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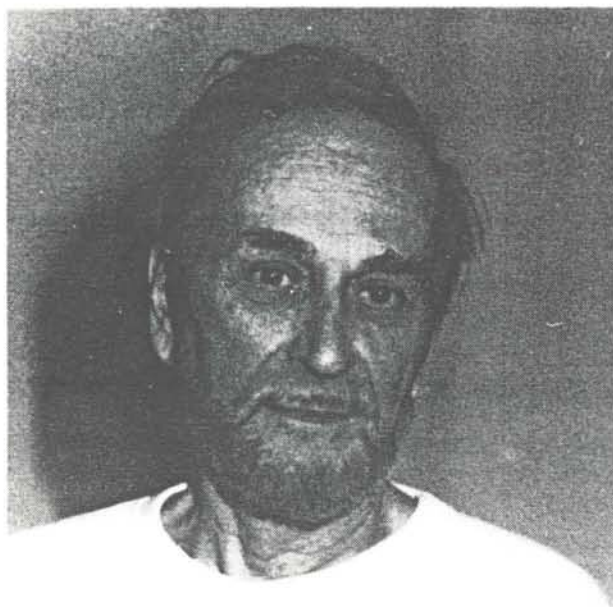
# New Life for the Portage Road



Portage Road is the oldest road in continuous use in Upper Canada, and it can be found here in Prince Edward County.

A thousand year old Indian trail, now the dividing line of Prince Edward and Northumberland counties, the road runs from the Bay of Quinte to Weller's Bay on Lake Ontario. Modern travellers will know it as part of a busy junction at The Carrying Place, and as part of the route to Barcovan Golf Course and on to Brighton. In fact, it could be said that Carrying Place as a village existed only because of the Portage Road, which neatly cut the village in half, placing it in two counties.

Dr. Paul Germain, who with his wife Edythe



Dr. Paul Germain

operates the Weller

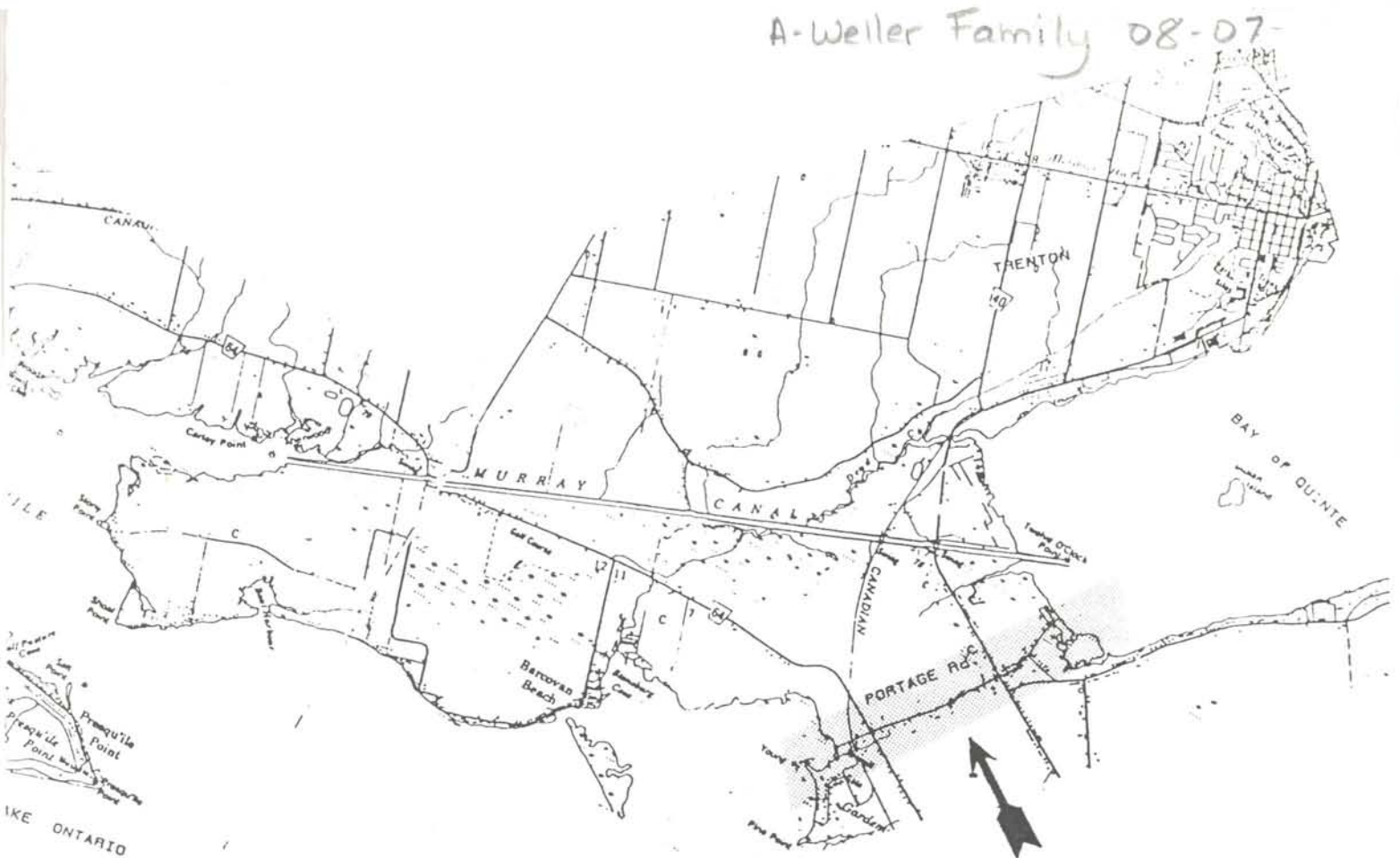
House Gallery on that Road, has taken a great interest in increasing awareness of the value of the road and has spent a great amount of time researching its past, and promoting its future.

