

The Selkirk Colony's Hayfield Farm

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Most references to the Selkirk Colony's Hayfield Farm, a "Home" farm designed to help the colonists begin farming in a new land, and supervised by William Laidlaw,¹ place the farm on the Assiniboine River. George Bryce, the early Manitoba historian, noted that the Hayfield farm was located on the north bank of the Assiniboine River, near what is now the outskirts of the City of Winnipeg, a little above the present Agricultural College buildings.² Much later, Parks Canada historian, Robert Coutts, opined that Hayfield was established by Selkirk about four miles west of the Forks, probably near the site of the St. James Church.³ These historians probably came to this calculation as the evidence is not straight forward, and the first examination of possible spots for the farm considered the Assiniboine River.⁴ What these historian overlook, however, is the testimony of one of the first observers of the fledgling Selkirk Colony,

¹ William Laidlaw, the son of a Scottish farmer, was born around 1798. He was recruited by Lord Selkirk in 1815 to manage the home farm at Red River and accompanied Selkirk to Fort William in 1816. He arrived in Red River in January of 1817. The farm, which Laidlaw called "Hayfield", however, failed to show a profit. As a result, Laidlaw abandoned it in the fall of 1821. He blamed grasshoppers, drought, the lack of tools, and poor manpower. He then left for the United States where he joined the Columbia Fur Company, and later the American Fur Company, trading on the Upper Missouri. He retired to Liberty, Missouri with his Sioux wife and five daughters. He died there in 1852. J.M. Bumsted (ed.), *Dictionary of Manitoba Biography* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 135. Kathy Alexander, "William Laidlaw – Most Able Trapper." <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/william-laidlaw/>

² George Bryce, *The Romantic Settlement of Lord Selkirk's Colonists* (Toronto: The Musson Company, 1909), 174; and George Bryce, *The Scotsman in Canada* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1911), 396.

³ Robert Coutts, *The Forks of the Red and Assiniboine: A Thematic History, 1734-1850* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, Microfiche Report 383, 1988), 102.

⁴ It is also true, that the HBC's Experimental Farm in the 1830s, was located on the Assiniboine.

Charles Napier Bell. In 1887, he noted that “An experimental farm was started at Hayfield on the east side of the Red River, about three miles above the entrance of the Assiniboine”.⁵

In August of 1817, the Administrator of the Colony, Alexander MacDonell, took a walk with William Laidlaw “to see the place on the Ossiniboia River, where it is intended, that a farm house shall be built, for the establishment.”⁶ Very shortly thereafter, however, plans would change. Writing to Selkirk in 1818, William Laidlaw noted that:

I am vastly pleased with the situation your Lordship pitched upon for the Farm, it is certainly much superior to any place we had formerly thought of for it . . . the soil appears to be excellent I have not seen a place in R.R. so much adapted for a Farm as it is, what a beautiful place it may be made for a sheep walk nothing can beat it, it is so finely sheltered and watered there is an immense quantity of the best natural Hay I ever saw in my life upon it, which has me induced to call it Hayfield. . . . I have got one small house built upon the farm & begun a pretty large dwelling House.⁷

While the Hayfield Farm was not located on the Assiniboine River, Selkirk documents do not make clear where the farm was. This location comes into more focus in 1820-21, when it is revealed that Rev. James West had taken up residence on the farm, about 3 miles from Fort Douglas.⁸ The Winnipeg Post Journal, for the time, notes

⁵ Charles N. Bell, *The Selkirk Settlement and The Settlers* (Winnipeg: The Commerical, 1887), 30.

⁶ Journal of Alexander MacDonell, entry for 17 August 1817. LAC Selkirk Papers, C-17, Vol. 67, p. 18,176.

⁷ William Laidlaw to Selkirk, July 22, 1818, Hayfield. LAC Selkirk Papers, C-5, Vol. 15, 5210-11.

