its confluence with the Herbert.

In 2015, I returned to Halifax and did additional research at the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, the Crown Land Information Management Centre, and the Nova Scotia Archives. In the first two offices, I was able to determine that the “undated map in the portfolio for Hants County” is in fact just one large page of the original plan of Newport Township by Charles Morris in 1761. The Crown Land Information office located in its records the section of the map containing the legend, which reads, “A Plan of the Township of Newport, This Plan is an exact copy taken from the one filed in ye Supreme Court upon the Partition and Division of the Township of Newport on which many of the Courses between the Lots were Wrote Backwards in the same manner as Inserted in this Copy. Charles Morris”.

The Crown Land office also located the original 1866 tracing of the 1775 Plan of Newport Township by Geo. Hallyburton. Both the 1761 map and the 1775 map show the “River Hebert”.

Additional research led to the source of the Morrison and Duncanson map. It is found as an appendix to a book written in 1985 by John Victor Duncanson.⁹ Morrison and Duncanson treated the Herbert River differently from the St. Croix (Dugas) and the Avon (Pisiquid). In the latter cases, they used both the historical and modern names, but in the case of the Herbert, they chose only the modern name. In a letter from Duncanson to Morrison in December of 1981 regarding the St. Croix, Duncanson suggested retaining the French name but having it appear in brackets under the St. Croix.¹⁰ It appears that the spelling of the Herbert was intentionally changed to reflect the present usage.

With the assistance of Garry Shutlak, of Nova Scotia Archives, I located additional maps, as follows:

- *Map of the Province of Nova Scotia including the Island of Cape Breton, by William Mackay, 1834*, also known as “The Great Map”. It shows “Hebert R”.
- *Plan and Section of the main road Between Herbert and Meander River in Newport*, dated June 2d, 1842. This map is curious because writing on the

⁹ *Newport Nova Scotia, A Rhode Island Township*, by John V. Duncanson, Mika Publishing Company, Belleville, Ontario, 1985.

¹⁰ From the papers of Walter K. Morrison, according to Trish LeBlanc, Campus Librarian, Nova Scotia Community College.

reverse side has leached through the paper so that it is legible as a mirror image. When held up to a mirror, the river is labeled on the reverse side as “R. Hebert” whereas it is labeled as “River Herbert” on the front.

Oral History

According to Sara Beanlands, Pere Pacifique de Valigny in his publication *Le Pays des Micmacs* states that the river was first known as “Magamegoisisg”.

Through the assistance of Kentville-based historical tour guide Richard Laurin and West Hants County Councillor Randy Matheson, I was shown extracts from the 1992 book, *Brooklyn in Retrospect*, by Edith McGray and Rev. George McGray, who state that the French called the river the “Aubare”¹¹. They cite the book *North Along the Shore* by Edith Moser, who refers to the river as “the ‘Aubrae’ (Hebert), the original French name for the Herbert”.¹² The McGray book has a copy of an undated map showing the river as “Hebbert” written in the original hand but with “Herbert” typed at a later date. The McGrays also refer to the French village “Village Aubre”.¹³ This is likely a reference to the village Rivière Hébert described by Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc in his work. He believes that the Acadian Village named after Jean Hébert was located near the mouth of the river.

The Meander River

The McGrays also cite an oral tradition that at an earlier time the conjoined Herbert and Meander Rivers was called the Herbert, not the Meander, as it is today¹⁴. Evidence of this can be found in the original 1761 township map of Newport which names the River Hebert but shows no name for the Meander. The Morrison and Duncanson map of 1985 confuses the question of the name of the conjoined rivers by moving the location of the name of the Meander on the original 1775 map to a point below the confluence of the two rivers.

Conclusion

From 1756 and well into the 1800s, English and Canadian mapmakers consistently spelled the river as “Hebert”. The earliest map that I located spelling the river as “Herbert” was the 1842 drawing of a road section, and it spelled the name of the river differently on front and back. The 1871 A.F. Church map is the first large map that I found spelling the river as “Herbert”. In 1881, noted observer Frederick Veith described the river as “Hebert”, and as late as 1928, C.H. McClare drew a map with the river

¹¹ *Brooklyn in Retrospect*, by Edith McGray and Rev. George McGray, Lancelot Press, 1992, p. 42.

¹² *North Along the Shore*, by Edith Moser, Lancelot Press, 1975, p.20.

¹³ *Brooklyn in Retrospect*, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Brooklyn in Retrospect*, p. 145.

named “Hebert”. In 1951, “Herbert” became the official name of the river. It would be conjecture to conclude whether the initial spelling changes resulted from simple spelling error or from a conscious choice by the mapmakers to reflect a change in pronunciation.

The story of the name is best told by the maps in the attached *Appendix* containing copies, in estimated chronological order, of relevant maps or details from them.

Appendix: Maps

1. Detail of a map made about 1756 entitled *A Map of that Part of Nova Scotia contain'd Between Lunenburg and the Bay Vert by Halifax and Pisiguit including Cobiquit and Tatmagouch*.¹⁵
2. Detail from the original Charles Morris Map of the Township Newport dated by Crown Lands at July 21, 1761.¹⁶
3. Surveyor's map by Charles Morris, Surveyor General, attached to grant dated December 15, 1812 to the Reverend William Cochran and Andrew William Cochran, Book C. p. 57.
4. Surveyor's map by Charles Morris, Surveyor General, attached to grant dated July 22, 1813 to John Bond the Younger, Book D, p. 32.
5. Detail of a copy of Map of the Township Newport, by Surveyor General Charles Morris, undated but containing a detail that dates the map post-1825.¹⁷
6. Detail from the Great Map of Nova Scotia.¹⁸
7. Plan and Section of the main road Between Herbert and Meander River in Newport, June 2, 1842.¹⁹
8. Tracing made July 27, 1866 by Department of Crown Lands of the Plan of Township Newport dated April 10, 1775.²⁰
9. Undated map of one half of the Newport #27 sheet from the Department of Lands and Forest records.²¹
10. A.F. Church & Co Topographical Township Map of Hants County, 1871.²²
11. Detail of Map dated 1928 by C.H. McClare showing the Original Grants in Rawdon made in 1784 and 1786.²³

¹⁵ Library and Archives Canada, NMC 0018107, Call Number H2/202/[1756], Record Number 5920. Photocopy 27 ¼" x 40", original held in Huntington Library, California. This map is similar to a map held by the British Library titled *A Map of the Surveyed Parts of Nova Scotia MDCCCLVI* which Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc observes does not contain any mention of the River Hébert; however, he points out, it does show this river as well as its relation with the road leading to Halifax since this road goes straight down the river as it still does today, at least part of it near the vicinity of the Five Houses identified on that map. Nova Scotia Archives has a photostatic copy of the British Library map in its collection with the obsolete indicator CXIX.60.

