

**Toronto Telegram, September 6, 1947**  
**Schooner Days DCCCXI (811)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

### **Wee Sir John A. and his Hay Bay playmates**

APPLE orchards and fields of wheat and barley soon flourished amid the blackened stumps of the Loyalist clearings on Hay Bay shores. A little boy made mudpies on the bank when he was four years old. His home was right beside the water. and his mother must have worried every time she heard a splashing wave. When the Hay Bay pilgrims of 1947 landed, as was told last week, the first thing they sighted was a familiar "cairn," a steep obelisk of cemented fieldstones with a familiar National-Sites-and-Monuments plate of which the first line said:

SIR JOHN ALEXANDER

Turning aside to learn of the unknown celebrity they read below,

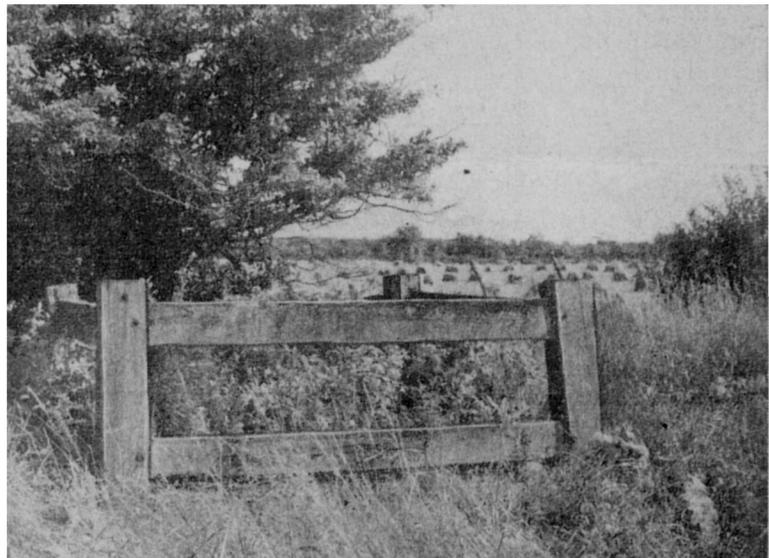
MACDONALD

1815-1891

"Prom this soil home of the loyalist he drew inspiration to weld . . .

"Must have used a sand pump," commented a pilgrim. henceforth suspected of being a disguised Red. "Look at the hole behind the fence."

There was a cellar site there among bushes between the cairn and the nearby water. A sunbrowned farm lady. Mrs. Brooks, with a nice little girl and wise old collie named Jiggs. said the hole was the cellar of the house where the Macdonalds lived when wee Sir John A.-to-be was a child of four. Canniff Haight said the father of Sir John A. Macdonald kept a store a short distance to the east of the meeting house on Hay Bay and it was a small clap- board building, painted red. This spot was west, not east, of the old Methodist



*Hay Bay's Tragedy of 1819: Eighteen tried to cross the water to go to Church.*

church. All the inspiration young John Alexander got from the soil here would be in the "welding" of mud. for which the adjacent water of Hay Bay still affords excellent facilities. By the time he was ten the family had moved to the Stone Mills of Glenora, five miles southwest.

The whole inscription said he drew inspiration "to weld together the weak and scattered

colonies of his day into a strong and ambitious dominion equal partner in the far-flung British commonwealth" but omitted the post office address of the said commonwealth — and all mention of the Macdonalds ever having had house or home here, or when, or what it was like.

SCULPTURED marble in St. Paul's Cathedral properly commemorates Sir John A. Macdonald. Empire statesman, but some of the play—mates of little Johnny sleep close by this childhood home of his on the Bay. Wonder if he saw — he could hardly remember being so young —

"John and Jane German. Peter Bogart also.  
Mary and Jane Detlor in the waters below  
Matilda Roblin and Betsey McCoy  
Betsey Clarke, Huldah Madden, and the said Mary Cole"?

