

J.L. Côté, Surveyor

By
J.G. CÔTÉ

MY FATHER, JEAN LEON CÔTÉ, was a prominent pioneer of Alberta, not only as a surveyor, but also as a legislator and a "booster" of Alberta's natural resources, especially of the tar sands, salt, and coal. From 1913 on, he prodded both the provincial and federal governments to begin development and exploitation of Alberta's tar sands, causing the federal government to send out geologist Sidney C. Eells, who devoted the rest of his life to the development of the area. Then, with Dr. H.M. Tory, my father founded the Research Council of Alberta.

He also was a pioneer land surveyor in western Canada and was one of the founding members of the Alberta Land Surveyors Association. His partners at the time were William and Reginald Cautley, who came to Edmonton with him from Dawson City after the turn of the century.

J.L. Côté was a descendant of Jean Côté who settled in Quebec in 1634. A native of the Perche province (where perchers come from), he sailed from Dieppe, Normandy, in May 1634, as a woodsman with Robert Giffard, first seigneur of Beauport. In November 1635 Jean Côté married Anne, daughter of Abraham Martin, reputed owner of the Plains of Abraham. The original spelling of Jean Côté, was "Jehan Coste." Efforts to trace his birth record have been fruitless. He may have had the same origins as Eugene Coste, the French engineer, who pioneered in the early southern Alberta oil and gas explorations.

Jean L. Côté (or "J.L." as he was often called) was born on May 26, 1867, in the Laurentian village of Les Eboulements, Charlevoix County, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, some 90 miles north-east of Quebec City. His mother, Denise Boudreault, of Ile-aux-Coudres, below Les Eboulements, was an Acadian, while his father was the local schoolmaster, postmaster, and telegraph office agent-manager.

My father had completed his schooling at *l'Académie Commerciale* at Montmagny, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, by 1885. At eighteen, as he wanted outdoor work but not



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farming, he went to Ottawa to seek a job with the survey parties of the Department of the Interior. He went out to western Canada and to Fort Edmonton in 1886; that year he also went through to the Pacific coast on the CPR. The only Department of the Interior survey being done in Alberta that year was that of the Calgary-Edmonton Trail road allowance under Georges P. Roy, which he joined. As a result of this experience he became sold on Alberta's climate and its natural beauty and resources. He also felt that he had found the profession he desired for his future, but he soon realized that he would need further education, especially in mathematics. So, when wintering in Ottawa, he went to the Ot-

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tawa College in order to qualify as a land surveyor. In March 1890, he passed his Dominion Land Surveyor's examinations.

Afterwards, my father worked on Department of the Interior surveys out of Ottawa, mostly in western Canada, and on contracts after that. During one season, he assisted Dr. Otto Klotz on a Lake Erie Ontario boundary survey. He also helped survey the second base line from Manitoba to the North-east angle in 1900. He told me he did a survey in or around the Cypress Hills, near Medicine Hat, in the rattlesnake belt.

He was on the staff of the Alaska Boundary Commission (Preliminary) Survey during the summers of 1893-94-95, along with another pioneer Edmonton surveyor, Alfred Driscoll. In 1903 the British government's representative caved in to American demands and gave up the Alaska panhandle coastline nearly as far as Prince Rupert in a treaty which Canada's representative, Sir Louis Jetté, refused to sign. The final boundary survey was completed during World War One. A mountain near the United States border in the Ketchikan-Wrangell area was named Mount Coté.

In Alberta, a mountain north-west of Jasper National Park was named after my father in 1926; there also is a creek bearing his name in the Peace River district where the rural post office of Jean-Coté is located north-west of MacLennan.

Following the Alaska survey, father found himself in the Yukon when the Klondike gold rush attracted thousands of fortune hunters to Dawson City, so he decided to try his luck there. He joined forces with the Cautley Brothers as Cautley & Cote, Surveyors & Mining Engineers, locally called "the tall company with the tall men," for they were all over six feet tall.

The Cautley brothers had come from England, where their father, an Anglican clergyman, wished them to complete their university studies. But Canada provided them with the desired escape from academia to the adventure and outdoors they preferred.