¹⁶ Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and the Crown Land Information Management Centre.

¹⁷ Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, file No. E-7-21.

¹⁸ Nova Scotia Archives.

¹⁹ Nova Scotia Archives.

²⁰ The Crown Land Information Management Centre.

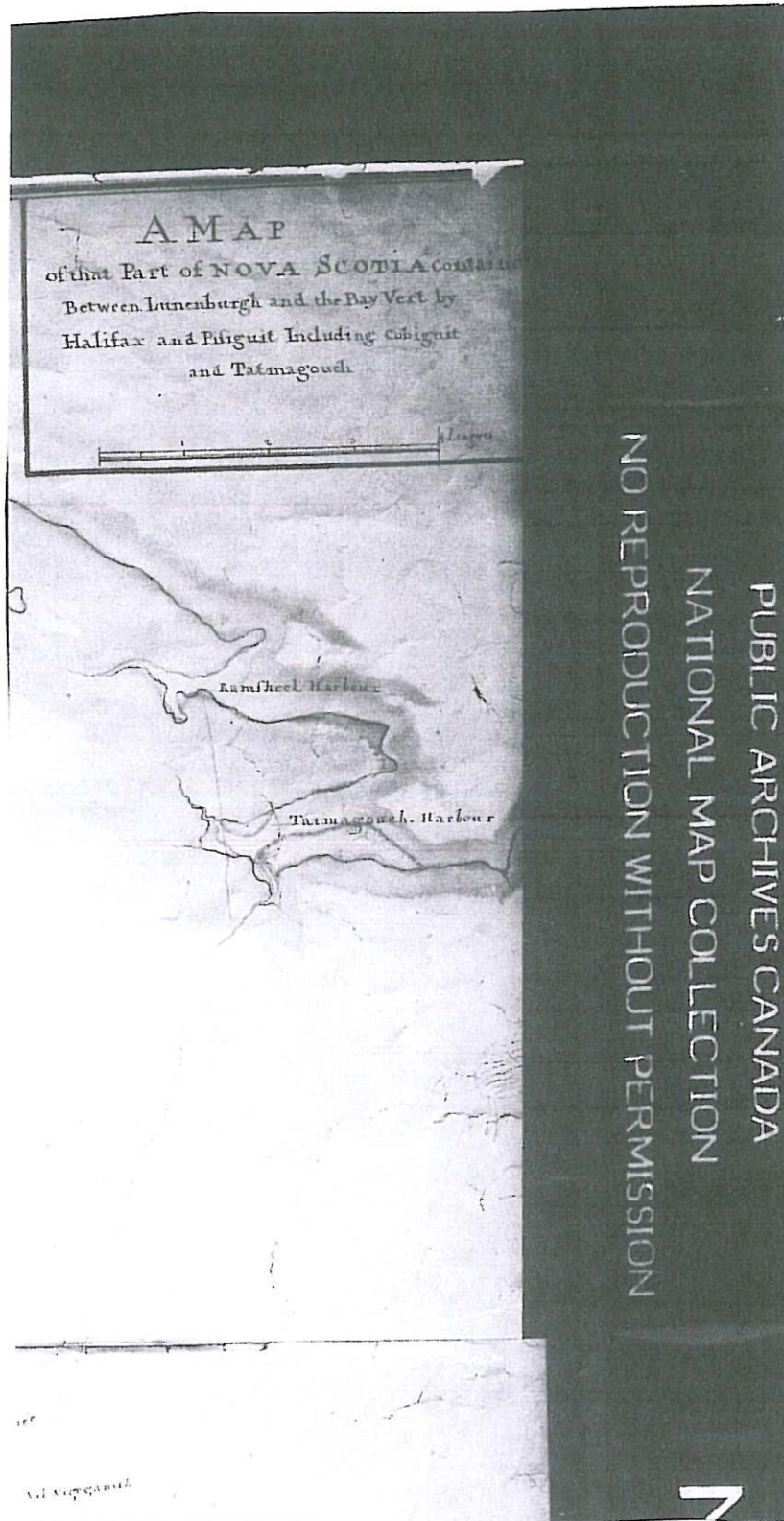
²¹ *Brooklyn in Retrospect*, by Edith McGray and Rev. George McGray, p. 49.

²² Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources.

²³ Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources.

12. 1985 map by John V. Duncanson and Walter K Morrison drawn from the 1866 tracing of the 1775 Plan of Newport Township by Geo. Hallyburton.²⁴

²⁴ *Newport Nova Scotia, A Rhode Island Township*, by John V. Duncanson, Mika Publishing Company, Belleville, Ontario, 1985, and Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, E-19-22.



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9x



Hebert River

16

15.

3. 6th Division

Mill

Right across

400

S. 500 E.

S. 24 E.

S. 500 E. 60 Chas.

E.

H.

