

A-Cobourg - Settlement  
(07-04)

CHARLES CAMPBELL, MANAGER  
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# COBOURG CREAMERY CO.

COBOURG, ONT.

MANUFACTURERS AND  
WHOLESALE DEALERS IN

P. O. DRAWER 66

CREAMERY PHONE 6

"LILY BRAND" CREAMERY BUTTER

*Mrs Wells is a daughter of Mr Samuel Ash*

COBOURG

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Written for the Cobourg Sentinel

## OME SKETCHES

By Nell Gwynne, Cobourg, Ontario.

Note--I am indebted for the facts in the following little sketch to the kindness of Mrs. Wells who is a daughter of Mr. Samuel Ash, and who was born on the spot in which she now resides, in 1803. Mrs. Wells, who among many excellent qualities is possessed of superior intelligence and a remarkably retentive memory, was affected almost to tears while recounting the hardships and sufferings of her parents during their early life in Canada.

### FIRST PAPER

The first settlers in the vicinity of Cobourg were Mr. Samuel Ash, and his brother-in-law, Mr. Roger Wolcott, who tempted by the offers made to Canadian settlers by Lieut. Gov. Simcoe, left their homes in the state of New York, in the spring of 1797. They, accompanied by the father of Mr. Ash, who was quite an aged man, crossed Lake Ontario in an open boat and landed near Kingston. The two young men bought a yoke of oxen between them, and having constructed rude sheds, upon which they strapped their luggage, and which were drawn by the oxen. They travelled up through the woods, which must have been a weary journey indeed, till they came to the neighborhood of where the town of Cobourg now stands, which was then like the whole country about--a trackless wilderness. The farm on which *Zom* *Kewin* Mr. Wells now resides is part of the two hundred acres of land chosen by Mr. Ash; and the farm now owned by Mr. (James Beatty) is part of the two *Greer's* hundred acres chosen by Mr. Wolcott. Having selected their land the two men went to work with brave hearts and their good axes, and they not only did their settlers' duties on their land, but had hewn out enough of the virgin forest to enable them to put in a little crop before returning to the States for their families; which they did in a couple of weeks.

"The settlers' duties consisted in building a log cabin on each lot of land, and in chopping down and clearing up enough wood to make five large brush heaps. When they had done this and paid twenty-five dollars apiece for their deeds the land was theirs. Cheap land, we would naturally imagine now-a-days, but that remains to be seen.

"They recrossed the lake by the way they had come and brought their families over in a small schooner, which sailed from Oswego and landed at Presque Isle.

"Their life in their new home was for many years one hard struggle. The chopping and logging and clearing up of brush, in which they were constantly employed, being very hard upon the men's clothes they had soon worn out their clothing, when their wives cut up their blankets and made clothes for them.

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When they had worn these out and had left themselves with scarcely enough bed clothes to protect them from the cold during the long severe winter they tanned deer skins and made clothes of them. From constant exposure to all sorts of weather these clothes were constantly becoming wet and dried on their persons, in consequence of which they would become as hard as boards and would of course be very uncomfortable. To remedy this the wives would take them after their husbands had gone to bed on Saturday night and spend the live long night washing and rubbing and pulling at them to render them clean and soft for the next week's toil.

They came by their first dry goods in the following manner: Toronto, or Little York, though then scarcely worthy of being called a village, was beginning to build up, and lime was in demand there. Having burnt a quantity of lime our worthy pioneers made perogues and having loaded them with lime they paddled them all the way to Toronto, where they sold their lime and bought cotton to make dresses for their wives with the proceeds. But when they arrived at home the good woman thinking their husband made the cotton up into shirts for them. They went forth on Monday morning rejoicing in their new shirts: a shirt being a luxury they had not known for many a day, and when they came home on Saturday night all that remained of them were the writbands which were buttoned about their necks, the having been literally torn to shreds among the brush in which they had been working, which would have been hard enough upon any cloth, but this so dearly bought was such poor material that it was scarcely worth making up.

In the course of time as they got their land cleared they were enabled to raise flax, out of which they wove coarse linen, but it was a good many years before they were able to keep sheep on account of the wolves, which was a great misfortune to them on account of the length and severity of the winter.

One evening shortly after they had taken up their abode in the country Mrs. Ash was surprised to see a stranger present himself at her door soliciting accomodation for the night for himself and his servant. Mrs. Ash summoned her husband who was at work in the bush hard by, when, the stranger informed him that he was Gov. Simcoe, and that her was travelling down through the country on horse back accompanied by his servant. Mr. Ash made him cordially welcome, telling him he was sorry he had not something better to offer him. But Gov. Simcoe assured him that their place was much more comfortable than many he had passed on his journey. The good wife now busied herself in preparing supper for the weary travellers, a process that was watched with a good deal of interest by their guest, who laughed outright when he saw Mr. Ash bring in his logging chain for the purpose of suspending one of the pots over the fire.