Father was a rather silent man and a good listener. I regret that I did not get him to talk more about his experiences. I do remember his telling me of whales seen spouting steam-like vapour when he went north to the Yukon. A reporter for the *Edmonton Journal* at the Legislature recorded on Feb. 19, 1921 having spoken to him and found that he was an interesting raconteur of his experiences in the Klondike. His, and his part-

ners' work was straightening out miners' claims and counter claims, as often happened among these acquisitive and ambitious adventurers.

When the gold rush simmered down and claim jumping had diminished in the Klondike, the firm decided in the winter of 1903 to fold its bed rolls and move out of the log house hotel office-cum-quarters in Dawson and go south to Edmonton. There, with the firm name of Cautley, Cote & Cautley, they opened an office in a small two storey frame house at 1034 - 7th Street. About 1907, father left the Cautley brothers' partnership; I think there may have been a disagreement, but I know they admired father, as William in his diary wrote that he was one of the most honest and honourable men he'd ever had dealings with. Father then joined with Frank B. Smith and was associated with him for some years as Cote & Smith, Surveyors & Engineers.

During the winter of 1906-07, father went back east for a visit. In Quebec City, his sister, the widow Marie Tremblay, introduced him to Cécile Gagnon, eldest daughter of Gustave Gagnon, organist of the Québec Basilica. She was a co-founder of the Québec Musical Club and later, in Edmonton as Mme. J.L. Coté, one of the founders of the Edmonton Women's Musical Club. After a whirlwind courtship, they were married, two weeks after first meeting! Following a trip to New York, they travelled to Edmonton and stayed at the new Alberta Hotel.

Father had his office and quarters building moved to the rear of the lot and built a new home. There my four brothers and I were born. Following World War One, the house was divided into two apartments and later during the Depression, into four suites by my then widowed mother. She eventually sold the home to Jenner Motors, which razed the house for a parking lot, and now the location of the Daon Building at 10030 - 107 Street.

In 1908, my father surveyed the second part of the Edmonton, Yukon & Pacific Railway's right-of-way and track in the city, from its station in Rosedale flats at the bottom of 101st or 102nd Street Hill. He traced its way through the flats south-west toward the Saskatchewan River, along its bank where the Legislature's power house stands, west of the High Level Bridge along the hill above the city's municipal golf links, up Groat Ravine, across Athabasca Ave. (now 102nd), turning north-east parallel to Wadhurst Road to 124th Street, which it intersected diagonally at Stony Plain Road

(approximately 104th Ave.) towards the Canadian Northern Railway's city yards. By that time, in 1908, I believe that Canadian Northern had bought the charter and assets of the EY & P.

Attracted to Alberta for its natural resources, my father constantly "boosted" the north and railway construction there. In his accented English he used to say "devil-op-ment," and some snickered at his "devilish" pronunciation of that word. He learned his practical English originally from Glengarry County Scottish survey members, who manned the majority of the Department of the Interior survey parties; so J.L. closed "d-oo-rs", and once, he told my mother that her pronunciation of "Edinburgh" was wrong. "Na, na," he said, "Edin-borough." And every morning we were brought up on oatmeal porridge!

In the course of his surveys around Athabasca Landing, Fort McMurray, and Grouard, he eventually became interested in politics. He was Elected M.L.A. for the Athabasca constituency in a by-election in July 1909, beating out Fletcher Bredin, a Peace River pioneer merchant. My father was a man who commanded much respect for his honesty and sincerity; he was not a politi-

