

### III.

#### PETITIONS FOR GRANTS OF LAND. 1792-6.

#### INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY BRIG.-GEN. E. A. CRUIKSHANK, L.L.D., ERE

Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe's proclamation, published at Quebec on the 7th of February 1792, announced that one of the terms of grant and settlement of the crown Lands in the new Province of Upper Canada would be "that no Farm Lot shall be granted to any one Person which shall contain more than Two Hundred Acres; yet the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, or Person administering the Government, is allowed and permitted to grant to any Person or Person such further Quantity of Land as they may desire, not exceeding One Thousand Acres over and above what may have been before granted to them." Applications for grants were to be made by petition to the Lieutenant-Governor or his representative for the time being. Petitions came in rapidly, a considerable number being from persons seeking townships on behalf of themselves and their associates, who, they state, wished to emigrate from their present homes in New England and settle in a body in Upper Canada. Some of them purposed to bear the signature of several hundreds of such people. The great majority were from individuals who came in, either accompanied by their families, or with the intention of exploring the province for a suitable location. None of these petitions were dealt with until the Executive Council assembled at Niagara early in October 1792. Altogether some four thousand petitions were received and considered in less than four years. Quite eighty per cent. of these were from "ordinary settlers", who were contented to accept a single farm lot and expected no more. The remainder, however, came from military officers, civil officials, and many others, who thought themselves deserving of larger grants or special privileges, such as the occupation of "mill seats". A great variety of reasons for preferring such petitions was stated, sometimes in rather quaint language. Particular weight was placed upon the former services of the applicant and the public benefit to be derived from their projects in the establishment of mills, dairies, forge, salt-works, storehouses and wharves.

Such petitions seem to have been considered with great care and the decision was frequently deferred for further enquiry and better information. In many instances the petitioners attended the meeting of the Council in person and were questioned on the subject. Simcoe often presided and when he happened to be absent, particular cases were referred to him for his decision, which was endorsed on the back of the petition and initialled by him. In a general way, the endorsements show that the action of the Council was influenced by consideration of the military rank or civil standing of the applicant, his character and education, wounds received in action, losses by confiscation or accident, the size of his family, and his ability to cultivate the land and make improvements.

It is well to not that the market value of "waste" land, when saleable at any price, was seldom more than six pence per acre, and the equivalent in money for a grant of a thousand acres was not more than \$125, or scarcely enough to pay the fees for the patent and survey.

Nearly all the petitions presented at this time have been preserved and are readily accessible in the Dominion Archives. They were filed in alphabetical order according to the initial letter of the surname of the applicant and numbered in chronological order according to the date of their reception. Those now printed have been selected from among them and will serve to illustrate the action of the Executive Council of that time in dealing with a considerable variety of special cases in which some persons of note were concerned.

Loyalists could always rely upon receiving a sympathetic hearing from the Council, and Simcoe wrote bitterly at the time, "there are few families among Them but what can relate some barbarous murder, or atrocious Requisition which their relatives have undergone from the Rulers of the United States; however, those transactions may have been concealed and glossed over in Europe."