

A-Cobourg - Stores, Shopping center
(06-08) Q

EARLY RETAILING IN ONTARIO

Snuff and Hair Ribbons for Men, Ink Powder, Quills, Brimstone, etc., Were Staple Articles— Every Store a Departmental Store and "Cash and Carry" a Perfection.

(By IDELL ROGERS.)

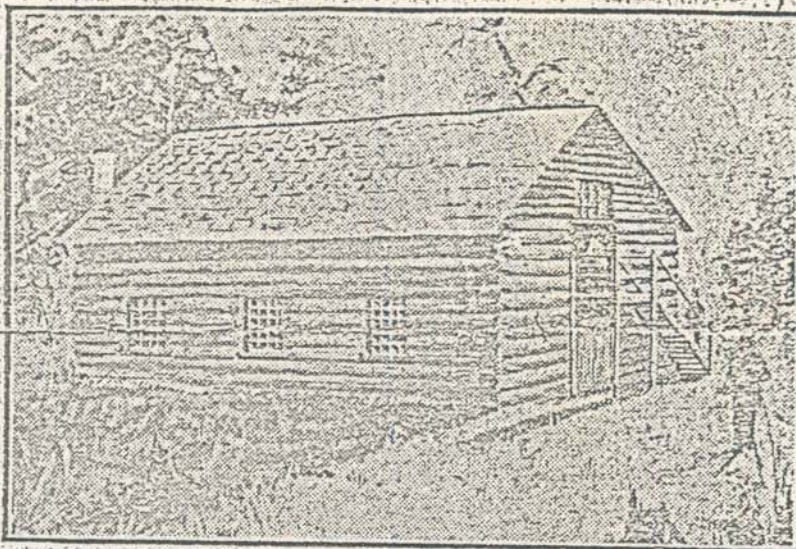
Cobourg, March 14— The first store what is now the town of Cobourg, which at that time may have been called "Buckville," Hamilton "Hardscrabble" was opened in a log building on what is now King street by a Mr. Elias Jones in 1802. The name Hamilton, which is still retained by the township in which Cobourg is situated, was in honor of Peter Hamilton, who was a member of Council and acting Governor of Canada in 1785 and 1786. "Hardscrabble" it is told, was applied to the settlement owing to the fact that large families landed there in one day, when a spirited contest took place as to which family should have its log hut fit for habitation first. All of the settlers in the district turned out to help, and as it was the present town's first building boom the name "Hardscrabble" was colloquially applied to it.

First Store in 1792.

Up to the time that Elias Jones opened his little store in Cobourg the nearest store to the settlers in the district was located on the front of Thirdtown, or Fredericksburg, on the Bay of Quinte shore, about six miles west of Bath, this being the first store opened in the Midland, or Bay of Quinte, district, one of the first ports of Ontario to be settled by the United Empire Loyalists. The pioneer in early mercantile business who opened this store was Benjamin Seymour, and the date 1792. In 1797, Reuben Bedell opened a store at or near Hay Bay, one of the historic spots of Canada, as it is the site of the first Methodist church. Some little time afterwards, or early in the nineteenth century, Sheriff Ruttan, who, by the way, was later one of the first Presidents of the Up-

These stores which retailed?

TYPE OF ONTARIO STORE IN 1792



Drawing of an old Presbyterian Church in Cobourg, which, except for the entrance, is the type of the early stores of which the accompanying article by Miss Idell Rogers treats so interestingly.

per Canada Agricultural Association, opened a store at Grafton, in Haldimand township, seven miles east of Cobourg. This building is still standing, and is used for a driving shed. Trade was largely conducted on a system of barter and exchange, and it is said that Mr. Ruttan used to give a yard of calico for a bushel of wheat. Some of the commodities carried in this store were maple sugar, tea, soap, tobacco, snuff, calico, flannel, cambric, beaver hats, sprigged muslin, some lines of hardware, testaments, almanacs, spelling books, quill pens, etc.

It was without doubt a "cash-and-carry store." The story is told that Mr. Ruttan kept on hand a quantity of rum, as was the custom in all those days. He would take a shilling, or five shillings, or the equivalent, per quart. At the time of the war of 1812-1815 a soldier wearing a large cape over his other clothing, went into the store and asked for a bottle of rum. He was given it, and proceeded to stow it away under his coat. Having nothing with which to pay he was ordered to return the liquor, when he took from beneath his cape a similar bottle filled with water and made off with the rum.

Two years before this store was opened a settler in the locality who was building a barn and wanted nails was obliged to saddle his horse and ride to a store near Kingston to secure them. He paid one shilling a pound, divided the nails, putting half in each end of the saddle bag, and returned, making the trip in four days.

Queer Things in Stock.

