

The 2006 OCAPG Award

This report presents the discoveries made during our investigation.

Part 2: The Report

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Robert Down's descendant Jane Down wanted to reconcile conflicting stories about his activities soon after immigrating, and when he really went to clear and occupy some Canada Company land. Did he take his family with him to the Huron Tract immediately after their arrival in Canada? Did his nephew, also called Robert, join him alone in Usborne Township the following year? How soon did either family move to Usborne, or conversely, how long did either family stay in Darlington? When necessary, we will distinguish between the older man as Robert Sr. (1794–1864), and his nephew as Robert Jr. (1807–1856).

At our request, Jane Down was able to provide more information about the two Robert Down families. For example, both uncle and nephew had married Wooldridge sisters (Robert Sr. twice) in their native County Devon, England. The Downs' chosen faith was Bible Christian, a Methodist offshoot that developed in Devon; notable clusters of adherents migrated to Canada West. Family group charts outlined many vital dates—Robert Sr. had a total of eleven children and Robert Jr. had one. All the immigrating members apparently stayed in Ontario and died here.

CHILDREN OF ROBERT DOWN SR.

Robert Down Sr. (1794–1864)

by his first wife Elizabeth Wooldridge (1803–1827)

Harriett Kestle (1825–1897) born Devon

William Down (1828–1919) born Devon

by his second wife Susannah Wooldridge (1808–1892)

Robert Down (1829–1920) born Devon

Samuel Down (1832–1912) born Devon

Thomas Down (1833–1918) born Devon

Mary Ann Balsden (1836–1924) born Devon

John Down (1838–1876) born Devon

Susannah Keddy (1840–1920) born Devon

Emanuel Down (1843–1921) born Devon

Elizabeth Blatchford (1846–1946) born Canada West

Henry Down (1850–1924) born Canada West

Jane's questions revolved around how much could be gleaned from a concentrated time period of 1846–1849. The prospects were challenging. Uncle and nephew signalled the potential for "same name" complications. Their adult sons would figure into the investigation, with the names Robert and John proliferating in later generations. Keeping everyone separately identified was essential. Through the process, at least seven men named Robert Down were encountered, and several John Downs, most of whom had to be eliminated as not of the target families.

Research began with a review of some of the sources cited in the essay. The plan then focused on

what other records might say about immigration dates and the locations of the two Roberts in the critical time period. The sources of interest were not all created within the 1846–1849 time frame but spanned the lives and deaths of family members. With such a small window of time at the heart of the investigation, a timeline for uncle and nephew became a necessary working aid and a chronological outline the best way to present the results.

The information collected during the research suggests the actual timing occurred more like this:

REVISED TIMELINE: ROBERT DOWN SR.

1846 Devon to Darlington

After investigating, we had little reason to doubt the Down family tradition that Robert Sr. and his family arrived in Canada in 1846. Eleven of thirteen sources confirmed that this was the likely year. Those sources consisted mainly of the “year of immigration” column, answered by his English-born children, in the 1901 and 1911 census returns. The only dissenting answers came from son William, in 1911 at well over the age of 90 (“1850”), and son Robert, in 1901 (“1856”).

Elizabeth Down was the first child born in Canada; therefore her date and place of birth were important to the family’s timeline. Her marriage record said her *place* of birth was Darlington.

Conflicting *dates* of birth include these:

- Elizabeth was age four in the 1851 census; the enumeration date was 12 January 1852 and ages were intended as of *next* birthday.¹ This pegged her likely year of birth at 1848.
- The 1901 census gave a date of 25 December 1846.²
- The 1911 census said merely December 1846.³
- At her marriage 16 October 1877, Elizabeth’s age was 29.⁴ Combined with evidence of a December birthday, this places her birth in 1847.
- Elizabeth’s tombstone gave the bare dates 1846-1946.⁵
- According to a newspaper reporting her death in 1946, she was born in Darlington Township on 25 December 1846 and, “She would have reached the century mark had she lived until Christmas day.”⁶

The diversity of information in those sources does not allow a clear conclusion about Elizabeth’s date of birth. We don’t know who, in the large Down household, spoke to the 1851 census enumerator. Ages are always “suspect” in any census and other records, particularly for women, it seems, who shaved off a few years here and there. Perhaps the truth won out later in life, as her advanced age became a matter of local renown. If correct, turning 100 at Christmas 1946 calls into question all other years of birth.

