

CARTWRIGHT FAMILY

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The family story begins with the Loyalist, the Honourable Richard Cartwright (1759-1815). Richard Cartwright's intellectual capacities and business acumen overawed his contemporaries and single him out as an extraordinary figure in the early history of the province.

He was born in Albany, N.Y., and was educated for a career in the church. However, the American Revolution altered his future. He came to Canada in 1778 and served at Niagara as secretary to Colonel John Butler. In 1780, he formed a partnership with Robert Hamilton to become merchant middlemen and provisioners to the military. Together they controlled much of the commerce of Upper Canada, transshipping goods from Montreal and exporting wheat flour, pork, lumber, potash and pearl ash downstream from Upper Canada. Cartwright's general store in Cataraqui (Kingston), where he settled in 1784, was the most important business in town. Among myriad enterprises, he was active in ship building, owned a blacksmith shop, and the flour, saw and fulling mills at Napanee. By 1801, 25% of the flour shipped to Montreal was Cartwright flour. At his death, he bequeathed 27,000 acres of land situated throughout the province.

Cartwright's interests reached beyond commerce. He served as justice of the Mecklenburg Court of Common Pleas, magistrate of the Court of Quarter Sessions (1788), Legislative Councillor (1792), colonel of the militia (1807) and commandant of the Midland District during the 1812-14 War. He was a close adviser to successive governors of the province.

Concerned for the education of his children, he brought John (later Bishop) Strachan from Scotland in 1799 to serve as tutor and schoolmaster, and was active in church matters. He seems to have been a stern, scrupulously upright individual, with a photographic memory, superior education and intellect, and a mania for detail.

Cartwright married Magdalen Secord [sister-in-law of Laura Secord] in 1784 and they had eight children. The deaths of the four eldest children clouded the final years of Cartwright's life and he died of a lingering illness in 1815. The fortunes of the Cartwright family in Kingston came to rest with Richard Cartwright's twin sons who were aged 11 at the time of their father's death.

John Solomon Cartwright (1804-1845) was educated at Oxford and practised law in Kingston from 1830. He was Judge of the Quarter Sessions and first President of the Commercial Bank. In 1836, he was elected to the Legislative Assembly. In 1842, he refused the post of Solicitor-General because he opposed union of the Canadas.

The Reverend Robert David Cartwright (1804-1843) was also educated at Oxford, for the

ministry. He married, in Ireland, Harriet Dobbs (1808-1887) and returned in 1833 with his bride to Kingston where he served as curate of St. George's under Archdeacon George Okill Stuart. A frail, gentle individual, Robert overstrained his lungs conducting the funeral service for Lord Sydenham, and slipping into a decline, died the next spring.

Most prominent among the descendants of the Cartwright twins was Sir Richard Cartwright (1835-1912). The eldest son of the Reverend Robert Cartwright, he became President of the Commercial Bank of Canada. He sat as a federal Member of Parliament, first as a Conservative, then as a Liberal, from 1863 to 1904, at which time he entered the Senate. He was Minister of Finance under Mackenzie 1873-78, and Laurier's Minister of Trade and Commerce 1896-1904. Sir Richard's brother, Conway, was minister of St. John's Anglican Church, Portsmouth and Chaplain to the Penitentiary.

Of John Solomon's family, James became Master of Osgoode Hall, Toronto, and John became Deputy Attorney General of Ontario. Their sister Anne married Bowen Van Straubenzie of Kingston and it is through her descendants that the Cartwright items of clothing on display came to the Queen's (University) Collection of Canadian Dress.