

## ERASMUS FOWKE

Erasmus Fowke was born in or near Quarndon, Derbyshire and baptised July 13, 1794. His parents were Thomas Fowke and Rebecca Wallstone Fowke, whose first child was Anna (or Hannah?), baptised in 1781, then Thomas, baptised in 1792, and last Rebecca, baptised in 1796. A Job is mentioned in the parish records as the son of Thomas and Mary, and the name Mary may be a mistake, as the family recollection is that Job was Erasmus's brother. He was baptised in 1793. The baptismal dates were not necessarily close to the children's birth dates.

Quarndon was a tiny place, only a few short miles from Derby, but during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries it was at least moderately well known in England for its healing waters. Pigot's 1835 Directory, found on the GENUKI Internet site, states that in 1821 Quarndon had just 438 inhabitants and in 1831, 487. It also mentions that, "Sir John Curzon, in 1725, bequeathed an annuity of L20. for the support of a free school, for a limited number of children of poor parents residing in Quarndon, Kedleston and Weston." Perhaps this was the school which provided Erasmus and his brothers with their education. There is nothing to indicate that the Fowke family had a lot of money. All three sons left the area to seek their fortunes.

There is a very amusing story about a certain "Nanny Fowke" from Quarndon. It is quite unlikely that Nanny Fowke was *not* related to our Fowkes, given the small size of Quarndon. Nanny Fowke was a gardener at Allestree Hall in January of 1837, when she decided that she should go to London and help her son, who was soon to appear at the Old Bailey because of some excessive behaviour celebrating the New Year. She walked the 120 miles to London in five days, through mud and the usual bad January weather, and arrived in time to help her son by addressing the judge. Her son was acquitted. Somehow her employers at Allestree Hall heard of her trip to London and sent her the money to return to Quarndon by coach. Perhaps they thought that Nanny Fowke was a little too old to walk that distance in both directions.. After all, she was over ninety years old.

Apparently Nanny lived to be 103, most of that time in her own little cottage. She continued to be a gardener at Allestree Hall until she was 98. When she died, in Derby, the Derby "Mercury" printed her obituary, in which it was stated that she retained "all her faculties" until the end. It is possible that Nanny Fowke was Erasmus Fowke's aunt, since his father had a sister named Hannah or Ann, (the names were often interchangeable) baptised in December of 1750, and "Nanny" was often a nickname for Ann or Hannah.

The members of this branch of the Fowke family were almost certainly Nonconformists. The fact that their baptismal and marriage records are not tied to a particular Anglican parish suggests this, as do Erasmus's and his brother Job's names. Also, when Erasmus married, his wife came from a well-known Nonconformist family living just four miles from Quarndon.

Erasmus became a clerk in London. There, at the age of 20-22, on November 25, 1814, he was pressganged into the British Navy, an event which, not surprisingly, changed his life. For approximately the first month of his time on the "Barbadoes" he was "a Landman", meaning that he was *not* an Able Seaman, but would have to work up to that rank, if he could. Since the British Navy was fighting a war against Napoleon's navy, neither a Landman nor an Able Seaman was in an enviable position, so Erasmus was fortunate that the ship needed a clerk and he was put in that position only one month after he came aboard.

The "Barbadoes" was built for the American Navy and was originally called the "Herald". It had been captured by the British in 1813 and during Erasmus's time at least, its commanding officer was Captain John Fleming. She was a brigantine, which meant she was about 120 feet long overall. She carried 16 cannons. From the time of her capture by the British through early May, 1815, she was employed in harassing and capturing American ships, usually in the Leeward Islands. From August 8th to August 10th of that year she participated with a number of other ships in an expedition to free Guadeloupe from the supporters of Napoleon who were still in control there. By the time Erasmus became a member of the crew, the "Barbadoes" had already taken three ships, described as "the Swedish ship 'Gothland'", the "privateer sloop 'Polly'", and the "schooner 'Commodore Decatur'". In the first five months of his time on the ship, she was successful in four battles, always, it would seem with ships less heavily armed than she was. On December 26, 1814, she took the schooner "Gallant Hull" and on January 11, 1815, the privateer schooner "Fox". In February 16, 1815 she took the "Vidette", called a letter of marque brigantine, and on March 8, she took the American privateer brig "Avon". This ship carried 14 cannons and a crew of 129, which is probably why it appears to have been a more difficult action than the previous ones. Four men in the "Barbadoes" were wounded, including a Lieutenant West, and ten men were killed and wounded on the other ship.