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"Necessity is the mother of invention," ingeniously remarked the sturdy settler as he lent his wife a hand in the arrangement of her pots and pans. They had fresh venison for supper, but what else history does not record, but whatever it was it was keenly relished by the travellers, seasoned as it was by the most appetizing of all sauces, hunger and weariness. Gov. Simcoe declared he had not enjoyed a meal so heartily since leaving England. They now brought in their blankets which they carried strapped to their saddles and made themselves comfortable for the night, going on their way in the morning and carrying with them the good wishes of their hospitable entertainers.

The woods, abounded with deer and various kinds of game and the lake swarmed with fish of immense size, so that the settlers were never at a loss for meat when they could find time to go out and hunt or fish. Salmon from ten to twelve pounds weight would come up the creeks in shoals every fall, and the settlers were in the habit of salting down a couple of barrels of them annually for winter use. Here let it be remarked that the creeks of the present time are but meagre streamlets compared to what they then were. What is now known as the "Factory Creek" having been quite a respectable river in those days.

In the meantime settlers had been gradually coming into the country, each family building their log cabin and making their little clearing in the wilderness. I once heard the daughter of one of the settlers, when quite an aged woman, talking of the sufferings of her family in those far off days. She said she had many a time wandered along the lake shore with the hope of finding a fish washed ashore. And one spring to save themselves from starvation they were obliged to dig up the potatoes they had planted and eat them after cutting out the eyes which they planted in their stead. On telling this to Mrs. Ward she said: "I have not the least doubt but what she said was perfectly true. I knew who her father was perfectly well, he lived in a little cabin down by the lake shore and he was too lazy to laugh. I have seen him come to our house and my father would tell him some jokes or some funny stories, and he would open his mouth and roll his head from side to side, but no laugh--he was too lazy to get up a laugh."

The settlers used popped corn boiled in milk, after it had been pounded in a stump hollowed out for the purpose, as a substitute for bread, and strawberry leaves and various kinds of herbs as a substitute for tea. They gradually got themselves into stock by trading back and forth with the settlers at the Bay of Quinte, which was comparatively an old settlement, it having been settled some years previously by U.E. Loyalists. Mrs. Ash obtained her first geese from people who had come up from the Bay of Quinte and did pay for them.

"There were no Indians seen in this part of the country for several years after the arrival of the first settlers, though they frequently

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met with the remains of their camps about in the woods but in the course of time they began to come back to their old hunting grounds along the "big lake", which they had no doubt deserted for "fresh fields and pastures new". These were the red man's palmy days, they had plenty of game, and as they were in annual receipt of "government presents", as they were called, they were much better clothed than their pale faced brethren.

The first place of business in Cobourg was a blacksmith's shop which stood about where Messrs. (Graham and Minaker's) store now stands, and the first school was held in an old stable, which had been fitted up for the purpose of by nailing slabs over the cracks to keep out the rain. It was taught by the daughter of the U.E. Loyalist, and stood where Waldie's bakery now stands. My informant, who is among the few that survives among those who attended this school, tells how the children used to amuse themselves at noon by running down through the woods to where the North American Hotel now stands, which was then an open field to gather the sweet scented Indian grass which grew there in great quantities, or sometimes by going down to the sandy beach to watch the Indians catching sturgeon, which were of such immense size that they could be compared to nothing but sheep. It is curious to think of this little band of children who trudged through the woods to schools bare footed and scantily clad in such coarse raiment as the country afforded and yet many of whom lived to see themselves surrounded by every luxury.

After the settlers had cleared enough land to enable them to raise wheat in large quantities, it was of very little use to them as they could not get it ground but as they carried it to Surell. And they could find no market for it. After keeping some hundreds of bushels of wheat over year after year Mr. Ash was obliged to feed it to his horses to keep it from being entirely wasted.

Among the many privations from which the settlers suffered one of the greatest was the want of boots. Mr. Ash would tell in after years how he would sometimes come home from his work in the evening and find his wife absent, when he would know she had gone out into the woods in search of the cows which were in the habit of straying away, and he would be enabled to follow her by tracing the marks of her bleeding feet on the stones and brush as he went along.

But there was a better time coming--schooners were beginning to put in along the shore from time to time, bringing goods and other necessaries for which the settlers traded with them.

The first goods sold in Cobourg were brought by Major Jones. After wards a man named McDonald brought goods and sold them to the settlers, and then a Lower Canadian named Mungo or Mango opened a little store.

Rather a good joke on the wife of one of the first store keepers in Cobourg went the rounds of the settlement in the old times. One of

*Now about Girards look at...*

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the settlers being desirous of buying a pound of shot happened to go to the store in the absence of the proprietor who had left his wife in charge in his absence. The good woman having had the misfortune to have been brought up in these wild parts did not know one figure from another or one weight from another, and was consequently quite at a loss when her customer made known his demand. Seeing her dilemma and having an eye to the main chance the customer remarked in a sententious tone:

"Well Mrs. So and So, a pound is a pound the world round, and of course it will do just as well if you measure it in the pint measure." No doubt glad to see her way out of the difficulty she immediately responded:

"Yes a pound is a pound the world round."

"And forthwith measured him out a pint of shot. Thinking in the simplicity of her heart that as a "pound was a pound the world round," it could not possibly undergo any alteration by being put into a pint measure.

