

Otterville Has A Colourful History

1 p.
Otterville

United Empire Loyalist Descendant Tells Of Early Days In South Norwich

The following story was prepared by Mrs. Charles Snell (Ellen Jones) and was given as a paper by her at the Women's Institute meeting, Otterville, on March 11th 1927. Mrs. Snell, who died October 16th, last year, was the last member of a family of 10 children and was a descendant of one of the oldest pioneer United Empire Loyalist families in this district.

"One hundred and twenty seven years ago, the township of South Norwich was an unbroken forest, no roads except a few blazed trees made by the surveyors or the track of an Indian. Wild animals were numerous. The township of Norwich (now divided into North and South Norwich) was surveyed by Mr. Hamley in 1790. In a territorial division made in Western Ontario July 16th, 1799, Norwich Township was made a portion of the County of Norfolk. By an act of Parliament, which came into effect on Jan. 22nd, 1800, Norwich Township became part of the County of Oxford. On July 22nd, 1800, Mr. Wilcox (who later turned traitor and was killed) of York, now the City of Toronto, received from the Crown a grant of 15,000 acres of land lying east of the middle town line and from the first and 12th concessions, one mile in width, numbering from north to south and having 28 lots of 200 acres in each concession. In 1805 it was divided into North and South Norwich, the road passing between the 6th and 7th concessions being the boundary line. These two townships were jokingly called Sodom and Gom-morrah. In 1807 John Earl and Paul Avery received a grant of land from the government where they erected a grist and saw mill, just a little above the present dam. They sold to Cook and Galloway, were succeeded by the Cromwells, who built a second and larger mill a few feet below the present flour mill. John C. Fernie of Hamilton owned them for a short time and in 1845 sold to Edward Bullock, who built another saw mill.

First Horse In 1808

In 1808 the first horse was brought into this township by Josiah Gilbert who settled in Springford. Joseph Spittler was another settler at this time. In 1810 the first white child was born in Otterville, Peter Avery. In the summer of 1811 there were 11 families living in the township and 5,200 acres of land had been taken up. The first season 32 acres had been put into crop, and in the second 735 acres. In 1817 the population was 170, the producing agriculturists 22. In 1820 the surplus wheat of Norwich amounted to several thousand bushels. For many years the surplus wheat had to be teamed 60 miles to Ancaster. Hamilton had not a market at this time. The roads were rough and so difficult to travel that 23 bushels was considered a full load and it required a three-day journey.

During the American Revolution of 1812 a great many who were loyal to the Crown suffered at the hands of the Revolutionists, among them my great-grandfather, Powell, who they hung up to an apple tree to make him disclose the whereabouts of some hidden money. Grandmother, disguised as a ghost frightened them away, and cut him down, but he did not live long after that. After this my grandfather, John Jones would not live under Republican Government, so in May 1819 he brought Grandmother and two children (my father, being the younger) in a wagon drawn by an ox team, with their household goods and arrived in Otterville and stayed all night on the banks of the Otter, near where Mr. Wyatt's house is now. The next

day they settled on the grant of land where Stanley Davis now lives, and built a log house which stood long after I remember. Families living there at that time were Cromwells, Cornells, Addisons, Vanbuskirts and Chester Johnston.

Lack Of Postal Service

One great inconvenience was the lack of postal service in the pioneer days, as no post office was established in the County until 1821, when one was opened at Ingersoll, and about the same time another at Barford. The nearest post office was at Ancaster about 60 miles away.

Correspondence was rather expensive then. Postage on a letter from England being 60 cents and from New York 25 cents. In 1830 John Cornell opened the first post office in Otterville and also a store. The lack of medical attention was a great hardship. Dr. Cook was the first doctor. He lived in the village of Norwich, coming in 1831, and was our nearest medical aid. Some years later Dr. Carter settled in Otterville. In 1831 Peter Hamilton and William Hardy built an iron smelting furnace, but an accident happened and the enterprise was abandoned. In 1833 on the first Saturday in July, Asa Durkee came here, and in 1834 started a tannery. In the year 1833 my mother's people came to this community, settling on the Ball farm. My mother and her sister rode horseback to the first school, west of Springford. It was built of logs and as glass was not obtainable, sheets of greased paper were utilized for windows. The desks were of boards supported by wooden pins, driven into the logs. The seats were of split logs — not a nail in the whole building. The only road was a blazed trail. Smithson Waller was the teacher and the school fees for each child was \$2 per month. The teacher stayed where there were the most children. My father was taught by his mother, who also taught as many of the neighbour children as would come to her. Later father was sent to Brantford to

