

An Outline of the Early Happenings in and Around Balmer Island

Transcribed by James Austin, May 2005

chimney. The wild pigeons were numerous in those bygone days. One Saturday afternoon the carpenters laid off work & secreted themselves at the edge of a bush in front of the church alongside a small field of peas. In two hours time they had shot over 100 birds. They made excellent eating. A great amount of square timber was taken off each year prior to 1875., all available space in front of the town hall being covered end from the washing green at the river at the flat eastward with road allowance excepted, closely covered with beautiful white pine square timber. The late Duncan McLachlan had a squared timber shanty on the bank of the Dochart creek about 100 yards westward from where the creek crosses No. 17 Highway, 9th Concession, on the lot formerly owned by John Arnot. Towards spring, when the snow was not likely to regain long enough to complete operations the timber would be hauled to the river, scored, but not hewn. It was a sight never to be forgotten to see the hewers competing with each other as to skill and there were some good ones, but the Paddy of them all was the James Murphy, uncle of Archie S. Murphy. As I let my memory go back to those days as a small lad I can clearly see Murphy starting on his unhewn stick. He would begin with a few light blows to get the run of the line, following it up and splitting it fairly in two, but when he started on the home run, O, Boy!, with his broad axe well up over his six feet in height, and power and skill behind it - every blow true to the line - he would leave the timber ready for varnish if ever need be.

I cannot leave without fond memories of the girls and boys of the old school, Where are they? Most of them have gone on and left the worst behind. A few verses by Mrs. Hemans seem to me to fit here for the old gang.

*They grow In beauty side by side,
They filled one home with glee
Their graves are scattered far and wide
By mount and stream and sea.*

*The same fond mother bent at night,
Over each fair, sleeping brow.
She had each folded flower in sight.
Where are those dreamers now?
One night the forest of the west
By a dark stream Is laid,
The Indian knows his place of rest
Far in the cedar shade*