Those early historic stores kept a number of articles which if offered now to the trade the majority of people would not know their use. For instance, there were the wagon chairs. These were strong, splint-bottomed seats, capable of comfortably holding two persons, or three at a pinch, made to fit into the inside of the box of a lumber wagon—the farmer's usual carriage. Then there might be seen a wooden hoop, eight or nine inches deep and fourteen or sixteen inches in diameter, in which the curd for cheese, then manufactured at home, was pressed, or a pebble and mortar very commonly used in many houses to reduce articles to powder for culinary and other purposes, an apple peeler, a little machine for peeling apples and a prominent feature at apple bees; tin horns, used to summon the men of the family to meals, or upon other occasions when their presence at the house was necessary; keeler, a shallow wooden vessel of two or three gallons capacity, used for holding milk in the days when tin pans were hard to obtain and quite expensive. These keelers and bowls were usually manufactured by the Indians, who also made other useful things for the house, such as splint brooms, wooden spoons, ladles, trays, baskets, etc., which they bartered for provisions. Then there was the combas table, a sort of extension or folding table, and there were also "half-rounds." By using one of these at each end of a "fall-leaf" table the seating capacity was considerably enlarged; consequently they were much in demand for festive events. There were also heckles, made of wood and used to free the fibre from the stalk of the flax. Potsh, kettles and leach tubs were other necessary requirements of those early days.

Prices Are Interesting.

A record of prices obtained by Reuben Bedell at his Adolphustown store about the year 1800, is preserved. A few of them are: Men's fine heaver hats, 23s 4d; men's heavy boots, 7s 6d; women's morocco slippers, 10s; cravat, 5s 6d; fine drab cloth, 22s 6d a yard; sprigged muslin, 10s 6d; breeches stuff, 5s 6d; coating, brown, 5s 6d; tustian, 1s 8d; satinette, 5s 6d. Snuff was 2s a pound; tobacco, 1s 4d. Ink powder sold for 1s 3d, and quills for a penny each. An almanac retailed for 6d, and a spelling book for 2s.

The drug department of this early store was of especial interest. In it was sold balsam, salts, lavender oil, elixir, paragoric, soap, indigo, bergamot essence, brimstone, linseed oil, fever powders, fomatium stick, ink powder, hair powder, blueing, perfume.

Another early store was that kept by John Black, a mighty Scotsman, a striking figure in the early mercantile history of the county of Ontario. He kept a store near Whitby, sign read "John Black" at the door. He was something of an orator and was wont to entertain romancers with political and national.

stores in those early days searching for pretty ribbons. An old Haldimand township historian, now deceased, recounts that his father's oldest brother and contemporary young men wore their hair at full length, braided and hanging down the back. On week days a cord of any kind was considered good enough to tie it, but on Sundays and holidays those who could afford it adorned their hair with bright ribbons. When one of these young men later put in an appearance shorn of his tresses the community was quite electrified, but the convenience was so great to those sturdy sons of the soil that the custom soon became general.

In the dry goods departments of these early stores the calicoes and sprigged muslins offered were de-ly. settlers raised flax and in their homespun way manufactured almost all of their clothing, and also bedding, towellings, bags, robes and harness. It was not unusual to see a team of horses harnessed with the old-fashioned Dutch collars made of linen and with rope tugs and lines. Then, too, they raised sheep and the wool was at home put through the different processes of carding, spinning, weaving and pulling until the finished product turned out material for men's suits and women's dresses, and also for hosiery which were knit by hand, and for underclothing.

Travelling Shoemakers.

Boots and shoes and also millinery were not always found in these early departmental stores, which are often described as carrying a little of everything. A travelling shoemaker, who made periodical trips from house to house, staying long enough to make shoes for each family, supplied the need of footwear. Although high heels were unknown, the young folks even then aspired to modishness, as was evidenced by the demand for "copper toes" by the kiddies and red tops for the youth's high boots. To provide material for making shoes a settler would take two calfskins to a tannery. The tanner kept one and returned the other made into leather. The soles of the shoes were secured by wooden pegs, most often manufactured by the shoemaker himself.

As for headgear for the women, a

woollen hood or fur bonnet was in winter the correct thing, while for summer wear the maidens were taught to fashion for themselves sun bonnets, and later hats made by plaiting straw braid and fashioning hats at home.

When postoffices were opened for his Majesty's mails they were located in these early stores, but proved quite expensive. A letter written by a citizen of Cobourg to a friend in the old country desiring the latter to dispose of some property was carried by Archdeacon Bethune afterwards Bishop Bethune of Toronto, to London to save postage, which at that time amounted to 50c, or 3s.

Ingenuity an Essential.

The early stores, carrying largely only necessities, the inhabitants of the people was constantly called into play to meet the needs of festive occasions. Thus it is told that when "Victoria the Good" was crowned Queen, the men and boys paraded the streets of Cobourg, setting off home-made fireworks, the boughten kind being too expensive if available. These fireworks were manufactured by making fireballs about four inches in diameter and soaking them in turpentine. They were then stuck on long poles before being ignited. Afterwards a large bonfire was started in an open space, an Irish piper played and the people danced.

Old records of the mercantile business carried on by Benjamin Seymour and Reuben Bedell for the latter's store was kept replenished from the larger stock of the former, and probably the Ruffan store at Grafton also tell of the goods taken in payment by these storekeepers, and the prices allowed. They were: Pearl ash, 25s; barley, 6s a bushel; beef, 3d a pound; butter, 9d to 10d a pound; hogs, 4d a pound; mutton, 4d; muskrat skins, 10d; wheat, 4s 4d a bushel; oats, 12s a bushel; oxen, \$30 each, etc.

It was not until the early thirties, when a retired factor of the Hudson Bay Company, Squibb Henry, opened the first bank in Cobourg, that the practice became general, in that locality at least, of paying cash for wheat. It proved a great advantage, in that it brought the trade of farmers for miles around to the town.