⁸ John West Journal for 6 December 1820. John West, *The Substance of A Journal During a Residence at the Red River Colony, British North America In the years 1820-1823* (Vancouver: The Alcuin Society, 1967), 23.

that no service was performed at Fort Douglas by Mr. West on 19 April 1821, “as his place of residence being the opposite side of the river and the ice broke up hindering his crossing.”⁹

This location of the Hayfield Farm, on the east bank of the Red River south of the Forks becomes even clearer with the visit of Nicholas Garry, the temporary president of the HBC’s Northern Department.¹⁰ On a visit around the settlement on August 4, 1821, Garry writes:

After Breakfast the Birds and myself attempted to cross the River in a small Bateau, an old crazy rotten Vessel. We had scarcely got half over when she began to sink when she began to sink and when with 30 Yards of the Shore she went down. . . . After Changing our Clothes we again embarked and got over safely. Called on Mr. Logan,¹¹ formerly in the Services of the Hudson’s Bay Company. . . . From Mr. Logans we rode to the French Priest, a young Man, quiet and unassuming a Mr. Picard des trois Maisons.¹² The Church is under roof with a Spire and poor Mr. Semple’s wishes fulfilled: I must confess I am anxious to see the first little Christian Church and Steeple of Wood rising through these Wilds to hear the Sound of the first Sabbath Bell which has tolled here since the Creation. Semple’s Letter. The House is very comfortable. From hence we rode two Miles to Hay Farm (Mr. Laidlaw.) Lord

⁹ Winnipeg Post Journal for Sunday, 19 April 1821. HBCA B.235/a/4, fo. 19d.

¹⁰ Nicholas Garry (1782-1856), a member of the London Committee, was appointed temporary president of the Northern Department on March 28, 1821, to do what was necessary to implement the merger agreement. He met with the NWC at Fort William to implement the merger, but to decide on the postings in the Northern Department, he had to travel to Rupert’s Land (Norway House) to establish these. John McFarland, “Garry, Nicholas,” *DCB Online*.

¹¹ Robert Logan (1773-1866) was probably born in Jamaica to a West Indian planter who moved to Montreal in the 1780s. He joined the NWC in 1801 and served at Sault Ste. Marie until 1814. In that year he was recruited by Colin Robertson to outfit his Athabasca Campaign, and accompanied Robertson west. In 1815-16 he wintered at Ile-a-la-Crosse and from 1816 to 1818 was put in charge of establishing Rock Depot at Swampy Lake. In 1818-19 he was the Master in charge of Lac La Pluie, and in 1819 was appointed Sheriff of Assiniboia at the Red River Settlement. In 1825 he purchased Fort Douglas and the Windmill at Point Douglas from the Selkirk Estate and became a settler and businessman. From 1825 to 1839 he was a Councillor of Assiniboia. He died in the Red River Settlement in 1866. HBCA B.S. J.E. Rea, “Logan, Robert,” *DCB Online*.

¹² Thomas Picard Destroismaisons (1796-1866) was born in Quebec and was ordained as a priest in 1819. He was sent to Red River in 1820 working at St. Boniface, Qu’Appelle River, Pembina, and White Horse Plain. He returned to Quebec in 1827. Nive Voisine, “Picard Destroismaisons, Thomas-Ferruce,” *DCB Online*.

Selkirk's, where I found Colonel Dickson. About 70 Acres are in cultivation but the Grasshopper had made here dreadful Devastation, whole Beds of Potatoes eaten without a Vestige remaining, fine Fields of Wheat destroyed and the whole having a most desolate melancholy Appearance. Mr. Laidlaw thinks they would deposit their Eggs again but this Opinion I consider to arise From Mr. Laidlaws we rode through what is called the German Street, the Houses very comfortable and clean, the Crops excellent where the Grasshopper had not been, nothing in the World could be finer. [see Map 1]¹³

Although the Nicholas Garry diary does not give the precise location of the Hayfield Farm, documents related to the demise of the Farm in 1824 do. In June of 1824, the governor of the Red River Settlement, Robert Pelly,¹⁴ wrote to Andrew Colvile¹⁵ that the farm had been sold to “one Batoch¹⁶ and old Company Servant who gives £300 for the farm comprising House and Buildings with 265 Acres of Land.”

Here is the longer quotation.