¹ Robert Down household, 1851 census Huron County, Usborne Township, p. 21, line 1; Library and Archives Canada (LAC) microfilm C-11728.

² John Blatchford household, 1901 census Huron South, district 74, Hensall village, subdistrict C, p. 14; digital image, Library and Archives Canada, *Canadian Genealogy Centre* (<http://www.collectionscanada.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing LAC microfilm T-6474.

³ Elizabeth Blatchford household, 1911 census Huron South, district 82, Hensall Village, subdistrict 1, p. 4; digital image, Library and Archives Canada, *Canadian Genealogy Centre* (<http://www.collectionscanada.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing LAC microfilm [T-20378].

⁴ John Blatchford-Elizabeth Down, marriage registration no. 002144 (1877); digital image, *Ancestry.ca* (<http://www.ancestry.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing Archives of Ontario (AO) microfilm MS 929 [reel 23].

⁵ Mona Aitken, Nettie Campbell and Jean Bircham, transcribers, *Hensall Union Cemetery, Lot 35, Con. 1 (North Boundary), Usborne Twp.* (Goderich, Ont., Huron County Branch, Ontario Genealogical Society, circa 1984).

⁶ “Shedden Woman Dies; Would Have Been 100 at Christmas,” *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, 9 October 1946, p. 1.

By consulting another source Jane Down had not seen, we learned there was no Robert Down in the 1846 assessment roll for Darlington, customarily recorded in the spring of the year. Together with constant references in the records to Elizabeth's birth in Ontario, the evidence implies the family arrived after the property assessment and before her birth.

1847 Darlington

The next previously unseen tax assessment roll for Darlington clearly shows the first appearance of Robert Down, and he was located at lot 10 concession 6.⁷ The roll was completed by 7 April that year. Family information is not provided on the record, but with his consistent occupation of the same property for three years (1847–1849), this can only be Robert Sr.

1848 Darlington

A review of the 1848 (heads of household only) Darlington census produced strikingly different results from Jane Down's reading. The review confirmed how easily the endless columns (well over 100) across eight pages can be misread; the enumerators themselves were not immune at times to line errors. The household for what is very likely Robert Down Sr.'s family was again occupying lot 10 concession 6.⁸ The total count was thirteen persons, all born in England, but then two were listed as natives of Canada. Thus, anomalies crept into the household statistics, including apparent confusion over farm servants and children attending school. The one married couple were in the right age category, and most of the children could be accounted for.

1849 Darlington

The family story about '*landed at Port Hope and then settled in the Exeter area*' has been interpreted by some descendants to mean the Downs hastened to the Huron District soon after arrival. This story is further undermined by Robert Down Sr.'s appearance, once again on the same property, in the 1849 Darlington assessment roll.⁹ The collector returned his roll at the end of May. Evidence from Canada Company registers does show that during this year Robert was arranging to take over Henry Kerslake's lease of lot 28 concession 2 Usborne.¹⁰ The agreement was finalized by December 1849.

1850 Darlington and Usborne

A census enumeration was completed in Usborne on 15 April 1850 and examination of the return produced another new finding. An entry for the Robert Down household recorded eight young people on 100 acres of "wild land" at lot 28 concession 2.¹¹ At this point, no land had yet been cleared or cultivated, so work was just beginning. The ages provided for the males matched the ages of Robert Sr.'s sons from the oldest, William, down to John, with one exception. Likewise, the females matched daughters Mary Ann and Susannah; one pictures their duties as "cooks and bottle washers" for their brothers, in the absence of an adult or married female (mother Susannah). The two youngest children (Emanuel and Elizabeth) were also not represented. Robert Sr. himself may not have been present, as there were no marks in the married males columns.

Determining the Down family's likely movements in this year—and probable reasons for them—also called for a study of Robert and Susannah's youngest child, Henry. Researching Henry produced no less than four different years or dates of birth. The 1851 census, the enumeration closest to

⁷ Robert Down, 1847 Assessment Roll Darlington Township, Newcastle District, semi-alphabetically arranged; AO microfilm MS 16 reel 4.

⁸ Robert Down, 1848 census Newcastle District, Darlington Township, bundle 5, line 19; AO microfilm MS 16 reel 3.

