

Pidgeons of New Brunswick, Canada

Settlements of St John and Fredericton

After the Americans declared independence from Great Britain in 1776, the War of Independence (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War) continued for another seven years, until the Treaty of Paris was signed in February 1783. During this period the British fought against the “rebels” but were eventually defeated, after the French and Spanish joined in on the side of the Americans. One of the last strongholds of the British was the area around New York, and after the signing of the Treaty many of those who were loyal to British left the area and moved north into Canada. These refugees were mostly American colonists, but also included soldiers from the defeated army who decided not to return to Britain. Many of them made the difficult overland trek to what we now know as Ontario and Quebec. Some of them sailed north to Nova Scotia, which then included what is now New Brunswick. Most settled in present-day Nova Scotia, but others settled north of the Bay of Fundy at what is now known as the City of St John.

On 18th May, 1783 the first of two fleets of ships arrived at Parrtown, Nova Scotia on the banks of the St John River north of the Bay of Fundy. A month later, another ship arrived.

Previously, this part of Nova Scotia had been mostly unoccupied by Europeans. In the late 17th century the French built Fort Nashwaak on the north side of the river at present-day Fredericton, but later abandoned it. In 1732 an area south of the river about a mile upriver from Nashwaak was settled by the French fleeing from the British in Nova Scotia. They named it Pointe-Sainte-Anne, which became Ste Anne’s Point after the British captured it in 1759. When the British arrived from New York in 1783, most settled on either side of the river’s estuary at Parrtown and Carleton, but a few sailed upriver to Ste Anne’s Point.

In 1784 the new arrivals persuaded the British government to split the territory of Nova Scotia, and the province of New Brunswick was established, named after Braunschweig, or Brunswick as it was known in English – the ancestral town of the Hanoverian Kings of the UK. The area of Ste Anne’s Point was chosen over Parrtown to be the new capital because of its inland location, which made it less prone to American attack from the sea. It was first named Frederick’s Town, in honour of King William III’s second son Prince Frederick Augustus, Duke of York. In 1785, it was shortened to Fredericton, and the settlements at Parrtown and Carleton were combined to form the first incorporated city of British North America as the City of St John.

United Empire Loyalists

In 1789 Lord Dorchester, the Governor General of British North America declared that all “those Loyalists who had adhered to the Unity of the Empire” before the 1783 Treaty should be given a mark of honour and be allowed to use the letters UE after their names. This honour was to include all their children and descendants, and although the use of the letters is no longer in use, these original settlers became to be known as the United Empire Loyalists, or UELs.

When the City of St John was formed in 1785 it had a population of about 14,000 people. Were there any Pidgeons amongst them? Sadly, we don’t know. Surviving lists of UELs of New Brunswick are few. Similarly, there are very few surviving records of births, marriages and deaths before about 1870. The first census which covered New Brunswick was in 1851, but the only records which survive from the County of St John were for two rural areas along the coast east of the City, and contains no Pidgeons. In 1861, only 25 pages survive for St John County, for the Carleton section of the City, but again there no Pidgeons, although there were a few living to the north around Fredericton.

The first real insight into Pidgeons of New Brunswick comes from the census of 1871, over 80 years after they *may* have arrived with the UELs. In addition there are some surviving City and Area Directories dating from 1864, which listed the heads of households and gave their address and occupation. Put together with the birth, marriage and death records which survive from around the same time, this information has been used to compile a picture of the Pidgeons of New Brunswick. However, the picture is very blurred before about 1870.

Pidgeons of St John

In 1864 Hutchinson's St John Directory lists five Pidgeons:

Pidgeon David, steamboat captain, h Main cor Marble, Indiantown.

Pidgeon Jacob, steamboat captain, h Main cor Adelaide.

Pidgeon Jacob R, deliverer of timber, h Marble off Main, Indiantown.

Pidgeon Richard, lumberman, h Metcalfe cor Albert, Indiantown.

Pidgeon Thomas C, carpenter, h Charles n Sherriff.

In 1870, the same directory included three more Pidgeons, in addition to those above:

Pidgeon Alonzo, surveyor, h Paradise Row.

Pidgeon C Burpee, grocer, Main n Marble, bds Indiantown.

Pidgeon William B, carpenter, Charles cor Main, Indiantown.

Indiantown was in an area of St John known as North End. 'h' refers to the home address; in 1864 David lived at the corner of Main Street and Marble Street. These Pidgeons possibly belonged to the same family, but there is no surviving evidence, except that David was the father of C Burpee, and we know that C Burpee was the father of the actor Walter Pidgeon.