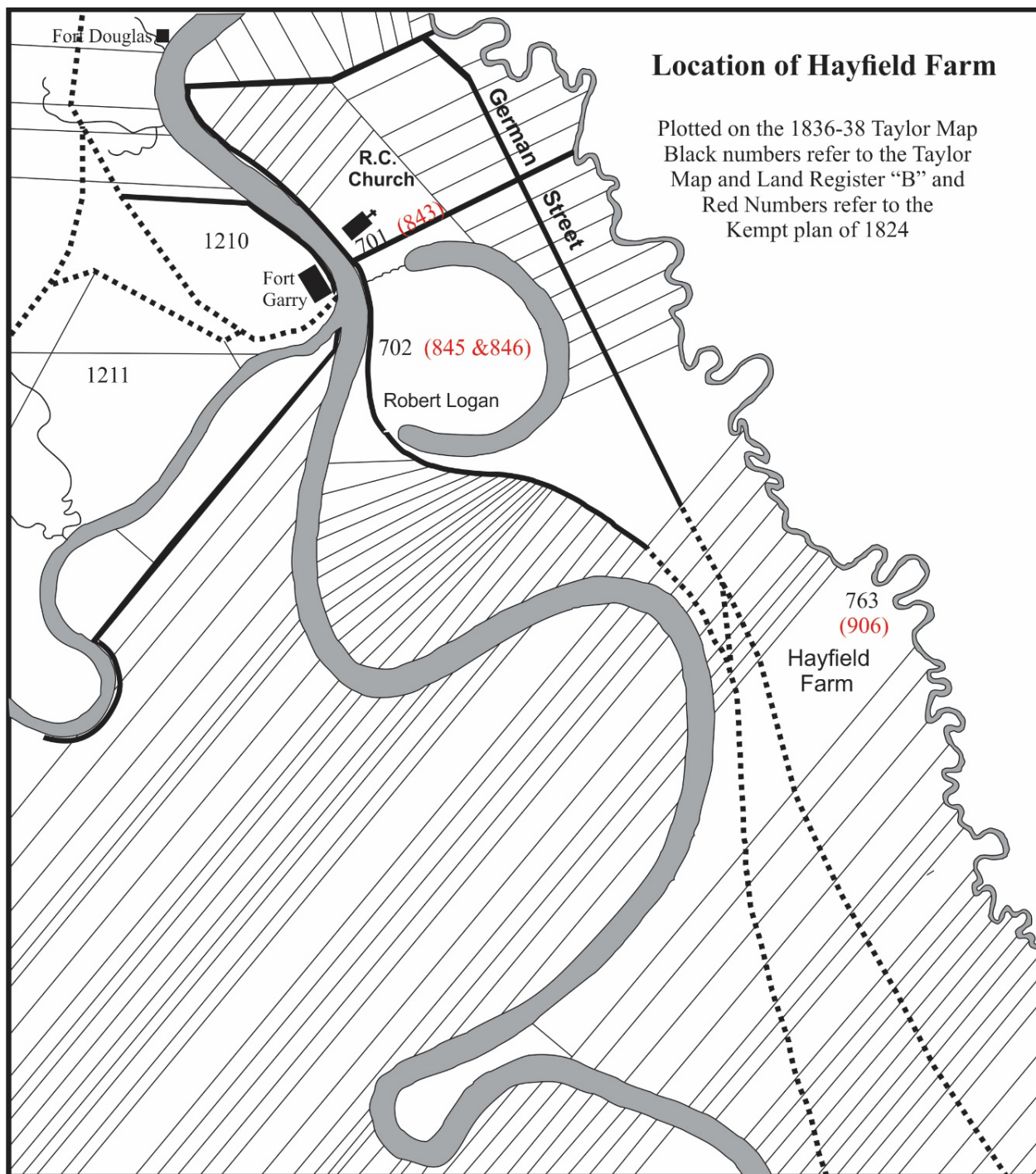
I found Mr. Kemp already in possession of the Farm at Hayfield which Captⁿ Bulger had given him early after his arrival. About one Month after my arrival he expressed to me his anxiety to be allowed to quit the Country, and to return home by the Ship in the Fall stating as his reason that he disliked the Country and as his professional Services could not be wanted after he had completed his Survey which he hoped to have done by the Spring, he trusted he should be allowed to give up his Engagement and that in such case he should relinquish the Farm. . . .

¹³ V. “Diary of Nicholas Garry, Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1822-1835. A detailed narrative of his travels in the Northwest Territories of British North America in 1821. With a portrait of Mr. Garry and other illustrations.” *Transactions of the Royal Society*, Section II, 1900, 137-139.

¹⁴ Robert Parker Pelly was the Governor of the Selkirk Colony from 1823-1826.