⁹ Robert Down, 1849 Assessment Roll Darlington Township, Newcastle District, semi-alphabetically arranged; AO microfilm MS 16 reel 4.

¹⁰ Agreement no. 2579, Canada Company lease registers, series B 3, vol. 30, p. 507; AO microfilm MS 729 reel 4.

¹¹ Robert Down, 1850 census United Counties of Huron, Perth & Bruce, Usborne Township, bundle 3, line 5; Family History Library (FHL) microfilm 0851368.

his birth, said he would be two at his next birthday, placing his birth in 1850.¹² The census-taker then carried on overleaf to mark Henry as a “birth during the year 1851.” Some of the confusion could be the result of the enumerator’s misunderstanding of the 1851 census requirements and our inability to determine who the informants were. Other information about his date of birth was as follows:

- Henry’s age at marriage implied a birth year of 1850 or 1851.¹³
- The 1901 census gave a date of 15 February 1851.¹⁴
- The 1911 census gave no day but said February 1849.¹⁵
- Henry’s death registration said 15 February 1852.¹⁶
- Finally, a family group sheet supplied by Jane gave the date as 2 March 1850.

The 1852 date could be discounted since Henry had been born by the time the 1851 census was enumerated in January 1852. But that still left three conflicting years: 1849, 1850 and 1851.

Henry’s birth was clearly very relevant to the family timeline from Darlington to Usborne. His birth date on Jane Down’s family group sheet came from a transcription in the well-known series, *The Marriage Registers of Upper Canada/Canada West*.¹⁷ A Bible Christian minister in Usborne reported the baptism there, 18 August 1850, of Henry Down, son of Robert and Susannah, with a birth date of 2 March 1850. The minister’s original paper returns to the District Clerk of the Peace, accessed by the transcriber at the Archives of Ontario, may still be unprocessed within the Justice Portfolio. Jane’s family group sheet reflects the assumption that both the birth and the baptism took place in Usborne. Our conclusion is that Henry was born in Darlington, as stated on his marriage and death records, and baptized in Usborne.

While Henry’s date of birth remains uncertain, the plausible theory can be advanced that in the early months of 1850, a pregnant Susannah stayed behind in Darlington with her two youngest children, to deliver her baby in relative comfort. Her husband Robert set up his crew to clear the Usborne land, and may have returned to assist her. Susannah would have been able to undertake the arduous trip to Usborne after the census date and in good time for an August baptism there.

1851-2 Usborne

Robert Down Sr. is enumerated in Usborne in the 1851 census with all of his family members except Harriett, who was married with her own household nearby.¹⁸

REVISED TIMELINE: ROBERT DOWN JR.

1850 Devon to Darlington

Our investigation found no evidence to verify the family tradition that Robert Down Jr. arrived

¹² 1851 census Huron County, Usborne Township, p. 21, line 1.

¹³ Henry Down-Rebecca Stewart, 27 March 1878, marriage registration no. 002102 (1878); digital image, *Ancestry.ca* (<http://www.ancestry.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing AO microfilm MS 932 [reel 26].

¹⁴ Henry “Downs” household, 1901 census Middlesex East, district 86, City of London, Ward 3, subdistrict C-3, p. 15; digital image, *Ancestry.ca* (<http://www.ancestry.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing LAC microfilm T-6480.

¹⁵ Henry Down household, 1911 census Middlesex East, district 94, City of London, Ward 3, subdistrict 1, p. 13; digital image, Library and Archives Canada, *Canadian Genealogy Centre* (<http://www.collectionscanada.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing LAC microfilm [T-20383].

¹⁶ Henry Down, death registration no. 020533 (1924); digital image, *Ancestry.ca* (<http://www.ancestry.ca>: accessed February 2007), citing AO microfilm MS 935 [reel 314].

¹⁷ Dan Walker and Robert W. Calder. *The Marriage Registers of Upper Canada/Canada West, Volume 3, Huron District, 1841–1870* (Delhi: NorSim Research and Publishing, 1995), p. 40; citing baptisms in 1850 by Rev. John Aaron Ralph, Returns to the Clerk of the Peace, 1841-1852. *Note*: Although some of these original returns have since been microfilmed on AO microfilms MS 5095 and MS 5096, some are still unprocessed in Archives of Ontario, CA/CP records 1853–1860.