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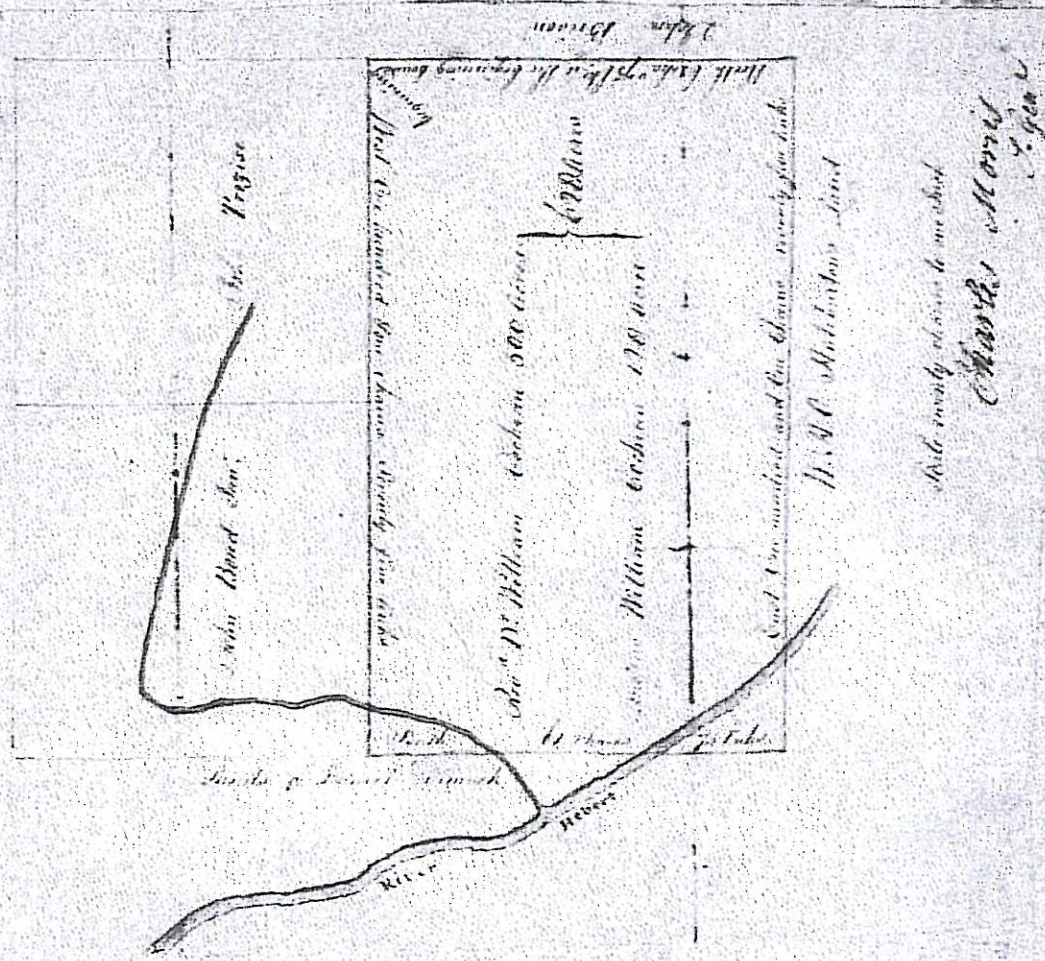
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A PLAN
of the Township
of NEWPORT.

This Plan is an
Exact Copy taken from the one filed in the Supreme Court
upon the Partition and Division of the Township of Newport, in which
many of the Townships
between the Lots were written Backward, in the same manner
as printed on this
Copy.