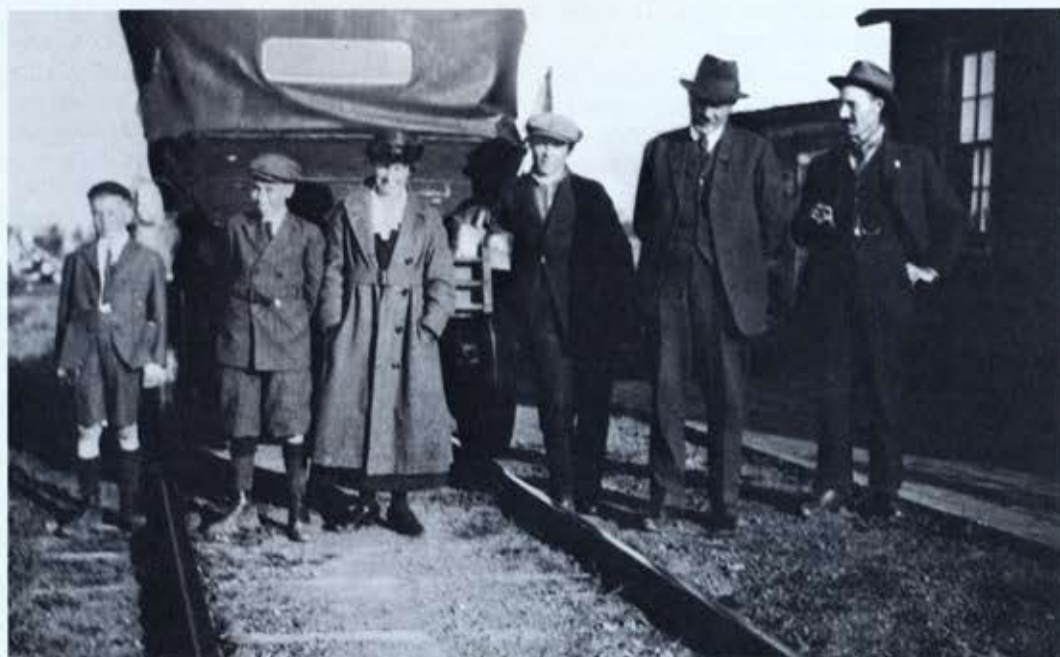
cian in the pejorative sense, and he eventually won over his constituents permanently. In a change of constituency boundaries, he eventually represented the Grouard riding.

In 1912, my father moved in the Alberta Legislature the second reading of a Bill for the Alberta Survey Act. Also, through speeches and correspondence, especially after 1912, he interested both the federal and provincial governments in the vast McMurray tar sands deposits. The federal government, as a result, sent geologist S.C. Ells to survey the Athabasca river deposits. Father's speeches in the Legislature boosted the province's natural resources and coal production as well; he even suggested that coal be shipped on barges down the Saskatchewan River in order to compete with the high rail freight rates in western Canada

He was for a time associated with his nephews Albert and Solyme Tremblay, sons of his widowed sister, in a survey firm known as Côté, Smith & Tremblay. Hugh E. Pearson of Minnedosa, Man., also joined the firm in 1912 and later became a partner, when the company's name was changed to Côté, Tremblay & Pearson.



The first home of J.L. Côté was at 10034 - 107 Street, in Edmonton. This view, taken about 1905-07 shows W.H. Cautley, at left, and Côté.



J.L. Côté took his family with him when he travelled by rail inspection car to visit his Grouard constituency in August 1921. Left to right are Paul, Jean, Mrs. Côté, unknown, J.L. Côté, and campaign manager Dan Hayden.

In 1913-14, father became interested in the Pocahontas Collieries mine near Jasper National Park, just east of Jasper town, which his nephews had located before the railways went there. The colliery was principally financed by Duluth interests; father became a director and vice-president, losing a fortune before the mine was eventually closed after World War One, when the Grand Trunk Pacific pulled up its tracks past the mine tippie. The only thing our family had to show for the five-digit loss was a coal miner's lamp which my brother Paul found in the abandoned mine property in 1929; this hung for years on the verandah of our home on 107th Street.

In 1918, father was named to Premier Charles Stewart's cabinet as Provincial Secretary. He eventually also held temporarily the portfolios of Minister of Mines and of Railways (including Telephones), which Mr. Stewart had to relinquish due to ill health.