In the last few months of the Napoleonic War, the "Barbadoes" seems to have spent most of her time not far from the islands she was named for. The other islands in this area were mostly French possessions, such as Martinique and Guadeloupe. When she wasn't involved in a naval engagement, the "Barbadoes" must have been dodging in and out of islands, watching for enemy ships and being careful not to be taken herself. She was so heavily armed that she may have been less manoeuvrable than many of the other ships in the area. On the other hand, other ships may have preferred to stay out of her way. Her provisions no doubt came with her from England or were taken from the captured

ships.

As the clerk on the “Barbadoes”, Erasmus was the main record-keeper. It would have been his job to stand on deck during battles and record all the action, at the same time trying to stay out of the way of bullets and cannon balls, not to mention his crewmates’ rushing to and fro, a difficult feat, as the “Barbadoes” deck was crowded. In Erasmus’s letter of discharge, Captain Fleming said of him that “he performed his duty in every respect and behaved with diligence and sobriety and was always obedient to command.”

Every time the “Barbadoes” took another ship, her crew was entitled to prize money, the total amount dependent upon the size of the ship captured and the value of its cargo. The prize money was divided up among the crew members according to their rank. As a clerk, Erasmus was probably not entitled to a large share of the prize money, but I think it is likely that he saved what he earned and used it after he was discharged from the Navy, not only to set himself up in a small way in Canada, but also to travel back to England and get married.

On May 15, 1816, when the War was over, Erasmus was discharged in Port Royal, Jamaica, a long way from home. Perhaps he was told that his service in the Navy would entitle him to a land grant in Canada. Perhaps he had discovered a taste for adventure. In any case, he worked his way from Jamaica to Montreal by ship and from Montreal to the site of present-day Port Hope in the same way, reaching that area by some time in 1817. He must have arrived in Port Hope, then known as Smith’s Creek, at almost the same time as Charles Fothergill.

Charles Fothergill described his own first sight of Smith’s Creek in his diary with these words: “Took a walk while tea was preparing, up the creek into the forest ... A very good mill-stream of fine pure water flows down Smiths Creek. This village, so called from one Smith now living here who came to this spot exactly 20 years ago and built a house and mill which was the commencement of the settlement... At present I could count no more than 15 houses of which two are inns. “[ quoted in Little Tales of Port Hope, by W. Arnot Craick] Charles Fothergill opened a store in the future Port Hope, and Erasmus Fowke worked in it, as we know from a letter of commendation, dated November 8, 1817, which Fothergill wrote to accompany Erasmus Fowke’s petition for a land grant in Monaghan Township, the same township where Fothergill himself held land. This petition was deferred and apparently never granted, although Erasmus received a small grant of land in Smith Township, and perhaps the petition also helped him to acquire his land in Hope Township.

Erasmus himself had a license to run a store in 1818 and in 1819. In the fall of 1819, his brother Job arrived from England. He had travelled up the St. Lawrence River on one of John Molson’s steamboats, the “Malsham” and paid for a cabin. Perhaps Erasmus had paid his way to Canada, so that Job could help him in his business. No doubt Job managed the store while Erasmus returned to England in 1820, in order to bring back a wife.

Erasmus Fowke and Mary Wilson were married in Liverpool in 1820, probably just before they set sail together in the middle of July for Canada. Mary Wilson (1785-1849) was the daughter of Job Wilson and Mary Wallstone Wilson, the youngest girl in a family of four girls and three boys, the only girl to marry. Their home was Day Park, a well-known meeting place for Nonconformists. Evidently, the house called Day Park is still standing. In time, Erasmus and Mary had four children, a daughter, Rebecca Frances, and three sons, Thomas, Erasmus and Job Wilson.

The Fowkes sailed to Quebec City on the “Atalania”, which also carried coal and salt. Their crossing took two months, which was unusually long even in 1820. From Quebec City they travelled up the St. Lawrence to Montreal in a cabin on the “Malsham”. They must have been very glad to find that the food on the “Malsham” even included fresh fruit, grown in the gardens of Molson’s brewery. There is no story about how they travelled from Montreal to Port Hope, but we do know that it was a difficult and time-consuming journey in 1820, easier than it had been in earlier years, but still one involving a number of changes from one boat to another or perhaps from one means of transportation to another, as stage coaches were often used where otherwise rapids would have had to be traversed. Port Hope had no wharf at this time. Wharves were relatively uncommon in Canadian harbours as yet.

In 1820 Port Hope was a tiny place, in fierce competition with neighbouring Cobourg. It had a small harbour, into which came schooners and a few steamboats. There were some stores, a few breweries and distilleries, possibly a little private school. It was still a very new place and probably rather raw looking, since the trees had been cut down first, and as yet there had not been much time for the planted trees to grow big. Perhaps Erasmus was able to take his bride to a house on his 200-acre parcel of land in the Township.