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school. It was not until 1820 that Oxford had a representative of her own in Parliament. Previous to that time she had been with Middlesex and Norfolk. Her first member was Thomas Horner and in 1824 she sent Horner and Charles Ingersoll to represent her. In 1941 by Act of Parliament, Otterville belonged to the County of Brock. The first jail for criminals was established in 1840 and the first resident Judge was Judge Arnold. The office of the Registrar of Oxford was first filled by Thomas Horner. The office was removed from Ingersoll to Woodstock in 1848. Prior to 1848 Magistrate in Quarter Sessions expended money for public improvements. In the introduction of municipal institutions under Baldwin LaFountain, administration of all matters pertaining to public works and local governments passing to the hands of the people whose representatives composed the Council of the Corporations. The Hon. P. B. Deblaquere was appointed by the Crown as Warden of this district. In 1833 the first hotel was kept by Mr. Flannery who sold to Steven Yarrington, then to James Cromwell. From his hands it came to Mr. Cleveland. It was burned in the fire of 1867, which wiped out nearly the whole village.

Volunteers Summoned

On the 6th day of December, 1837 Dr. Duncombe, then an M.P. arrived stating that McKenzie had possession of Toronto, called a meeting and secured volunteers, my father was one of the first men to join, serving under Col. Bradley and Captain Walen. A number were taken and kept in W.A. Cromwell's store (now part of the Otterville Manufacturing Co. Plant). One man by the name of Bedford was hanged and was buried outside the Quaker burying ground, north of the village of Norwich. One woman stole the soldiers' firearms and threw them in the mill race and they had to let the water off to recover them. A mother with four sons walked all the way to Niagara to ask for her husband's pardon, which was granted her under the condition that she bring her four sons up loyal to the King. This promise she kept as they all were soldiers of the King when they were grown men. In 1831 there was a coloured school in the middle townline taught by Holingback. My sister Annie, tells of going there for three days, carried by Wall Hulet, but in order to send her to school reg-

ularly father and grandfather with mother moved to this village and kept a grocery store, copper and cabinet shop, where Mr. Young's hotel now stands.

Malaria fever was so hard on them that they were glad to move back on the farm after four years suffering. While in the village Anna started to school in the building which stood back of Mrs. Collver's home. Her first teacher was Chauncey Wilcox. After the present school was built in 1857 she attended there. H. N. Coutland was the first teacher in the upper room and Miss Hattie Stover in the lower room. The Continuation school was opened in 1924.

First Election Held

In 1848 the last District Council, District of Brock, was changed to County of Oxford. In 1850 the first election of the Township of Norwich was held in the village of Norwich with Gerry DeLong as Reeve, councillors elected were John Griffin, Michael Stover, Truman Wilcox and Asa Durkee. In 1851 Truman Wilcox was reeve, with the same council with the exception of Benjamin Holmes taking the place of DeLong. In 1852 Asa Durkee was reeve and here the records were lost until 1856. In 1855 the township of Norwich was divided into North and South Norwich. In 1856 the first council was: reeve, Asa Durkee, councillors, Jesse Cornell, R. B. Cromwell, Chauncey Wilcox and David Randall, clerk and treasurer, E. M. Schooley. In 1854 David Stage built a foundry, one of the products being the bell on the school. About this time the Erbs built saw and woollen mills. G. Williams had stock, stables, distillery and grain warehouses; John Furlong, shingle and cooperage shops; Parsons, carriage works; Warners, match factory and John McFarlane carriage and blacksmith shops. Richard Talbot had a contract and built the first road of plank from Delhi to Ingersoll, collecting fees at toll gates. The last of these toll gates was kept by Walter Reavely on the Cole Road. In 1850 a railroad was started by Woodstock and Lake Erie R.R. Co. It was nearly completed in 1854 when the promoter, Mr. Zimmerman, was killed and all

the work was stopped. In 1872 J. F. Bullock and Gilbert Moore, of Norwich, interested some of the people in Woodstock and Simcoe and the present railroad was completed. A Canadian Southern and Great Western was finished about the same time. In 1843 the first church was a Quaker church, which stood on the west of the burying ground, west of the village. This was sold a few years ago to Varden, Springfield, for a hog house.

