

THE BLEECKER FAMILY

Pioneer Life in the Bay of Quinte

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The Bleeckers are descended from an old Holland Colonial family of New York. At a convention held at Albany as early as 1669, there was present a Jan Janse Bleecker; and twenty years later, in a letter written from Albany, the name of a Captain Bleecker appears. After the massacre of Schnectady, a meeting was called at Albany to arrange for the burial of the victims, and to provide some means of defence against future attacks of the French and their Indian allies; A. J. Bleecker is mentioned among those who took an active part at the meeting. Several others of the family are given in a published list of the freeholders of the city and county of Albany for the year 1720.

John R. Bleecker, the Trenton pioneer, came from near Albany, in which city his father was a merchant. Shortly after his father's death his mother brought him and his sister to Kingston in company with a McKenzie family. John R. studied surveying, and at the age of eighteen was employed by the Government to assist in laying out the townships in the Bay of Quinte District. His mother married the McKenzie pioneer. His sister married George Finkle, a merchant and distiller and founder of the Canadian family of that name. She was a woman of business ability, and when left a widow engaged in the steamboat business with Henry Gildersleeve.

Young Bleecker, while acting as assistant surveyor, became acquainted with Captain John Walten Meyers, who was at the time living in Montreal. He located his own land on both sides of the Trent, recognizing the importance of the situation as an Indian trading station. During those early years of his bush life he had much to do with the Indians, and was recognized as a man of authority among them. Like all the old pioneers he looked upon rum as a panacea for every ill that human flesh is heir to, and always kept a good supply on hand. The red men who were dispossessed of their God given inheritance were exceedingly fond of the fire water, not because it tickled their palates, but because it gave them dare-devil spirit and made them "big injuns" in their own estimations. It is related how on a certain occasion before the magisterial club of British authority had reduced Bleecker's red neighbors to a passive condition of law-abiding citizenship, they resolved to attack the Bleecker castle and fill their red skins with Bleecker's rum. But as they had to scale walls of logs, Bleecker saved his rum by pounding on the knuckles of each red hand as it grasped the uppermost log in its owner's attempt to get inside. T. Howard Bleecker, of Trenton, a grandson of the old pioneer, says that when the home was

attacked his grandmother stood guard at the door. An Indian approached her with a spear, but his grandfather, perceiving him, drew her aside, thus saving her life, as the spear was thrust through the door. He had her conveyed to a cabin about a mile distant, and that same night she gave birth to her firstborn.

The following tradition relating to the legend which gave the small island at the head of the Bay the name of "Fighting Indian" Island is derived from the same source. A band of Mississagas were in pursuit of a band of Mohawks. They had gone up the great lakes to Georgian Bay, and thence down the usual route by way of Lake Simcoe to the mouth of the Trent River. Arrived there, the Mohawks secreted themselves on the island at the head of the bay. In due time their pursuers discovered their encampment, and one foggy night, fastening their canoes one behind the other in a straight line, stealthily approached the island and attacked the sleeping Mohawk. Although one squaw awakened and gave the alarm, only one Mohawk warrior managed to escape; and, for several days after, he was to be seen skulking about the Bleecker store and house.

Another member of the family relates how the old pioneer sat on a bench outside his cabin smoking a pipe when two Indians came paddling by in a canoe, and when directly opposite him one took deliberate aim and fired at him, the ball entering a log just above his head. Bleecker rushed to the shore, sprung into his own canoe and gave chase. As he neared the Indian's canoe the one who had fired the shot jumped overboard. But Bleecker caught him and gave him a thrashing, for in a rough-and-tumble combat he was a match for three or four Indians, and they were all afraid of him.

The pioneer was commissioned a Justice of the Peace, and in the early days, Squire Bleecker, of Trenton, and Captain Meyers, of Meyers Creek, were important personages. The Squire married the Captain's daughter, Catharine, and had two sons by this marriage--John R., and George. After her death, he fell in love with Mary, another daughter of the Captain, who, knowing that the Squire had proved a model husband to her sister Catharine, fell in love with him; and so they were betrothed. But the old Captain would not have it so. He was headstrong, worldly, and not overmuch given to piety, but yet was scrupulous in his religious notions. The idea of a girl marrying her own brother-in-law was not only a flagrant violation of all the known proprieties, but a sin in the sight of God. He put down his cow-hide boot with a crash that might have been heard all the way to Trenton, and swore that such a union should not be! But love, like truth, is mighty, and in the end prevails. There are conflicting versions given of the elopement. The Squire and Mary did not run away; they paddled away during the absence of the old Captain. As he had gone down to Montreal with his batteau, the Squire and his sweetheart took advantage of his absence. They resolved to go to Kingston in a clandestine manner to have the marriage solemnized. Unfortunately they arrived there only to run against the Captain on his return. His suspicions were at once aroused, and he landed with "blood in his eye." The Squire succeeded in eluding him, and Mary disguised herself by wrapping an Indian blanket about her, and squatting among a group of squaws. It was well that it happened so, for the Captain was determined, and had the two