Father's interest in the development of Alberta's natural resources led him to form the Scientific and Industrial Research Council of Alberta in 1919, with Dr. Henry Marshall Tory, then President of the University of Alberta, as Vice-Chairman. William Pearce DLS of the CPR Development Dept., also was an interested party in this. The Research Council was formally announced by Order-in-Council on Jan. 6, 1921

with father as chairman. Research work by Drs. J.A. Allan and Karl Clark, and I believe for a time by Sidney Ells, was done in the university science laboratories. One project involved drilling for salt with a core drill near Fort McMurray, which drew encouraging approval from Chicago scientists. That geological core lay on the shelves of the university science labs for years. For a time salt was produced commercially at Fort McMurray, until the Windsor Salt Co. interests bought it out and closed the plant to lessen competition with their eastern plant!

After the 1918 death of Albert Tremblay overseas in the Royal Flying Corps and following the 1919 retirement of Major Solyme Tremblay, the survey firm was again changed to Côté & Pearson, and the office moved to the old Bank of Toronto building on Jasper Ave. Father often let out-of-work surveyors use a desk in his office for the winter months without charge. The draftsman was a kindly Englishman, L.B. Pierce.

Around 1920, father's partner, Hugh Pearson, after a season's surveying in the Mackenzie valley, had enough of the long separation from his newly founded home, the mosquitoes, and the dangers of the river (in which one of his party was drowned). As a result, he resigned and joined his wartime pal, Jimmy Taylor, in a "new-fangled" radio and auto parts distribution

business which became widely known in Alberta as Taylor, Pearson & Carson.

When the Liberal government was defeated in July 1921 by the United Farmers of Alberta, father remained an undefeated MLA for Grouard. Hon. Herbert Greenfield, the new premier and Provincial Secretary, succeeded him as chairman of the Research Council of Alberta. After having been a cabinet minister for three years, father, as a simple MLA, returned to surveying. I remember him bringing in his theodolite from the cold warehouse at the back of our yard and putting it on the dining room table. With a cloth he removed the light lubricant and replaced it with graphite for winter use. That December he went to Lamoureux, near Fort Saskatchewan, to survey a farm.

During the summer of 1923, father was named to the Senate. That September, he was

operated on for removal of gall stones and appendix, and he never fully recovered. Nevertheless, he attended the Senate sittings during the winter of 1923-24. We brothers joined our parents in Ottawa for our summer holidays in June of 1924 and went on to Quebec City to visit our Gagnon grandparents. We spent most of our holiday at Les Eboulements, father's native village in the Laurentians, from where we had a magnificent view of the broadening St. Lawrence as it approached the gulf north-eastward.

Father suffered a sudden and fatal attack of peritonitis on Sept. 24, 1924. There was no hospital in the village. He was buried in the local churchyard on Sept. 26th, the funeral being attended by villagers as pallbearers, relatives, friends, and dignitaries from Quebec and Ottawa.

Police Patrol

Wetaskiwin Breeze: I noticed lying on the table at the Police Barracks the other day a printed form headed "Patrol Report." Of course I read it. At the foot of it was this: "Note — Settlers are requested to sign this report when visited by Patrolman who is instructed to ask if there are any complaints and to call at every ranche on his line of patrol."

In theory this is all very well and sounds lovely. But is impracticable. A number of ranchers hereabout cannot speak a word of English and those who cannot would be so flabbergasted at the sight of a North-West Mounted Policeman, with these papers in his hand, riding into the yard that he would be unable to speak at all, much less go through the red tapers of signing his name to the Report. If the rancher has any complaint worthy of lodgment, he'll lodge it himself quick enough. Only too quick as a general thing.

Taking into consideration the jealousies and enmities which but too often are to be seen in country districts amongst neighbors, this idea of a policeman riding around practically inviting them to air grievances and lodge complaints — (making it easy) — is unwise to say the least.

The complaints would run like this: "Well, I tell you, Mister, dot sawn of a gawn Ole Slonjugglooski. I borrow him a wagon to go to town. He got drawn and break whipple tree. He no pay. Oh, he son of a, etc." What is Mr. Policeman to do in a case of that kind? They will all be of that nature. If the grievances are at all serious the complainants will not dally, waiting for the policeman to come around.

This idea might have been feasible enough when the country was sparsely settled, but it would take a very long time indeed to visit every ranche in this district the way it is settled up now.

— Calgary W. Herald, June 13, 1901.