Churches Are Built

Mr. Samuel Erb built an Episcopal Methodist Church just west of the Friends' Church which was also sold. In 1834 my mother's people all being devout Catholics, grandfather brought the first Priest, Father X Uvette, to this County, also the first to Middlesex and mass was celebrated in their home for over 50 years. In 1842 father and mother were married by Rev. Mr. Pedrie an Anglican Minister from Bayham. They took their wedding tour on horseback. I have a letter written in 1843 to Mr. Burn Dereham, from Rev. James Stewart, telling of services to be held at Mr. Addison's, Summerville; Mr. Vanbuskirt's, Windham; and John Jones, Otterville; showing that even in those early days we were not without our church services. I have also a copy of the oath of allegiance of Grandfather Jones, in 1837. About 1850 the old Anglican Church was begun. Edward Bullock gave the ground. Mr. Mel Durkee has a list of the people who contributed toward the building, among them being Dr. Carter, Addison's, Vanbuskirt's, Cross, Asa Durkee, H. P. Jones, and many others, and Mr. Durkee and Anna Jones remember the first tea meeting, with tea served in the gallery of the church. In 1860 the coloured church was built north west of the old Anglican Church. The first preacher was Napoleon Bonaparte Anderson and their bush meeting used to attract a very fashionable crowd from the surrounding towns and cities. In 1862 the Otterville Methodist Church was built by a man by the name of Wilkinson; it was then New Connection, then Wesleyan and Episcopal. All three became Wesleyan. In the spring of 1868 the Rev. William Haveland of Burgessville came to

Otterville and held meetings in the town hall for some time and then organized the Baptist Church with Stephen DeLong and Silas Slaght as deacons and Edward Titus as Church Clerk.

The following names are some of the chartered members: Mrs. Edmund Titus, Abigail Titus, Eliza Titus, Mrs. Ellen Tibbels, Mary Jane Walker, Climenta Bleakley, Mrs. Penrose, Mr. and Mrs. Amos Richards. The present church property was built in December 1866. In 1864 the Otterville town hall was built by the Sons of Temperance. Then the Dramatic Club with the help of the town, moved it from the old site, (near the Baptist Church) to Main Street, put an addition at the back and bricked it in. John McFarlane Sr. and Peter Beemer started the first band, bringing the instruments with them from Waterford. Mr. Durkee has the drum in his possession now. In 1865 the Agricultural Society was started with A. B. Moore as president, Samuel Wallace, Benjamin Colver, Edward Bullock, H. P. Jones, and others. For a number of years it was very successful and became the County Fair and was looked forward to from year to year, with about as much interest as we look forward to the Provincial Fair at Toronto. In the 80's it began to fall away and the ground was finally sold to J. R. Johnson. From the old buildings the pavilion in the Community Park was erected in 1924.

Went To Fenian Raid

At the time of the Fenian Raid in 1866 a number of our Norwich and Otterville boys belonged to the Oxford Rifles. When orders came from headquarters they hastened to the border and at Port Colborne they saw seven Canadians who were killed in the Battle of Ridgeway. When

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the trouble was over they returned in a few weeks to their home. Some of the business men of the town in the order they came as near as I can give them were: John Carnell, Mason and Lydell, G. W. Carder, Durkee, Cromwell, Jones, Doan Coote, Dr. A. J. Colver, W. K. Kay, Bullock Bros., Braid and McMurtry, York Bros., Purvis and Cornell, Flick and Hillier, Wetheral, Carter, Chiswell, S. B. Lossing, T. J. Pennington, Purvis and Wyatt, Smiley and Paxton, J. Matheson, Bean and Miller. This does not include our present business men. In 1867 Henry Eggman had a photographic gallery and for a good many years was also one of our first brick layers and masons. We had a flourishing paper "The Argus," edited by W. C. Holland. I have a copy of June 22nd, 1867. In 1879 The Otterville Manufacturing Co. was started under the name of Otterville Sweeper Co. The partners were H. E. Bullock and J. E. Bullock of Chicago, and F. G. Bullock and W. F. Kay of Otterville. In 1879 Mr. Robert opened the first bank, a private one, and with Mr. Sam Smiley interested the people and started the Otter Cemetery and Park.

In 1884 fire destroyed the whole south side of the business portion of the town. In 1893 Otterville was incorporated as a Police Village and in 1913 through the foresight of the trustees at that time the installation of the present village water system was commenced. In 1915-16 H. E. Bullock of Chicago erected a memorial Anglican Church, rectory and Parish Hall. In 1916 Otterville was first served with hydro electric power. In this year also our Horticultural Society was started

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through the untiring energy of Mrs. E. M. Pennington, who was the first president. We are reaping the benefits today in our homes, parks and gardens. In 1917 the Tred Rite Shoe Co. Ltd. was incorporated and commenced business. In 1918 they were burned out and rebuilt on the present site, employing a great many of out-of-town people. In 1925 the Otterville Cannery Ltd. was started and is a big asset to our town. The men of Otterville have a fine bowling green. We also have two tennis courts, a croquet green, skating rink, baseball field and swimming pool. We have a gasoline launch on the river in the Park, where picnics come from surrounding towns for a days' pleasure. We also have a splendid library and last but not least a flourishing Women's Institute.

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