The Township Assessment records for 1820 show a Fowke, Webster and Company. Ian Bowering’s The Art and Mystery of Brewing in Ontario has this listing under Port Hope. “Fowke and Webster, brewers, 1821. This partnership offered their brew to the public at \$6.00 a barrel in the August 21, 1821, edition of the York Gazette.” The partnership between the Fowke brothers and the Webster brothers (Cornelius and Nathaniel) may well have lasted until 1830. The records do suggest that they ran a store and a distillery during that period, either jointly or together. It is not clear what caused the change. After this time the Websters no longer appear on the Assessment Rolls, and in fact Cornelius Webster seems to have been a tenant farmer for a time. The Fowkes did not have a license to run a distillery after 1829. Perhaps they had discovered Temperance.

Harold Reeve, in his book, The History of the Township of Hope, mentions Job and Erasmus Fouke (sic.) being prominent in local affairs in the period from 1822-35. In December of 1830, there was a meeting in Bletcher's Tavern, whose purpose was to establish an Agricultural Society for the county of Durham. Erasmus Fowke was made the Secretary of this group, while David Smart was to be President and Jacob Choate the Treasurer. [The Historical Atlas of 1878 for Durham and Northumberland]. In later years Erasmus Fowke was a Director of the Society.

There are a few advertisements in the Cobourg Star which show that from approximately 1830 through part of 1836, Erasmus Fowke was an auctioneer and commission merchant. He also sold real estate, at least occasionally. One of the real estate advertisements he placed in the Star may have been for the Fowke home and the land around it. Since Job Fowke was not separately assessed in those years, it would seem that he was living in his brother's household and working for him.

The Fowkes still had their store and used it to sell goods on commission, at least from time to time. The store was on the east side of Walton street, perhaps on the corner with Cavan, certainly close to it. Just around that corner on Cavan was the Fowke distillery, and beyond that was the distillery belonging to David Smart. An advertisement in the Port Hope newspaper in 1844 is interesting : "For Sale The store and premises situated in the town of Port Hope, formerly owned by Messrs. Job and Erasmus Fowke, and now occupied by Walter Waller, Esq. As a stand for business it is one of the most valuable in the town, being situated on Walton Street, and the road leading to Brown's mills. The Lot contains nearly half an acre and is sufficiently large to make two good building lots."

The Port Hope Gazette and Upper Canada Independent Examiner issue for December 6, 1836 contains a rather enigmatic notice from Erasmus Fowke. It reads as follows:

"Notice.

The Subscriber, grateful for past favours, begs to announce to his Friends and the public, that (in consequence of the favourable results of the last week's Election for the peace and prosperity of this County, *in this Town in particular*, he has determined to resume his former Business of Auctioneer and Commission Merchant.

The Subscriber feels it unnecessary to say more than that he has very extensive premises for the Storage of Merchandise and Grain, and that all orders in his line will meet prompt attention.

Erasmus Fowke

Auctioneer and Commission Merchant

Port Hope, 7th July, 1836."

The two men elected from this area in 1836 were both conservatives, George Strange Boulton, closely connected with the Family Compact, and George Elliott. What made this election different from the preceding ones was that John Brown from Port Hope was *not* elected. John Brown was a conservative, and an Orangeman like Elliott, and he had close ties to the Family Compact. He was also a magistrate, controlled the Port Hope Harbor Company, and was a dangerous competitor for the businessmen of Port Hope. It seemed that it was impossible to deal on equal terms with either John Brown or his employees, largely because of the support he received from the Family Compact in Toronto.

As for Erasmus Fowke himself, he had been involved for a number of years with the petitioning campaign in his area. The leaders of this campaign, who came to be called reformers, as well as various unpleasant names by the conservatives, worked to try to bring about improvements in a number of areas of Upper Canadian life. They wrote up petitions to send to England and read them out at large public meetings where they also asked for signatures. Erasmus also wrote letters to the Colonial Secretary, asking for help with problems which were never dealt with the Legislature. In the earliest years of the petitioning campaign, the meetings were peaceful, but as time went on, more and more people tried to stop the meetings with clubs and stones. By 1837 it was too dangerous to hold any more of these meetings.