met on that occasion there might have been one less Squire on the Bay or Quinte. This elopement occurred when the new province of Upper Canada was one year old. By this marriage our pioneer had three sons--Tobias, Gilbert and Henry; and two daughters--Katie and Jane.

He died, comparatively a young man, in 1807. Among his many enterprises was the building of a mill on Rawdon Brook near the present village of Stirling. It was while engaged at this work that he contracted the cold, which caused his death. He died intestate at the age of forty five years. His eldest son acquired all the property, and his widow with the remaining children returned to the mouth of the river, where she opened an hotel and operated a ferry. In this way she supported her family and made money over and above their needs. She attained to the ripe old age of ninety-five years.

For over quarter of a century, Thomas Howard Bleecker, a grandson of the pioneer, has been proprietor of the "Gilbert House," at Trenton, well known as one of the most comfortable and well kept hotels in the Dominion. His mother, Elizabeth Ritchie, was only fifteen when she was married to John R. Bleecker, at Bath. Directly after the ceremony they started in a canoe for Trenton. Camping over night on Captain John's Island, they reached home the following day. Three months later the young bride had occasion to go to Bath to visit her parents. She went alone and on horseback, fording every stream between Trenton and Bath, with the exception of the Trent and Moira, over which she was ferried. She followed the Bay and found her way through long stretches of tangled forest. T. Howard Bleecker has two sons--William Adam and George Henry. The former is manager of the "Gilbert Hotel," the latter, a graduate of Queen's University, Kingston! is a medical doctor. Both are leading, progressive young men, highly respected in the community.

Captain Walten Meyers, father-in-law of the pioneer Bleecker, gave each of his thirty-nine grandchildren a farm or an equivalent in money. Henry Bleecker received a farm of one hundred and fifty acres, on lot 13, of the 3rd concession of Sidney. He married Sarah, daughter of Peter Leavens, one of the pioneers of the Hallowell family of that name. He was Clerk of the Division Court for Trenton and Sidney for many years. He assisted the early surveyors in their surveys of Sidney, and in later years was looked upon as quite an authority when such matters were in dispute. His son, Henry G. Bleecker, was partly educated in the Bloomfield Quaker Seminary. He married Ella Lawrence, a granddaughter of Reuben White. They have two children--Dougall L., who married Lillie Chapman, daughter of the Postmaster at FrankLord; and Ina, who is unmarried. Henry G. Bleecker ran for member of the Ontario Legislature in 1898, but was defeated by a comparatively small majority. At the present time he is a Road Commissioner of Hastings County. In this connection it may be mentioned that few townships in Ontario can boast of better roads than Sidney--a fact due to such men as Henry G. Bleecker and his predecessors.

Donald G. Bleecker, grandson of Tobias Bleecker and great-grandson of the Pioneer, was born in Belleville, January 22nd, 186G, and educated at the public

schools and Albert College. He served his apprenticeship in the drug business with L. W. Yeomans, Belleville, one of the oldest drug houses in Canada. Later he graduated at the College of Pharmacy, Toronto, and then spent three and one-half years in the large establishment of Parke, Davis & Company, Detroit, as manager of a department. From Detroit, he returned to the employ of L. W. Yeomans, where he became head clerk. In 1904 he purchased the drug business of Alex. Roy; the store is centrally located, and is unsurpassed by any in the Bay of Quinte district.

Mr. Bleecker is well-known as an admirer of good horses. He is a member of the Moira Lodge, A.F. and A.M.; attends the Bridge Street Methodist Church, and his political leanings are with the Liberal Party.

JOHN R. BLEECKER

The Children and Grandchildren:

I. John R. Bleecker, b. 1787; d. 1874; m. Elizabeth Ritchie, b. 1795, d. 1876; set. Sidney. Issue: (1) John R., (2) James, (3) George, (4) Jacob, (5) Henry, (6) William, (7) Gilbert, (8) T. Howard, (9) lane, (10) Rachael, (11) Susannah and (12) Anna.

II. George Bleecker, m. Elsie Ritchie, set. Thurlow. Issue: (1) Ann, m. 1st, Judge B. Dougall and 2nd Dougall. Issue: (1) Helen, (2) Harriet A. and (3) Allecia.