"As the spot on which the town now stands began to take the form of a little village, the settlers gave it the name of "Hardscrabble," by way of a joke on their own hard "scrabbling" to get along.

One of the inhabitants was desirous of having this name changed to "Buckville" and built a tavern which he called "Buckville Tavern", and which stood, if we mistake not, where the Toronto Bank now stands. He had a sign ~~and~~ painted and erected on two cedar posts before the door, but the glory of "Buckville Tavern" was of short duration, for when the proprietor opened his door on the morning after the erection of his sign all that remained of it was about a foot and a half of the cedar posts, the rest of it having disappeared mysteriously during the night.

When the first Episcopal Church was built the steeple was surmounted with a wather cock in the form of a fish, and the village was immediately dubbed "Salmon City." But in time "Hardscrabble" "Buckville" and "Salmon City" gave way to the staid old name of Cobourg.

"The feelings of the first settlers many of whom, thanks to their own industry, were in comparatively easy circumstances, were very much embittered by the treatment they received at the hands of a certain class of old country people who now began to come into the country. The feeling that existed on both sides will be best illustrated by the following little anecdote: An English gentleman who had been a few years in the country was about to run for Parliament, and called one fine evening at the house of Mr. Wolcott for the purpose of soliciting his aid in the coming election. Loath to refuse his polite request, though he had no intention of aiding him, Mr. Wolcott accompanied him to the house of Mr. Ash whose aid he also solicited. After a good deal of preliminary conversation Mr. Ash gave vent to his pent up feelings in the following rather forcible little impromptu speech:

"We toiled up and dragged our luggage up through miles and miles of

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wilderness, and we took our axes and hewed a place out of the solid wilderness, for you to come to! We made roads for you to drive your carriages over, and now you want to drive your carriage wheels over us! We are not fit to associate! We are to be put down to the lowest grade of society because we have not had those advantages of education that the country could not afford! You want to ride rough shod over us because you happen to have the advantage over us of coming from an old country--a country that owes you nothing, and that has been hundreds of years growing to be what it is. No sir! I use my influence to put no such people into power. I will do you no injury, but I will say to no man, vote here or vote there! Let every man vote as his conscience directs him."

This was the first time the candidate for Parliamentary honors had condescended to cross the threshold of his homespun neighbor, and it is needless to remark that he did not call again.

When the steamer Frontenac passed up the lake, which it did shortly after it was built after the war of 1812, its machinery made such a fearful noise that the people left their houses and ran for their lives to the lake shore to see what was the matter, one man losing his hat in his hurry and consternation. The settlers gave it the name of "Old Puffer" and it afterwards became such a terror to the children in its trips up and down the lake that the mothers were in the habit of frightening them into good behavior by threatening to call "Old Puffer".

Tradition says the first Canada thistles seen in this part of the country sprang up on the road sides from seed scattered from the waggons that conveyed the Government stores from Kingston to Toronto during the war of 1812. The first yellow weed seen here sprang from the seed brought from Westbrook by Capt. Brock. If it had not come in Capt. Brock's seed it would most assuredly have come in somebody else's, but for all that one can not help feeling as if they would rather enjoy giving Capt. Brock a good shaking.

The first burying-ground in this part of the country lies unknown and unnoticed, marked by a few rude stones, on the hillside on the farm of Mr. Allen Ash, and quite near to "The Pines," now the residence of Mr. Winans, which is beautifully situated at the edge of the pine grove on the hill top, and where that charming little volume of poems, "Wild Notes from the Back Woods," was written by Miss Rhoda Page, afterwards Mrs. Falkner.

Among the oldest cleared spots in the country is Sherbrooke. And an architectural curiosity such as I think I may safely say is not to be met with in many miles is Sherbrooke Lodge, which sprang from a log cabin built by one of the earliest settlers. It is situated on the lake shore about four miles east of town. On first seeing Hawthorn's "House of the Seven Gables," I remember wondering what manner of shape a house could be to have seven gables, but Sherbrooke might be called the house of the

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*much*  
twenty-seven gables, without such, if any exaggeration, / A happy memory of Sherbrooke rises up as I write, as seen in the glow of an October afternoon, when the waves were sobbing dreamily along the shore, and the scarlet leaves raining softly down from the vine tendrils that cling over its many gables. As it reveals itself through a vista of evergreens, the romantic beauty of the situation and the picturesqueness of the low rambling house, which presents some new features at every turn, causes it to open on the vision like a story un-told.

Another picturesque house in a romantic situation is "Marino," which is on the shore a couple of miles nearer to town. "Marino", which has for many years been the abode of Capt. McDonald's family, was built by old Mr. Ash shortly after the war of 1812; the farm on which it stands being part of the Government grant of 400 acres received by him as his right as a discharged British soldier. When this house, whose windows are now washed by the waves in stormy weather, was built there were a couple of acres of land between it and the water's edge. But the lake has crept in year after year, swallowing up an orchard in its course, and promising fairly to swallow up the whole establishment before many years, which would seem like washing out an old picture. "Marino" is in all probability the oldest house now standing in this part of the country, it having been the second frame house erected in the Township of Hamilton.

*Capt. McDonald Cause -*