

Development of Renfrew was based on water

by Harry Hinchley

"Had the possessor of our splendid water power (the second chute of the Bonnechere) improved it or disposed of it to those who would our village would have been double its size and population." So wrote John Munro of the Township of Horton in a report to the Minister of Agriculture in April, 1853.

Before the middle of the summer Hon Francis Hincks, Premier of the Province of Canada, a man with a sharp eye for business, had bought the property. He had it surveyed into a sub-division - now the Hincks Section of Renfrew - and set about developing a town.

In 1854 because of political difficulties, Hincks resigned as head of the government. Later he sailed to England. In 1856 he was appointed Governor of Barbadoes. His property in Renfrew was left in charge of an agent.

To attract industry, attractive offers were made to prospective mill operators. John Lorn McDougall, a big

land owner of the settlement, agreed to build a large grist mill on the quarter-acre lot at the river that he had bought for five shillings. In a row just east of the McDougall Mill other establishments were built - the John McRae Grist Mill, the William Logan Carding Mill, and the Samuel Francis Axe Factory. On higher ground back from the river stood the Munro Plow and Carriage Factory and Wright's Hotel. On the south bank of the river was the sawmill of William Ross.

In September, 1857, to celebrate the opening of the McDougall and the McRae mills a public dinner was held. Invitations were sent to prominent citizens as far away as Perth.

At the same time a province-wide publicity campaign was carried on to promote the development of Renfrew and to advertise the sale of 100 valuable building lots. The next year, 1858, Renfrew separated from the Township of Horton and incorporated as a village.



Renfrew in 1850's. The town as a Village when Sir Francis Hincks shifted industrial activity from Smiths Creek to the Bonnechere River, shown in foreground. He had Donald Kennedy prepare this plan which shows Logans

Woollen Mill, McRae's and McDougall's grist mills and Francis' axe factory clustered by the river with the Village straggling south in the background. At upper right is shown Opeongo Hill. (Re-drawn by Veronica Chenier).