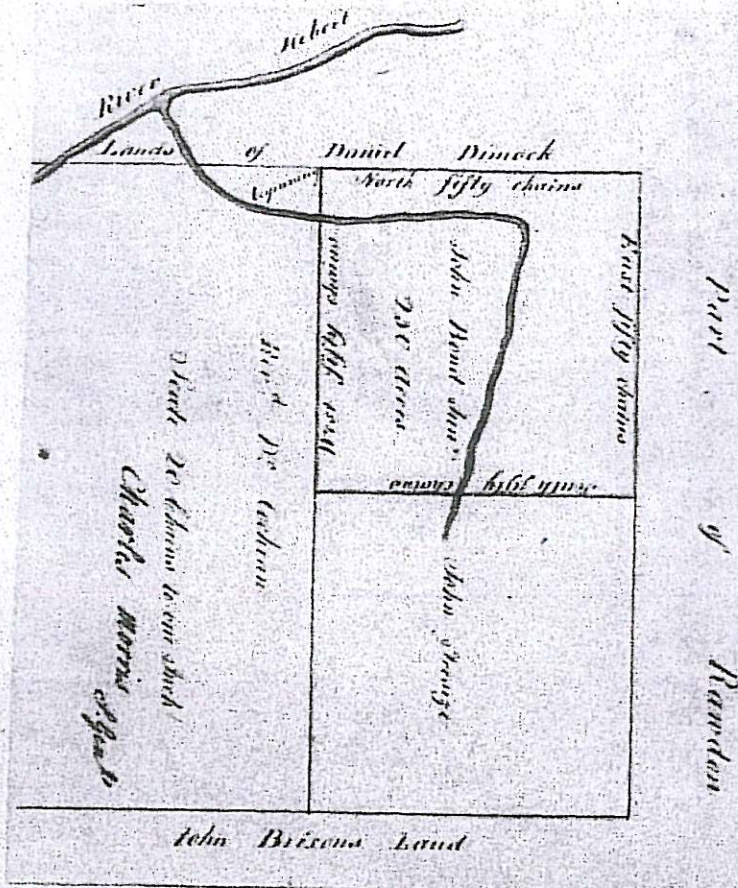
Charles Morris



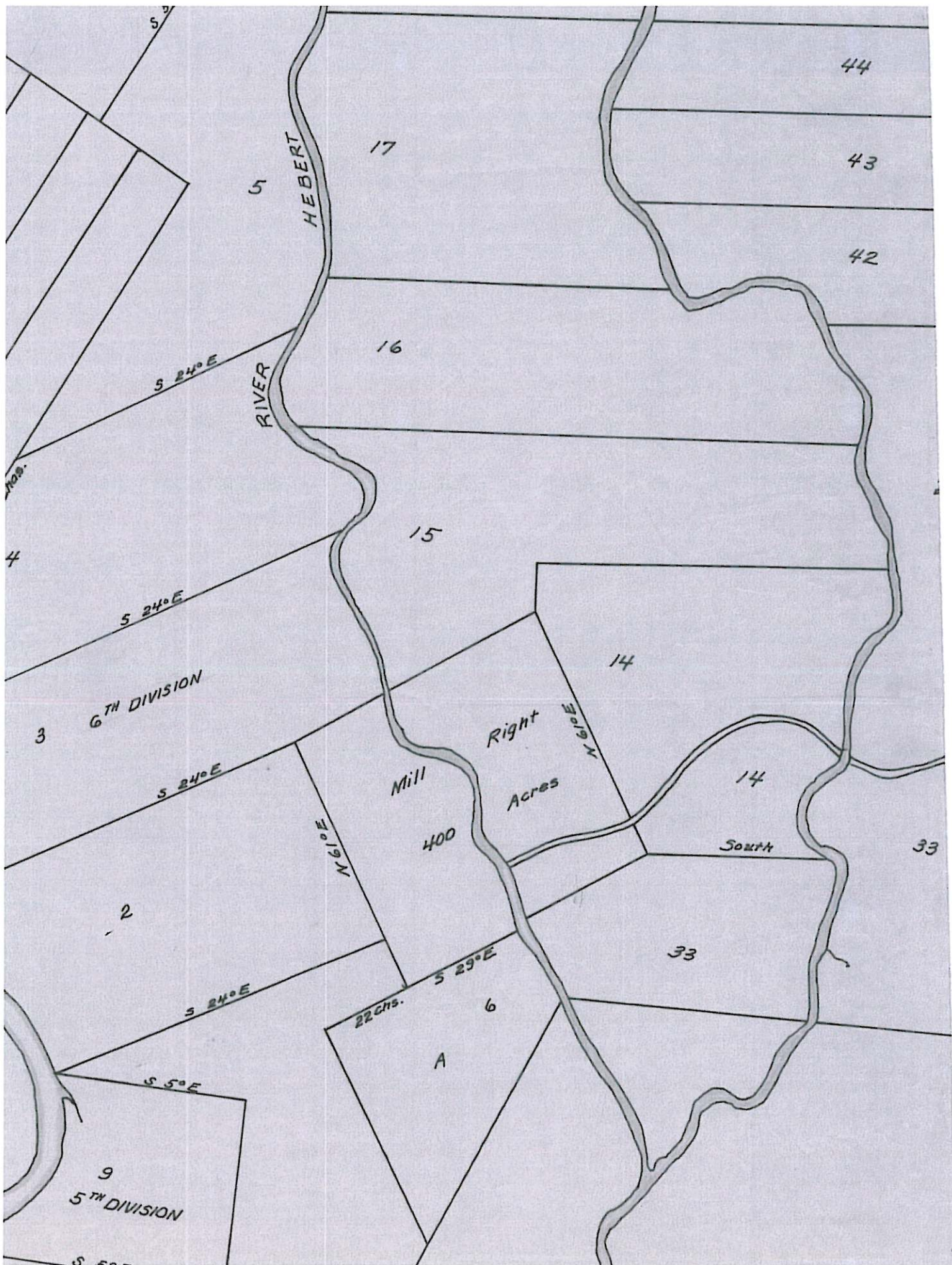
John Wood Lane

John Wood Lane

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5(a)



5(b)

9	29	
	30	
10		
	31	
11	32	<i>Charles Cochrane</i>
		<i>Purchased from Walley deed dated</i>
		<i>in 1825</i>
12	33	
		P
13	34	N E W
14	35	
15	36	
16	37	7 th DIVISION

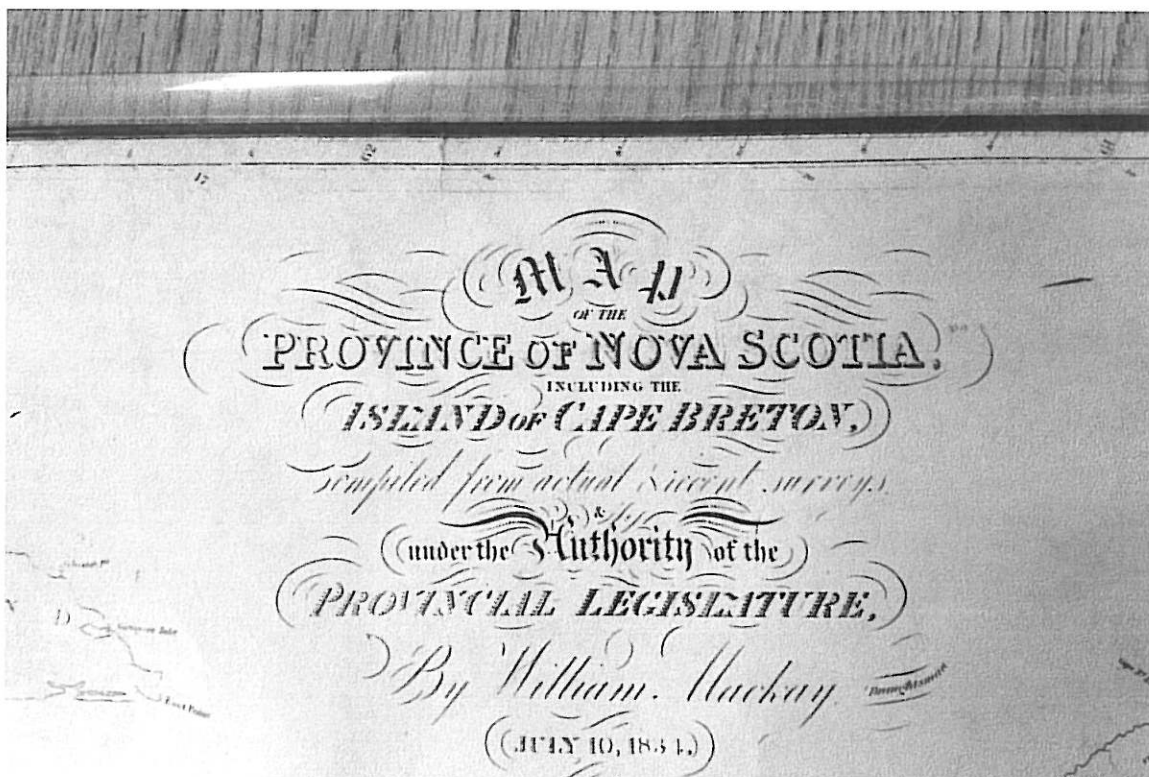
slightly above Scale - nearly all to one inch