III. Tobias Bleecker, b. 1797; d. 1866; was four times married: set. Thurlow. Issue: (1) William, (2) John J. Flint, (3) Jane, (4) Sarah, (5) Matilda and (6) Mary E.

IV. Gilbert Bleecker, b. 1799; d. 185D, m. Mary A. Walker; set. finally Sidney. Issue: (1) George, (2) Charles, (3) William, (4) Caroline (5) Jane and (6) Ella.

V. Henry Bleecker, b. 1805; d. 1881; m. Sarah Leavens; Set. Sidney. Issue: (1) John, (2) Dougall and (3) Henry G.

VI. Catharine Bleecker, m. John Orr; set. Sidney. Issue: (1) Gilbert, (2) Samuel, (3) Wesley, (4) William, (5) Bleecker, (6) Mary A., (7) Maria, (8) Susanna and (9) Caroline.

VII. Jane Bleecker, m. William Ripson; set. Sidney. Issue: (1) George; set. Rochester.

The Grandchildren and Issue:

See I. The John R. Bleecker Branch:

- (1) John R. Bleecker, m. Susanan Burnham; set. Wisconsin.
- (2) James Bleecker, unm.
- (3) George Bleecker, m. Elizabeth Burnham; set. Wisconsin.
- (4) Jacob Bleecker, unm.
- (5) Henry Bleecker, m. Hannah Abbott; set. Trenton. Issue:
(a) Howard, (b) James, (c) William, (d) Lewis and (e) Addie.
- (6) William Bleecker, m. Mrs. Sager. No issue.
- (7) T. Howard Bleecker, m. Isabel Young; set. Trenton. Issue:
(a) William A., and (b) George H.
- (8) Gilbert Bleecker, unm.
- (9) Jane Bleecker, m. W. H. Nugent; set. on St. Clair River.
- (10) Rachael Bleecker.
- (11) Susannah Bleecker, m. Samuel Bryant; set. Ameliasburgh.
- (12) Anna Bleecker, m. John Hennessey; set. Murray.

See II. The Tobias Bleecker Branch:

- (1) William Bleecker, m. Janet Siericks; set. Belleville. Issue:
(a) Henry, m. Sarah Nosworthy; set. Los Angeles, Cal.;
(b) Tobias, m. Lila Jones; set. Boston; (c) Mary, d. unm.;
(d) Herman, m. Sarah Vandewater; set. Sidney, no issue,
(e) Frederick, m. Mary Bragg; set. Belleville;
(f) Louis, d.y.
(g) Donald Gilbert Bleecker, unm., druggist; set. Belleville, and
(h) Ella Bleecker, unm.
- (2) John J. Bleecker Flint, Police Magistrate, BelleVille, m. Eliza Holt;
no issue.
- (3) Jane Bleecker, m. Ellis Burrell; set. Belleville.
Issue: (a) Emma Burrell, m. W. F. Carrier; set Toronto.
Issue: Ella, Gertrude and Jessie;
(b) Ella Burrell, m. M. C. Bogart; set. Belleville;
(c) Mary E. Burrell, m. J. W. Champion; set. Vancouver. Issue: Rosa, m. Colonel
Warren;

- (d) Ellis B. Burrell, m. Mary R. Bogart; set. Campbellford. Issue: Mary, Julia and Ellis;
- (e) Julia F. Burrell, m. J. P. Byers; set. Brockville. Issue: Rhoda and Ellis; and
- (f) Harry S. Burrell, unm.; set Belleville.

See IV The Gilbert Bleecker Branch:

- (1) George Bleecker, m. Sarah Johns; set. Marmora.
- (2) Charles Bleecker, m. Charlotte Davis; set. Sidney.
He was drowned, 1862; no issue.
- (3) William Bleecker, m. Samantha Fralick; set. Sidney.
- (4) Caroline Bleecker, m. Alfred Pitts; set. Belleville; no issue.
- (5) Jane Bleecker, m. George Ketcheson; set. Sidney.
- (6) Ella Bleecker, m. William Duffy; set. Michigan.

See V. The Henry Bleecker Branch:

- (1) John Bleecker, m. Hester White; set. Sidney. Issue: (a) John.
- (2) Dougall Bleecker, d. unm.
- (4) Henry G. Bleecker, b. 1850; m. Ella Lawrence; set. Sidney. Issue;
(a) Douglass L., m. Lile Chapman; set. Sidney, and
(b) Ina, unm.; set. Sidney.