

Richardson?

THE SMITH FAMILY OF PORT HOPE

The builder of the Bluestone House, John David Smith J. P., was one of ten children of Elias Smith, Senior, a U.S. Loyalist who had been a successful carpenter and contractor in the town of New York and appears to have amassed a considerable fortune before 1776. Elias Smith "adhered to the Crown" at the Revolution and joined the royal forces as a captain of an independent company of artificers. He served for some time in this capacity and eventually made his way to Montreal, where he established himself as a merchant, trading at times to the West Indies and later to Lake Ontario. He seems to have been in Montreal in 1785-8 and it is probably there that John David was born in 1789. His father had, however, kept up a connection with New York, probably visiting the city more than once, for reasons connected with business and with the attempt to save a part of his large property. It is reported that, by arrangement not uncommon in the Middle Colonies, Elias Smith was able to recover about half his property by surrendering the rest.

Certainly, by 1790, Elias Smith was in command of a fair amount of capital and he began to employ this in the trade on Lake Ontario in conjunction with Captain Jonathan Walton, a ship's captain from New York who had served in the Royal forces as a lieutenant of provincial armed boats. Walton had been in Montreal in 1788, but was now conducting an import trade from Schenectady to Lake Ontario by Oswego. He owned at least one schooner on Lake Ontario which he often skippered himself. Smith probably used a line of bateaux or Durham boats to bring goods from Montreal to Kingston; whether he owned any vessel on the lake at this time is not clear. Nor does it certainly appear that Abraham

... agency in the former province of New York and had finally
adhered to the British Crown, after giving some active support to
the early demands for reform of colonial government. It was in
Captain Walton's schooner that he and Elias Smith are said to have
visited Smith's Creek in 1792, possibly with an eye to establishing
a headquarters for their business in Upper Canada as well as for
a profitable speculation in land.

It was only by coincidence that the location where Elias
Smith was to lay out his town already bore the name of "Smith's
Creek". For more than a century after 1660 it appears on old maps
as Ganaraske from the name of the village established by the
Cayugas. The Mississaugas, who took this territory from the Five
Nations about 1700, called the place and creek "Pemitiscutiak".
In 1785 Richard Beaslet and Peter Smith (or Smyth) applied in
Montreal for a licence to trade on Lake Ontario with four "battoes",
20 men and a rather modest quantity of trade goods. They do not
seem to have returned to Montreal, but in 1789 petitioned Sir Guy
Carleton to be confirmed in possession of houses they had built
at "Toronto" and Pemitiscutiak with a grant of 200 acres at each
place.

The importance of Pemitiscutiak was due to the relatively
short portage to Rice Lake on the Trent-Severn route to Lake Huron.
There was less competition there than at the Humber; the backlands
abounded with game and the salmon fishing was excellent. Peter
Smith seems to have been living there in 1789 and he stayed until
1791 when the base line of the town was surveyed. Augustus Jones,
Deputy Provincial Surveyor, refers to Smith in his notes as if
he were present. He records the position of his house and mentions a
"pond belonging to Peter Smith" at the mouth of the creek. Soon

This pond or lagoon was cut off from the lake by a sand spit or bar. It could at best only be entered by small boats; larger vessels had to remain outside. However, the anchorage was sheltered from some winds and was no worse than most such "landings" along the lower lakes before the days of harbour improvement. Boats could not go far up the creek; for close to the pond the limestone came up near the surface and caused a long series of rapids. These, however, promised to provide a series of good "mill-seats", so highly prized by the settlers. Smith's Creek was a likely site for a town, once the good land in the vicinity was settled. A purchase treaty, signed in 1788, had given the Crown possession of the land from Pemitiscutiak to the Toronto Purchase. Jones' survey of 1791 had marked out the township lines, road allowances and lots for settlers were now ready.

At this period the speculative acquisition of wild land was very popular with North American capitalists. In Canada the British Government was determined to control it as far as possible. There were to be no huge Indian purchases by private persons, such as were being made south of Lake Ontario. Direct dealings with the Indians were illegal; the Crown would purchase land from its Indian allies and make limited grants to settlers who were resident in the province. By the regulations proclaimed in 1791 the basic grant to ordinary settlers was to be 200 acres, with additions up to 1000 acres at the discretion of the governor. Loyalists, military claimants and their children were privileged classes; they were exempt from land fees and the scale of their grants had already been increased and was to be further enlarged before 1800. Loyalist officers like Elias Smith and Jonathan Walton, could claim large additional acreage in their own right and for their

facilities. But the privileged grants, while they encouraged settlement, hardly formed the basis for large scale speculation on the American model.