TOWNSHIP of NEWPORT

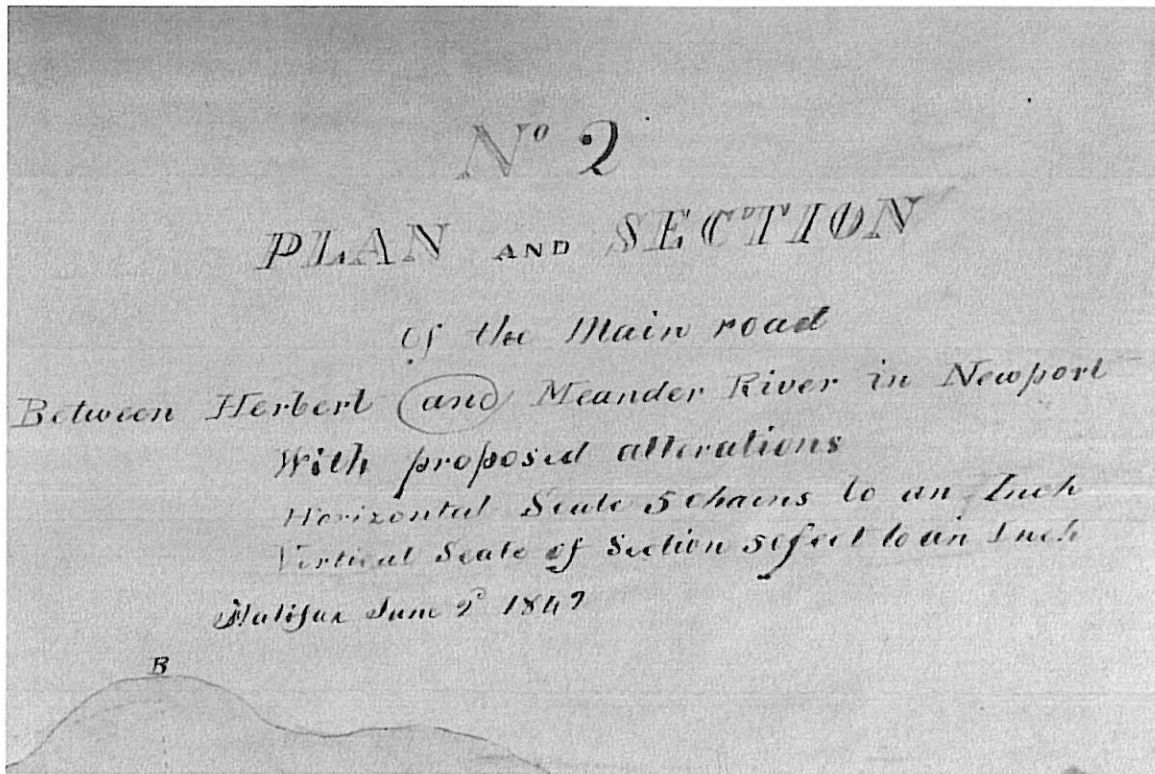
This plan is an exact copy taken from the one filed in ye Supreme Court upon the Partition and Division of the Township of Newport on which many of the courses between the lots were written bookend in the same manner as inserted in this copy

Tgd.

