

THE PORT OF BATH FROM 1817 TO 1856

In May of 1817, a petition was sent to Lt. Gov. Francis Gore from the inhabitants of Ernestown and vicinity. The petitioners asked for a "place of entry and clearance" stating that the harbour at the Village of Ernestown (later Bath) would be convenient. The petition was granted and the first Collector of Customs appointed was Roderick McKay. His tenure was short-lived however, as he drowned in 1818 while returning from Amherst Island. McKay's brother-in-law, James Rankin, was recommended to fill the post by Daniel Hagerman. Another candidate was Solomon Johns, backed by D.M. Rogers who said that Johns was formerly a lieutenant in the Second Battalion of the K.R.R.N.Y. under Rogers' father. Hagerman countered with the claim that Johns was no friend to the government. A letter supporting John's candidacy was signed by - B. Fairfield, J.P.; Ebenezer Washburn, J.P.; Sheldin Hawley, Maj; Davis Hawley, Capt'n; Willet Casey, M.P; and Thos. Dorland, J.P. Despite the strength of John's support, Rankin, who was already employed as postmaster, was appointed.

Items seized by the Collector of Customs in 1819 & 20, presumably for non-payment of excise duties, included spelling books, woolen cloth, almanacs, primmers, history books, tobacco, tea, a horse, wagon and harness. Seized items were sold at auction with the proceeds going to the Receiver General. The costs of seizure included a search warrant and a constable to enforce the same, advertising of the sale, the cost of storage and freight to Kingston and the services of an auctioneer. One wonders how much was left for the Receiver General. The writs for seizure were issued by the Court of Quarter Sessions.

Over the next two years the Collector enlarged the list of articles seized - a schooner, salt, gun powder, tea kettle, scythes, a mason's trowel, work and fur hats plus whisky belonging to a Joseph Elliot were appropriated.

In 1823, the death of Collector Rankin signalled a new spate of applications from hopeful citizens. Local merchant George Ham was supported by Isaac Fraser and Peter McGill. John Clark applied, as did George Detlor of Fredericksburg who buttressed his claim by stating that his father had died of wounds at the Battle of York. All were disappointed however, as the use of Bath port of entry lapsed until 1829. In that year Colin MacKenzie, John Dean, George Ham, Peter Davy and Benjamin Fairfield, Jr. all applied for the combined position of Postmaster and Collector of Customs. Fairfield had support from Anthony B. Hawke,

John Stoughton (the Anglican minister) Henry Lasher, Benj. Fairfield Sr. and Angus MacDonell. As with Solomon Jones earlier, Fairfield's petition was of no avail. The Kingston Chronicle of May 9, 1829, announced that Colin MacKenzie had opened an office as the Collector of Customs at Bath. The new Collector had to provide bonds as a requisite for the position.

Two years later, MacKenzie reported that three men had paid ten pounds each for a peddler's licence.

They were Abisha Perry, George Carscallion and Addison Palmer, each licenced for one horse and wagon.

In 1833, the Collector gave an account of items on which duty was paid from Oc. 1 to Dec. 31. Benj. Davy paid on 600 bushels of salt, Wm. Davy on 38 clocks, John Detlor for 500 bus. of salt, Lewis Thorp on 910 bus. of the same, Rob't. Hope on 48 axes, J.G. Parker for one ton and 1400 castings and Jas. Clark paid for 28 barrels of beer. The next year Samuel Huffinan and Jacob Vankleak obtained licences to sell beer in the Village of Bath.

There is a lack of information from 1834 to 1848 when a petition from the Village asked that Ezra Priest be appointed Collector in place of MacKenzie who was incompetent through age and infirmities and who was being helped by a local merchant, James Donnelly. A change was made, but the new appointee was W.J. Fairfield, who reported in 1856 that he had recently erected a building, "isolated from all others for the Collection of Customs." This building appears on the Walling map of 1859 but since then has completely disappeared.