These restrictions annoyed many of the settlers who wished to enrich themselves by speculation and who claimed that the regulations were checking settlement. As a compromise a system was adopted in 1792-6 which was expected to allow groups of friends to locate together, to make for more compact settlement and to hasten their development by giving settlers of means a pecuniary interest in particular areas. Under this system of "Associated Companies" one or more individuals applied for a grant of land, usually one or more townships, for themselves and their "numerous associates". The grant meant that these people were to bring a fixed quota of settler families into the area within a given period of time. No grants of land were to be made in the area except to settlers recommended by the leaders. Each recommended settler was to receive a grant of 200 acres, with such additions as might be approved by the proper officials; fees and the costs of surveys seems to have been paid or guaranteed by the promoters.

It was on October 6, 1792, that Jonathan Walton, Abraham Walton and Elias Smith, Senior, applied for such a grant of the Township of Hare. This was granted in the name of Abraham Walton and associates. They undertook to bring in forty families, probably by 1796. They began recruiting souls without delay and the next June they brought four families (26 people) to Smith's Creek in Jonathan Walton's schooner. The next morning the settlers landed through a heavy surf. On the flats east of the creek, near Herchimer's cabin, they found a large encampment of Indians, who were not a little startled by their appearance, taking them for "Yankees".

were pitched beside the wigwags. The next morning the settlers began work on temporary huts, roofed with bark.

Other families were brought in before long, though the task of finding settlers may have proved more difficult than was expected. It is probable that the promoters made a charge for recommendations, promising certain services in return. A grist mill is likely to have been one of these, but lots containing mill-seats were still reserved in 1793 and required a special grant. Elias Smith and Jonathan Walton applied for lots 5, 6, and 7, Concession 1 with their broken fronts, undertaking to build saw and grist mills on Lot 6 through which the creek flowed.

Elias Smith had sent his son Peter with goods for a store, and this was set up in a double log house at the foot of King St. Lawrence Herchimer moved on to Rice Lake. An attempt to build a mill in 1795 failed when the banks of the raceway collapsed in the spring thaw of 1796. A dam was built at the lowest rapids and the mills were nearly finished when the partners received confirmation of the grant of Lot 6. On October 8, according to Elias Smith the grants for the three lots were received. By the 15 of November the grist mill was grinding and doing well but the sawmill was not yet going. In the same year Smith had a frame house built of "five rooms on a floor".

A sufficient beginning had been made to prevent Hope Township being among the townships proclaimed by Simcoe to be forfeited and open for settlement after 1796. The system was proving unsatisfactory. The demand for land in Canada had been overestimated and in many cases nothing had been done. The remaining companies were given until June, 1797 to complete their quotas. The associates in Hope were in a better position than most; some of their first recommendations were being confirmed; surveys had been

Major General had a list which contained the names of 42 settlers in Hope, including one youth "under age" and "Oato, a negro". Together with the families of the settlers this brought the population of Hope Township to 187 inhabitants. The list included Elias Smith, Junior, his sister Susannah, wife of Philip Pother, with 11 children and "Nathan" Walton and his wife, but not Peter Smith or any other member of the Smith family. It was open to objection that 18 of the householders claimed neither wife nor children in the township and, since a bachelor did not constitute a family, the quota of the promoters had not been filled. The recommendations were accepted and confirmed, but no new ones were accepted after July, 1797, and ordinary grants of land began to be made in considerable numbers.

The associates received no extraordinary grants for their troubles or expenses and they had difficulty establishing their claims to military lands. In the end Elias Smith and Jonathan Walton were allowed 3,000 acres each, to be confirmed when they became residents of Upper Canada. Walton preferred to remain at Schenectady, though some of his family settled at Smith's Creek. Elias Smith moved there in 1797 with his wife and younger children, the eight year old John David among them. Elias Smith continued his business at Montreal and seems to have divided his time between the two places. Elias Smith claimed to Simcoe in 1799 that he had received 3,000 acres and that five of his children had received a total of 3,600 acres. However, the minutes of the council state that the 3,000 acres in military grants was in addition to the 1800 acres that Smith had already been granted.