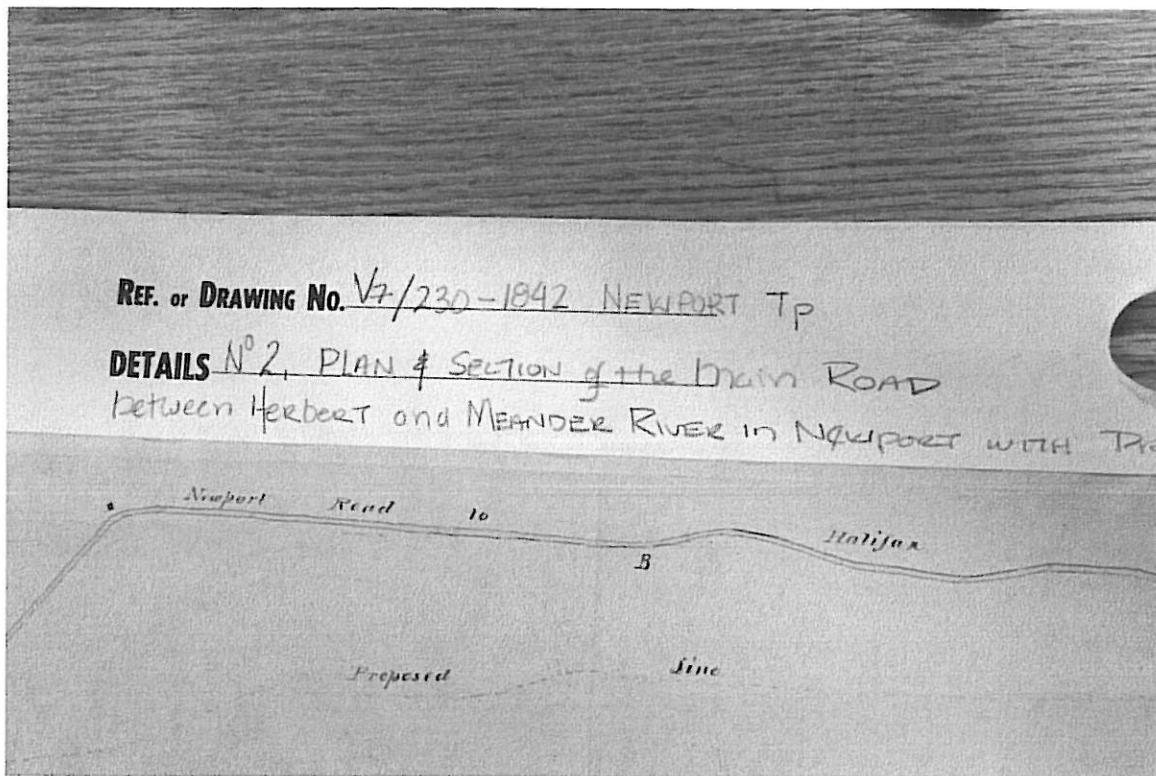
Charles Morris
Sur. General



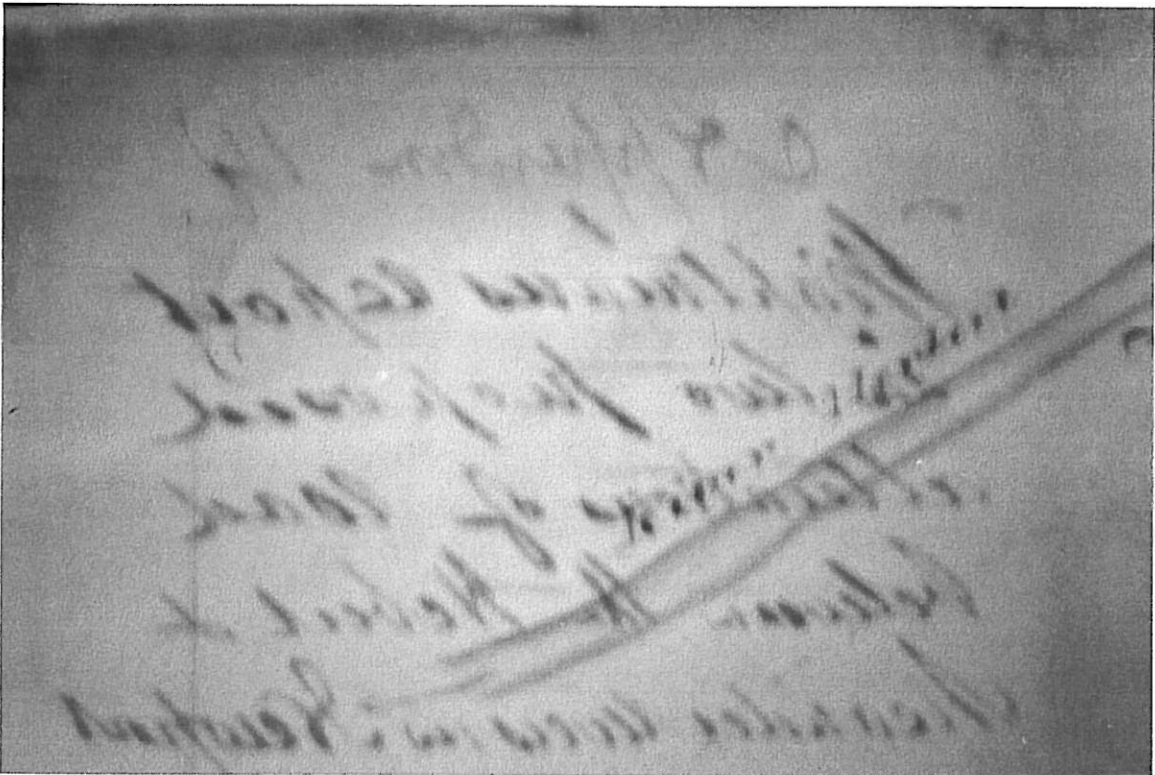
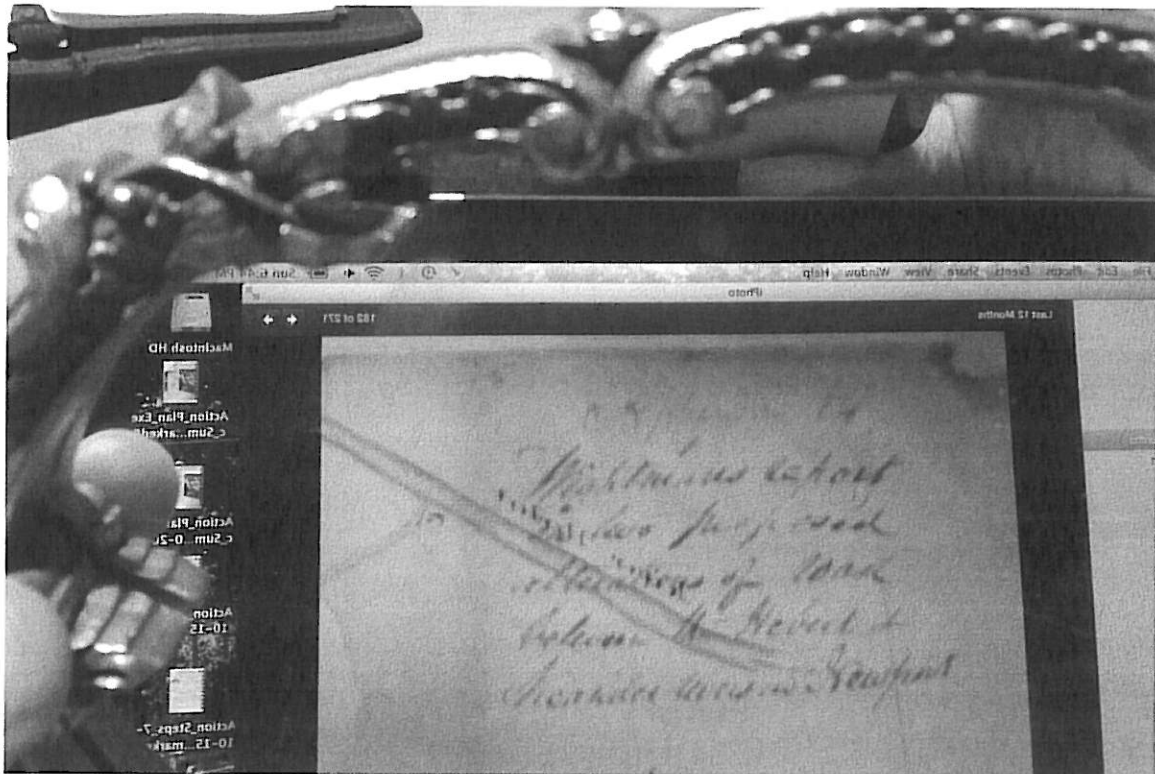
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7 (b)



7(c)