In his studies, he has found that, in 1787, the road was plied by John Bleeker, the first trader in that area. He was the son in law of Captain John Walden Meyers, who was instrumental in the establishment of what is now the city of Belleville.

Another important figure in the development of that end of the County, Asa Weller, built the house that is now occupied by the Germaines. Dr. Germain says that Weller was "undisputedly" the first white settler in that corner of the County in 1791. As well as establishing a well-known stagecoach route there, Weller left his mark by erecting two outstanding brick buildings which still survive today.

In *The County* by Dick and Janet Lunn, it is noted that: "At Carrying Place, Asa Weller had a flourishing portage business. Weller had been an early pioneer, the first at Carrying Place (his daughter Sarah was the first white child born in the west end of the County)... The portaging was managed with a sort of truck, a long platform on wheels, that could carry a batteau across the isthmus. It was very successful. A great many private people made use of his services as did the weekly boat from Kingston to York. He also rented batteaux and contracted transport services to the army during the War of 1812."

In Weller's days, of course, the waterways were essential for transporting goods and people. His position in the 'neck' of Prince Edward allowed him to supply a more sophisticated method of portaging following the trail the Indians had used for the same purpose for hundreds of years.



Though Weller's later land run by stagecoach from Kingston to York showed an increasing emphasis on land travel, there was always a strong need to transport boats from one body of water to the other across the neck of land at The Carrying Place.

After the War of 1812, serious talk began to circulate about building a canal to serve this purpose. Land had already been set aside for this, but it wasn't until 1882 that the ground was broken and the Murray Canal project was begun.

"The Murray Canal replaced the Portage Road," Dr. Germain said, "and unfortunately it fell into disrepair."

Now he is trying to bring attention to it again, and wants it to be examined by historians, politicians and the general public.

"A lot of people are looking at it now," he says, "and they not only see the nice things, but the deterioration as well."

He believes that its combination of natural beauty and historical

significance make it the "most beautiful place in the world" and this attitude feeds his enthusiasm.

"I keep telling people from the city: where do you find this beauty, where do you find all these nice beaches... it's not in Bermuda, it's here, right here at Carrying Place in Ontario."

The next step in his personal plan for the area is the formation of the Kente Portage Association.

"Everyone on the road is now a member, and we are still collecting people," he said. "Some people have offered donations to help us, and we haven't even asked for them!"

The first major project of the Association will be the Kente Portage Festival, to be held July 21-23, 1989. The Festival will be centred around canoe and portage competitions, and it is receiving support from several local tourist groups. It has even sparked interest in the office of the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation.

"The purpose of the Festival is to make residents and visitors aware of

a beautiful part of this country," he said, "of the richness of its past, of the great entrepreneurship and inventiveness of the pioneers."

"Such a festival at the very gate of Prince Edward County, connected with Trenton, Trent Waterway, Murray Canal, Brighton and the three Provincial Parks (Presqu'ile, North Beach and Sandbanks), will help boost tourist business for the whole region."

In addition to local group support, he is also gathering the interest of canoe and portage groups from outside the area. Also planned for the event are exhibitions and demonstrations, a pageant of historic times of Upper Canada, a Governor Simcoe feast, parade and encampment by U.E.L. regiments, and something called 'Ambush at Indian Island'.

More details will be developed over the winter, but we can be assured that, one way or another, Dr. Germain will make sure that the spotlight falls on Portage Road in the near future. □