The land granted for the mills were divided between the Smiths and the Waltons, Elias Smith getting the part east of,

According to his son, John David, Elias Smith laid out a town plot on his property by 1800; a very early date for a private town in Upper Canada.

In December, 1798, another Smith daughter joined the family. This was Catherine, who had married James Sculthorpe. She moved to Smith's Creek when her husband died and she brought her son, another James Sculthorpe.

For various reasons settlement in Hope was slow after 1799, though the Smith businesses seem to have been reasonably prosperous. An E. Smith paid duty at the Quebec border in 1801 on rum, wine and sugar. Elias Smith, Junior, brought a still to Port Hope in 1803 and the same year Elias Smith received a tavern licence for the District of Newcastle. The village grew slowly; it was a small place in 1813, though it had acquired a store, workshops, a school, a public hall, and a registrar of deeds (Thomas Ward). The old lakeshore trail crossed the creek above the mills and a bridge was built there, but it was washed out in the flood of 1812. Settlers used the lakeshore trail to drive cattle to their holdings (hence the story of a "cowpath" down Walton Street). This trail soon became a road which was more or less passable for wagons. Dundas Street, the great highway across the province, was surveyed along the front of concession III by John Stegman in 1799 and the road was completed to Smith's Creek (near Dale) by the end of the year. A trail was probably formed connecting it with the village. The part between the Lakeshore Road and Welcome was made a "legal road" in 1815.

John David Smith grew up in this little village and began to take some part in the local family enterprises. He served as a Captain in the Durham Militia during the War of 1812. After 1815 he seems to have assumed a more prominent place in the life of

the village. The Smiths had set up a distillery before the war and they do not seem to have been operating it themselves. In 1812 John David was licenced as a shopkeeper to sell liquor. In some later year he took out a still licence. The years 1816-18 saw the opening of a period of expansion at "The Creek". Not only was settlement expanding in Hope Township, but in 1817 a new tier of townships was laid out behind those on the lakeshore. Settlers from Great Britain reached these townships from the lake ports and bought equipment in their stores. A government barracks was built at Smith's Creek to house those going to the townships near Rice Lake. In 1818 the Legislature granted the petition of the inhabitants for a road to Rice Lake and the Cavan Road was opened in the following year from Port Hope to the boundary between Northumberland and Durham and up the boundary to Cavan Township.

Many changes were taking place. The name of the town had been changed. In 1817, when Smith's Creek is said to have had 750 inhabitants, a post office was opened with Charles Fothergill as postmaster. Fothergill sponsored a movement to call the place "Toronto", but made the mistake of referring to it by this name when writing to the Surveyor-General. The result was a sharp rebuke from his Honour the Administrator of Upper Canada (Colonel Samuel Smith, who owned the land in Toronto Township) telling him that the name was quite inadmissible. There were several Smith's Creeks in the province and the inhabitants were anxious for a change. At a public meeting in 1818 they voted to call the village "Port Hope" and this name was accepted by the authorities the following year.

John David Smith would be among those citizens who decided the name of the town, for he was becoming one of the leading citizens. He was made a justice of the peace, which gave him a voice.

in the government of the District and the Township. He also became active in provincial politics. In the riotous election of 1840 he supported the holders of location tickets, brought by Fothergill from the new townships, against the returning officer who refused their votes because they had no deeds to their land. His name headed the list of freeholders who signed the petition (unsuccessful to have the election set aside.

He was also taking some part in church matters. Though an Anglican, he is said to have given land for the Methodist chapel. When an Anglican church was built in 1822, it was on land granted to Elias Smith and most probably donated by John David. It seems likely that he also made substantial contributions to the cost of the building; for in 1837 he advertised no less than fifteen pews for sale, though this part of the advertisement was immediately withdrawn.

John David Smith was himself elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1829. He sat for only one session and does not appear to have stood for re-election. He probably had enough to occupy him at home; for the family had expanded its businesses. The store and the distillery seem to have been given up; but there were schooner plying to Kingston and other ports, the enlarged flour mill, the sawmill, wool-dressing machinery, turning lathes, and a foundry. There were still many town lots, some with buildings on them, and rented farms in the township.

John David Smith was now middle-aged; the children from his first marriage were grown up; he had recently married a second time and it was for his second wife that he began to build (1833) a mansion that would rival, and in its own way surpass, the fine houses which have lately been built in Port Hope and its vicinity.