All are familiar Loyalist names, frequent still in Prince Edward and Addington. The verse is rude, but so is what it celebrates. On Sunday, Aug. 29th. 1819 a ferry boat filled with church bound young folk was crossing Hay Bay near the Devil's Elbow narrows, when it swamped and turned over. The bay is not wide here and a ferry passage of a few hundred yards saved a 15-mile trudge or wagon drive round the head of it for those coming from the north to the old Methodist chapel on the south side.

"The boat being small and their number eighteen  
To go over together they all ventured in  
They launched away singing a sweet exercise  
The moment near by them was bid from their eyes."

There are many verses, the most pathetic telling how the poor passengers. old and young, baled with their Sunday hats to save their lives.

"They looked at each other and began to weep  
The boat filled with water and sank in the deep."

Figures vary with every account, high and low quotations being 32 passengers and 19 drowned and 18 passengers and eight saved. Taking the lowest record. it was still a major calamity in this first generation of Loyalist settlement, and gruesome in its detail.

Hay Bay has always abounded in fish, and net stakes still mark its narrows. With the resourcefulness of pioneers those on the shore ran out a seine net and swept the bottom, bringing to the land both the bodies of the drowned and survivors clinging to the upturned craft. The shore resounded with wails of anguish and cries of rejoicing, tears and prayers, grief and joy, as friends and parents recovered loved ones living or dead.

The ten were buried on the following Monday, when, to again quote the curious poem:

"A sermon was delivered on that solemn scene,  
By Sir Isaac Puffer from Job 19."

Sir? Perhaps in error for the Rev. Perhaps from "Sir reverence" that is. "Save his reverence." Knights among pioneer Methodist parsons were few.

THE pilgrims of 1947 assumed that the one fenced enclosure in the old cemetery, across the road from the church, contained the grave or graves of the ten. It was large enough, surrounded by stout oaken posts and timbers, morticed and bolted, bespeaking a time when good timber was plentiful and to hand. A large haw or thornapple tree had grown at the head. Tangled timothy was knee-deep all over the cemetery and over this plot and a wheat field ripe unto harvest by less grim reapers waved behind. The hay may conceal a hundred fallen headstones. Beneath it, in the enclosure, was one stone showing the initials "C. C." or "G. G." and probably many others.

ALL the original gravestones in this Gods acre had fallen, save one. This stood tilted curiously cornerwise, with an interesting inscription. "In memory of John Roblin who died Feb. 28th. 1813, aged 38 years 9 mos. 26 days."

John Roblin was a little child in the American Revolution. His Loyalist home was shot up by louts who sent eleven bullets through the windows. One of them struck him in the knee. With his mother and little brothers he was dragged to a concentration camp where some army sawbones completed the work of the bullet by operating so clumsily that his leg was permanently injured. Escaping to Canada with the Loyalists he and his brother Stephen were in the first Adolphustown colony, and "drew land." He mustered for the War of 1812 though permanently crippled. When he dies in the second year of the war, his plucky widow with her orphans crossed over to the High Shore in Ameliasburg, a few miles from Hay Bay. She made £5 spinning homespun that first winter. With this she bought a "lot" or farmsite on Roblin's Cove, which had not been settled. She built a little log mill, the first of five – three grist, one lumber, one planing – which made the cove ring with industry and turned it into a shipyard from which schooners went to South America. Son and grandson developed the mills.



*One Loyalist's bed: This little boy, shot in the American Revolution, live to muster for the War of 1812 and sleeps beside Hay Bay.*

Grass has grown alike over her husbands grave and the millstones which ground so

merrily. But her great grandson, Adolphus Roblin. Now 83, lives in handsome Victorian stone house which his grandfather built, on the high shore above the Cove. By a coincidence, the pilgrims aforesaid happened to call on him that evening, after finding the gravestone of his great grandfather in the afternoon. Roblin's Cove is just across the Long Reach from the mouth of Hay Bay, and Adolphus Roblin's house is about five miles from where the little boy wounded so long ago sleeps so securely.

The only other stoneseen standing in Hay Bay cemetery was a fine block of granite recently placed by the Huff Family Association in memory of "Paul and Solomon Huff, United Empire Loyalists, True to King and Country." Many other Loyalists, marked or unmarked, sleep beneath the matted grass.