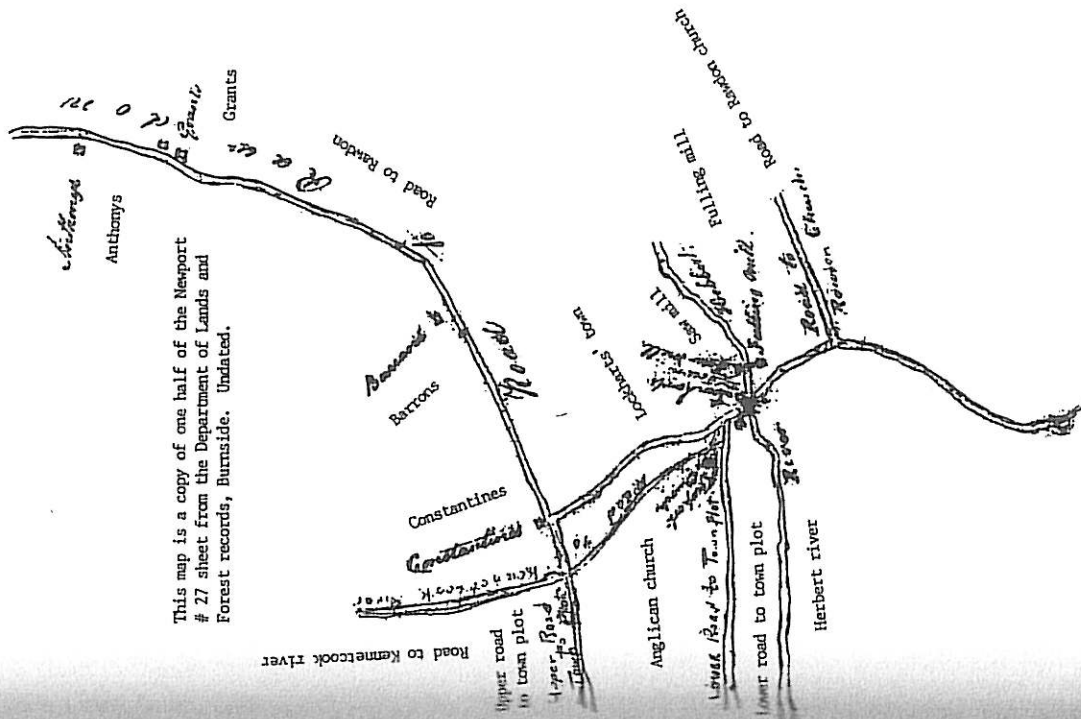
of fill that was moved in to build the entrance to the arena now known as the Hants Central Recreation Centre. To the west a second road has been added to take the place of the one that ran up past the Anglican church and cemetery. This road is still in existence and is known as the Hollow Hill road.

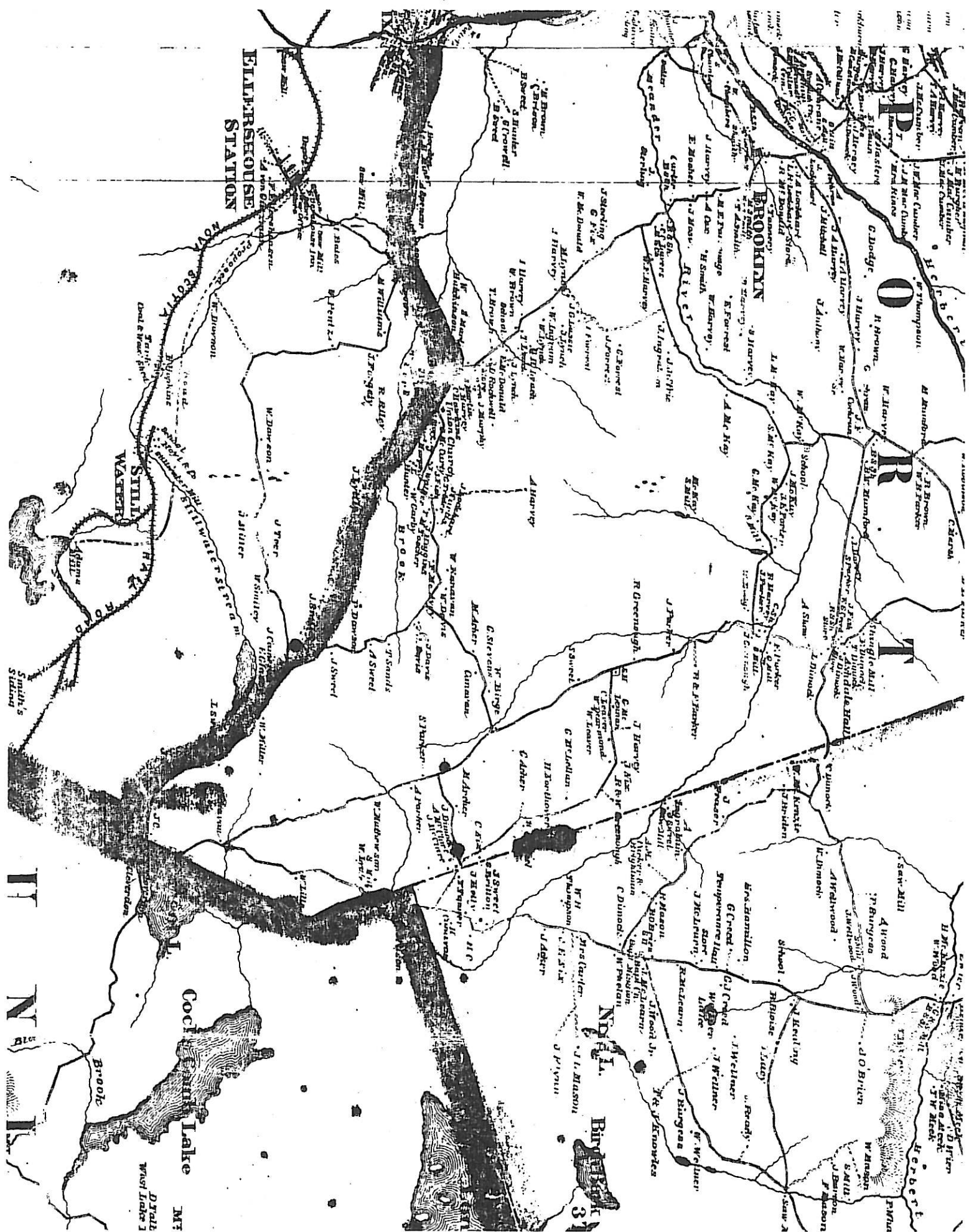
The map shows other changes. The grist mill has become a saw mill. The carding mill has changed to a fulling mill. The tenant houses built by John Day have become Lockhart town. What is marked on the map as the Lower road to the Town Plot is now called the Chambers road. The Upper road to the Town Plot now goes under the name of the Lawrence road. Along the top of the hill are the houses of Constantines, Barrons, Grants and Anthony's. These are familiar names to the older generation.