Although the Rebellion of 1837 proved to be short-lived in Upper Canada, the citizens of the time were not to know that. The men were called up to stand duty in the local militia. The Weekly Guide for May 5, 1899 printed the "Pay List of the Staff and Regimental Officers of the first Regiment of Durham Militia (including Capt. Erasmus Fowke's Company) from the time of its entry upon actual service to the date of the return of the officers to their homes. By order of his Excellency the Lieutenant Governor. December 6 until December 15, 1837." Job Fowke is not mentioned in this list, although he is mentioned elsewhere as a Lieutenant. "The officers' pay ran from 20s3d to 2s11d" and "the whole pay sheet for the officers was 40 pounds 11s, Halifax currency." "The payment of the officers and men of Capt. Fowke's company amounted to 37 pounds 10s 6d."

In his book about Port Hope, Harold Reeve quotes Charles Fothergill's Toronto Almanac of 1839, which lists Erasmus Fowke as one of a number of Majors in 1839. This may be an error, as the other Majors are grouped into two sections and Erasmus Fowke is grouped differently, with the higher-ranking officers. In later life, Erasmus was often referred to as "Colonel Fowke", although this may have been a purely honorary title.

The issues of early Port Hope newspapers which survived to be microfilmed are very scanty. There is no

further mention of Erasmus Fowke or of his business in the ones we have. There are a couple of advertisements for Job Fowke as assignee for two bankrupt businessmen in 1848 and 1849. The Port Hope Directory states that Job Fowke was a teller in the Montreal Bank and lived on King Street in 1856. The Directory of the Province of Ontario 1857 with a Gazeteer states that Job Fowke was a clerk, living on King Street. There is a reference to Job Fowke's wife dying in January of 1859, in the Port Hope newspaper. The 1861 Census for Port Hope lists Job Fowke as a grain dealer, aged 68, living in a frame 2-storey house. This is all that I know of Job Fowke. There is no sign in any of the records I have seen that Job Fowke had any children.

The Rebellion may have been brief, but the troubles associated with it continued for at least a couple of years. Every so often there were skirmishes along the Border, and many people were unfairly punished, at least by neighbours, as rebels. This time period was sometimes called "the Reign of Terror" and it must have been highly unpleasant, in spite of the fact that for part of this time Lord Durham was in the provinces collecting material for his Report. A number of Port Hope people who had been connected with the petitioning movement moved away from Port Hope at this time, most of them not to return.

Erasmus Fowke moved his family to Bowmanville in 1839 or possibly a little sooner, although he seems to have been back in Port Hope in 1842 and 1843. In 1840 he put a notice in the Cobourg Star to say that his wife and two of his children had left him. The other two children were already away from home and apprenticed. Nothing is clear about this story, but it does seem that Erasmus and his wife lived apart from this time on. Mary Fowke lived in the house in Bowmanville and worked as a dressmaker. Where Erasmus was from 1844 through 1850 is a mystery, most likely because he was not a householder. He finally turns up again in the 1851 Census for Hampton, Darlington Township, living in his Erasmus Junior's home. By this time Mary had died (1849) and been buried in Hampton Union Cemetery. Erasmus Junior was a cabinet maker in Hampton and his brother Thomas was running a tannery there. All of Erasmus and Mary's children married within the next few years.

The 1861 Census shows Erasmus Fowke living with Job Wilson and Adeline Fowke, my Great Grandparents, and their children. My Grandfather Fowke was the oldest child in that home, almost nine years old by the time *his* Grandfather Fowke died, so it is possible that the stories he told about the Fowke family came from his memories, perhaps hazy at times, of conversations he had had with his Grandfather as a little boy. One of his stories, not in any way proven at this time, was that the Fowkes were originally French Huguenots.

In April, 1863, Erasmus's daughter Rebecca died, less than three weeks after giving birth to her son Thomas. She also was buried in Hampton's Union Cemetery. Erasmus himself died in Job Wilson's home, April 7, 1866 and was buried beside his wife and daughter.

#### Sources for my information

A few of my sources should be obvious from the above text. I can supply fuller bibliographical references to anybody who needs them, as well as photocopies of the original documents mentioned. Also, I have information on Mary Wilson's family and Day Park which goes well beyond what is here.

I have written a much longer version of this story which also fills in the background better than this one does and relies on many more primary sources. I would be interested in hearing from people who want to know about this version.

In addition to the sources mentioned specifically in this text, I used three interesting websites.

1] <http://www.nhb.com/hunter/raft.jpg...> This is the Bolton family page and is a good place to read genealogical material related to the Port Hope area.

2] <http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk> I am indebted to this excellent website for my information concerning the naval engagements of the "Barbadoes".

3] TheShipsList website has transcriptions of passenger lists from the early St. Lawrence steamships.

Libby Toop  
R.R. #1  
Toledo, Ontario  
(613) 275-2503  
rgtoop@recorder.ca