¹⁵ Andrew Colvile, the brother-in-law of Lord Selkirk, was at this time a member the HBC London Committee, and a Trustee of the Selkirk Estate.

¹⁶ J.B. Letendre dit Battosh (Batosh, Batoche). He was listed as interpreter at Carlton from 1821-1823 and went free to the Red River Settlement in 1824. HBCA B.60/d/12 & 14. See also Diane Payment, “Letendre, dit Batoche, Jean-Baptiste,” *DCB Online*.



Map 1 – Sources: Taylor Map 1836-38, HBCA E.6/14; Land Register 'B', HBCA E.6/2; Kempt Plan, HBCA E.6/11

I therefore consented to let him go and he returns by the Ship. . . .
 Upon this determination of Mr. Kempt which I gladly seconded it
 became a serious question what was to become of the Farm, and after

weighing the matter well & counselling with Gov^r Simpson, we thought that whatever became of it that it should not again be attached to Fort Douglas having proved annually a heavy burden to the Estate and having been a source of constant trouble and expense from its first formation. We therefore judged it expedient to advertise for its sale or lease and after allowing a sufficient time for all competitors to make tenders, we closed with an offer made by one Batosh an old Company's Servant who gives £300 for the Farm comprising House and Buildings with 265 Acres of Land. – I have rec^d a Draft for £250 in part payment and a promissory note for £50 payable in three years.¹⁷

Given the land and census records of the Colony, and given we know that the new owner, was J.B. Battosh (Letendre), it is a simple matter to locate this land by way of the Kempt survey, Census of 1827, and Land Register 'B'. This information is summarized in the next few charts.

William Kempt Index to Plan of Red River Settlement, 1824. HBCA E.6/11
<p>Lot 906 – J.B. Battosh [Letendre], Age 67, Canada, Roman Catholic Cultivated Land = 30 acres, Prairie Land = 170 acres, Woodland = 56 acres Total = 256 acres Beginning at the Post planted on the East Bank of the Red River and running thence North 51° East to the River la Seine thence along the Bank of that River twenty-eight Chains and fifty links thence south 51° West to the Red River thence N 34° West across the Point until the line strikes the Red River, & from thence along the course of the same to the place of beginning.</p> <p>Lot 10?? [Point] – Part of Farm – 60 acres Beginning at the Post planted on the East Bank of the Red River and running North 34° across the point until it strikes the _____</p>

1827 Red River Census – HBCA E.5/1
<p>Lot 906 [Kempt Survey] J.B. Letendre [Battosh], Age 66, Roman Catholic, Canada</p> <p>Wife, 1 son over 16, 3 sons under 16, 1 daughter over 15, 2 daughters under 15</p> <p>1 house, 1 barn, 3 stables</p> <p>7 horses, 1 Bull, 5 Cows, 3 Oxen</p> <p>1 plough, 2 harrows</p> <p>50 acres cultivated</p>

¹⁷ Pelly to Colville, 7 June 1824, Fort Douglas. LAC Selkirk Papers, C-8, Vol. 26, 8292-8293.

From the names of neighbours and cultivated acres it is possible to convert this lot number [906 Kempt survey] to the Taylor Survey lot number 763 and 764 [1836-38].

Land Register “B” HBCA E.6/2 1835-36
<p>Lot 763 [Taylor Plan] – Louis Battosh [son of J.B. Battosh/Letendre] (261 acres) → transferred to Alexis Henry [son of daughter Agathe Letendre who had married William Henry] → transferred to Joseph Larviolet (1841) → Transferred to Joseph Larocque (1850) → transferred to Joseph Raill (1855) → Transferred to Henry Fisher → transferred to Alexander Tache</p> <p>From the east bank of the Red River to the Riviere Seine then 28½ chains along the bank of that River and from thence W to the bank of the Red River there N 23° West across the point until the line strikes the Red River then along the course of the same the beginning</p> <p>Lot 764 – 63 acres – Original grant to Pierre Versailles gratis → J. Baptiste Laframboise → transferred to Henry Fisher → transferred to Rev. Tache. Point of River Attached to Lot 763</p>

From this information, one can say confidently say that the Hayfield Farm was located on Lots 109-110 St. Boniface (Duncan Sinclair, George McPhillips Survey of 1874).