Other indications of the size of the development in the Hollow are found in the location of the Anglican and Presbyterian churches in the area. These developments can be found in the chapter on churches. Still another indication of the importance of the area is found in the fact that it supported an inn. Edith Mosher in her *North Along the Shore* reports that an "old inn later used as a boarding house stood in Brooklyn Hollow."¹⁵ The fact of the inn is established. Pictures are available. The old foundation on the up river side of the road, up until the time of the building of the new bridge, was discernible. Just when this inn was built was not determined but it was still in existence in the early 1940s.

While these developments were taking place, other influences were active. In 1837 the Anglican Rectory was built in its present location. In 1841 the Presbyterian church was moved to the village of Brooklyn. These moves indicate the beginning of a trend away from the Hollow.

The Hollow flourished at a later period. When the railway came into operation in 1898 it brought new life to the area. The railway station made the Hollow an active commercial centre. The train was the link with the outside world before the development of improved roads and the automobile. People from the surrounding area drove to the station in horse and





HANTS COUNTY, NOVA SCOTIA GENWEB PROJECT

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A. F. Church Map

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Topographical Township Map of Hants County, Nova Scotia

From actual surveys drawn & engraved under the direction of A.F. Church.

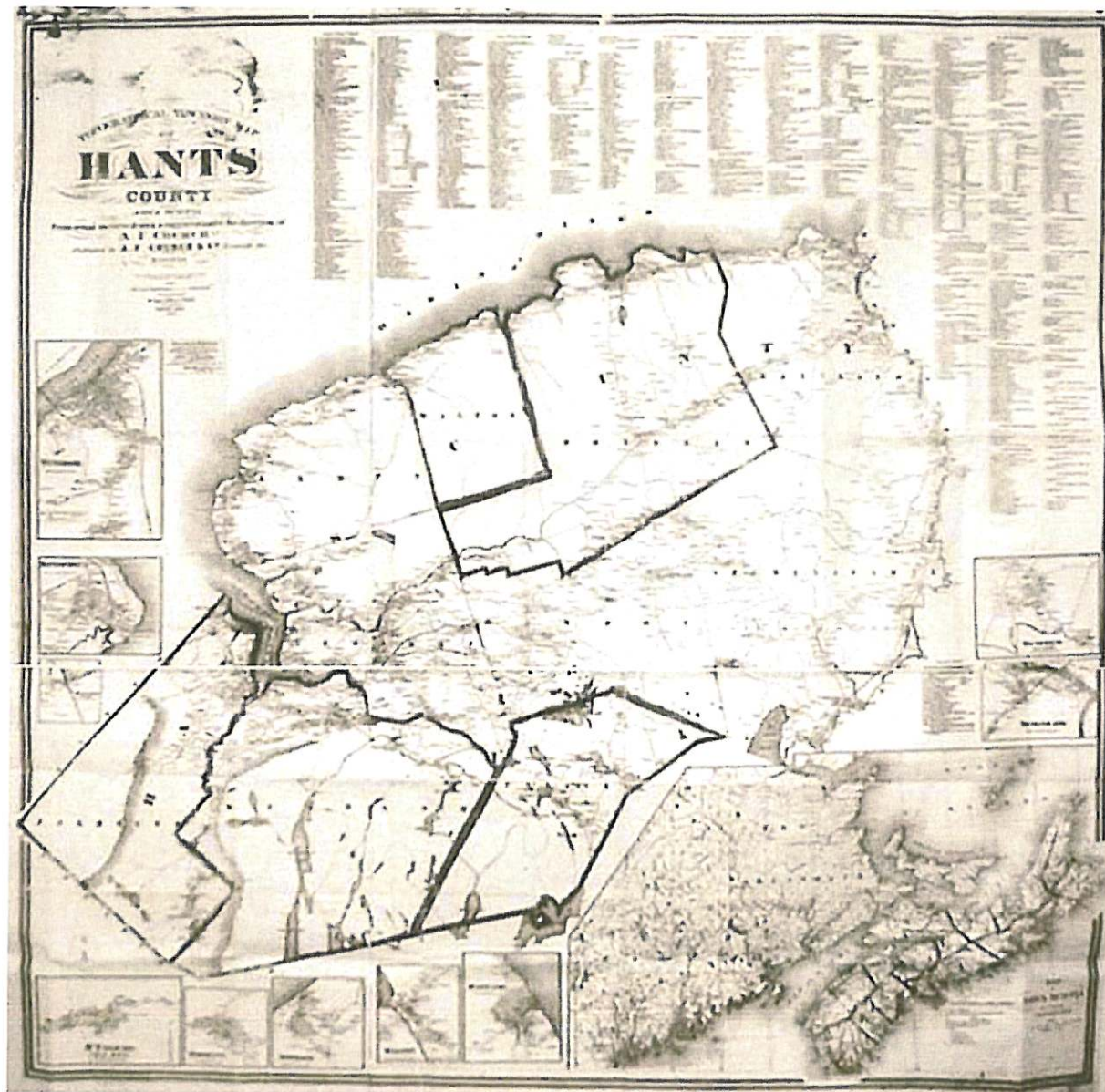
Published by A.F. Church & Co., Granville Str., Halifax.

Entered according to Law on the twenty fourth day of March A.D. 1869 by Ambrose F. Church of Halifax No. 5

Manufactured by Walling & Gray, No. 8 Arch Street, Boston, Mass. 1871.

A.F. Church & Co. Topographical Township Map of Hants County, 1871.

 **Zoom in with PDF enlargements. [Click a location on the map](#), or choose from the present day geographical descriptions listed below the map.**



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Map Inserts:

- o ☐ Avondale / ☐ Brooklyn / ☐ Ellershouse / ☐ Hantsport / ☐ Maitland / ☐ Mount Uniacke / ☐ Renfrew / ☐ Shubenacadie / ☐ Walton / ☐ Windsor

Map Locations: (using current geographical names which may not be present on map)

- o ☐ ch_1a: Burntcoat, Minasville, Moose Brook, Tennycap
- o ☐ ch_1b: Burntcoat, Densmore Mills, Gormanville, Minasville, NOEL, Noel Shore, Northfield
- o ☐ ch_1c: Latties Brook, MAITLAND, Maple Grove, Noel Shore, (ROCKVILLE), Selma, South Maitland
- o ☐ ch_2a: Bramber, Cambridge, Cheverie, Goshen, KEMPT Shore, Pembroke

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