¹⁸ 1851 census Huron County, Usborne Township, p. 21, line 1.

in Canada in 1847. Instead, several pieces of new information suggest that he came in 1850. After Robert Jr.'s premature death in 1856, his widow Ann married a Bible Christian minister.¹⁹ Ann's obituary related the journey to Canada in 1850 and how the family spent five months in Darlington Township before moving on to Usborne.²⁰ Their son John did not live to the 1911 census, but in 1901 he answered the "year of immigration" as 1850.²¹ When John died in 1908, his obituary repeated that he came to Canada in 1850 with his parents.²² The absence of a second Robert Down in the 1850 Usborne census (and the 1848 census Darlington) is negative evidence lending even more weight to this timeline.

Moreover, the property eventually owned by Robert Jr. was instead occupied by proprietor James Scott in 1850.²³ Canada Company registers substantiate Scott's original claim to lot 27 concession 2 from 5 January 1848; he transferred his lease to Robert Down in October 1850.²⁴ After three payments beginning 24 October 1850, Robert Jr. received his title deed on 7 June 1855 "converted from lease no. 1858."²⁵ Enough doubt has been cast on the family story of Robert Jr. arriving in 1847, but if new information surfaces pointing to an arrival before 1850, Jane Down will want to re-visit the issue.

1851-2 Usborne

Robert Down Jr., wife Ann and son John are enumerated immediately following Robert Sr. in the census.²⁶ The only anomaly there was a "mystery" Robert aged 17 in the nephew's household.

Added Note

Limited space prevents the presentation of all our findings, but we must acknowledge a third Robert Down who first appeared in Darlington in 1848.²⁷ Strong evidence indicates this is another Robert altogether, a carpenter who also had Devonshire origins. He had to be investigated for assurances that he was not the nephew Robert Down Jr. The carpenter's known family matches exactly the 1848 census grouping. Both this Robert and his son Robert lived and died in Bowmanville. Possibly his son Robert was the odd man in Robert Down Sr.'s 1850 pioneering household, and the mystery Robert of the 1851 census, especially if the families knew or were related to each other in the old country.

Ultimately, Susannah (Down) Keddy's obituary proved more accurate than the old family tradition. Jane Down's research is not necessarily finished. More scrutiny of Huron resources, particularly newspapers, might be in order. She can pursue the original Clerk of the Peace baptismal record. Wooldridge families were also spotted in Durham County. Jane may also wish to explore the possibility of a relationship between her Robert Down Sr. and Robert Down, the Bowmanville carpenter.

Family tradition is often the spark that kindles our interest in family history. However, its hearsay nature obliges genealogists to seek corroboration (and perhaps find contradictions) from a variety of other sources. Because even the original sources that we consult for this purpose cannot always

¹⁹ John H. Eynon-Ann Down marriage, 9 September 1864, Huron County Marriage Register, 1858-1869, RG 80-27-2, vol. 20, p. 131; AO microfilm MS 248 reel 8.

²⁰ "The Departed," (Ann Eynon), *Christian Guardian*, 7 November 1888, p. 715.

²¹ John Down household, 1901 census Perth South, district 105, Usborne Township, subdistrict 2, p. 8; digital image, Library and Archives Canada, *Canadian Genealogy Centre* (<http://www.collectionscanada.ca> : accessed February 2007), citing LAC microfilm T-6491.

²² "Death of John Down," *Exeter Times*, 9 April 1908.

²³ James Scott, 1850 census United Counties of Huron, Perth & Bruce, Usborne Township, bundle 6, line 10; FHL microfilm 0851368.

²⁴ Agreement no. 1858, Canada Company lease registers, series B3, vol. 30, p. 374; AO microfilm MS 729 reel 4.

²⁵ Agreement no. 4624, Canada Company contract registers, series B3, vol. 19, p. 492; AO microfilm MS 729 reel 1.

²⁶ Robert Down Jr. household, 1851 census Huron County, Usborne Township, p. 21, line 13; LAC microfilm C-11728.

²⁷ Robert Down, 1848 census Newcastle District, Darlington Township, bundle 8, line 16; AO microfilm MS 16 reel 3.

be trusted to contain accurate information, research standards require us to not only squeeze every bit of information from within each source, but also to critically evaluate the sources themselves—their wording, their provenance, and their creator’s circumstances or intent.

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