Caleb Burpee Pidgeon was born in 1847, the son of David Manchester and Susan H Pidgeon. We know this from the marriage record of Caleb (or CB as he usually was known) to his second wife Margaret Munroe. When he married for a third time, he gave his parents as David and Mary Pidgeon. Susan must have died sometime between 1847 and 1860 and David had remarried. It was Mary with whom we find him living in the 1871 census and subsequently. He eventually died at the age of 86 years in 1903. By the time CB married Walter's mother Hannah Sophronia Sanburn in 1896, he probably viewed his step-mother Mary as his real mother. According to the 1901 census **David Pidgeon** was born on 5th April 1817, and was of English origin.

Jacob Pidgeon may have been David's older brother. They were both captains of steamboats, and Jacob was born about 1810, but was he of English or *Irish* origin? In the 1871 census he says he was English. In the 1881 census, he says Irish, but he was lodging with his Irish brother-in-law David Ramsey who may have given the enumerator false information. The word 'American' has been crossed out and replaced by 'Irish'. He had probably died by 1891, so these two census reports are the only evidence available. On balance, he was probably of English origin.

Jacob Robert Pidgeon was probably the son of Jacob, born in 1830 according to the 1901 census. He had various jobs before becoming a clerk with the postal service. He cannot be definitely linked to Jacob senior as his father, but he was of English origin.

The carpenter **William B Pidgeon** was born about 1805, according to his age given in the 1881 census, when he was living with his son James, who was also a carpenter. William could have been an older brother of Jacob and David.

We don't know when **Richard Pidgeon** was born. We do know that Richard Pidgeon and Sarah Peters were the parents of Horatio Pidgeon, who was born at St John in 1856. So Richard could have been born about 1830, and could have been the son of either William B or Jacob. For another reason, I will suggest later he might have been the son of William B.

Thomas C Pidgeon married Mary Ann Fritch. There is no record of his age, but Mary was born about 1833, so Thomas was probably born a year or so earlier, and could also have been the son of either William B or Jacob. As he was a carpenter, perhaps he was the son of William B.

Alonzo Pidgeon presents a mystery – was he one man, or were there two of them? One was referred to as Edward A, Alonzo or simply E A. The other was just Alonzo. The one was married to Amanda J Haley. The other to Ethel. Both were surveyors, and both lived on Main St in 1890. Perhaps he was one man, who married twice? No marriage records have survived, but two Alonzos do not appear in the same census. In the 1881 census, Alonzo and Ethel were living with Harry (6) and May (3). In 1891 E A and Amanda were living with Elbridge D (14), Roy (6) and Hazel (4). No contemporary birth records have survived. In 1949 Elbridge declared that Hazel was born on 23 Feb, 1890 – he was three years out, if she was 4 in the 1891 census – and that he was her eldest brother, and her parents were Alonzo and Amanda Haley. It is possible that Ethel, Harry and May died between 1881 and 1891, but where was Elbridge in 1881, and who was his mother? When he married in 1900, Elbridge claimed his parents were Edward and Amanda. I think there was only

one Alonzo, “Ethel” was an enumerator error (should have been Amanda), “Harry” was Garry (Elbridge’s second name), May died, and nobody in that family had any idea how old they were, or when they were born – the ages of everyone vary from census to census. Alonzo and his brothers Charles T and George were the sons of Frances L Pidgeon, who was born about 1818 and was the widow of Charles Pidgeon.

All the above Pidgeons are probably related, but there are no records to say how. On the family tree of the Pidgeons of St John, they are shown in separate family groups, except where there is a strong probability of a relationship. To show the uncertainty of the relationship, it is indicated by a bold red **?** I said above that there was another reason why Richard was probably the son of William B. This was because one of Richard’s grandsons was named William Bayard, who named one of his own sons Bayard James. Bayard would appear to be a ‘family name’, and *may possibly* be the middle name of William B Pidgeon.

Many details on the tree have been deduced from many sources, from both New Brunswick and the USA, to where several of the these Pidgeons later moved. Apart from the uncertain relationships mentioned above, all details can be substantiated, although the sources are too numerous to list.

Pidgeons of Fredericton

Fredericton became the capital of New Brunswick in 1785, and in three years developed from a sparsely populated area into the capital of the new colony. There are no surviving records from those early days which tell us if any Pidgeons lived there, but there was a Pidgeon family living in the area by the mid 19th century, according to the first census of 1851. He was George Pidgeon, born about 1800 or just before, in Ireland. He probably emigrated to New Brunswick about 1820; his son Edward was born there in 1823. Thomas Pidgeon, who was married at Fredericton in 1852, was *probably* another son, although there is no surviving evidence to confirm this.

Another George Pidgeon appeared in Fredericton in 1885, when his son was born at Kingsclere. As he was of English origin, he would not have been related to the older George from Ireland.

For the family trees of these Pidgeons of St John, see:

http://www.pid-gen.uk/PIDGEON/Trees/Tree_St-John.html

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