

THE EARLY HISTORY OF SAUGEEN.

As early as 1847, men of vision saw great possibilities in the area known as the "Queen's Bush". The Government was petitioned to have a survey made and the district opened up to settlers. Thus Saugeen Township came into being.

The early history of the town and township of Saugeen is so nearly identical as to be almost referred to in the same connection. Both were surveyed by the late Senator Vidal of Sarnia. He laid out the Elora Road in 1851, and the following winter and spring surveyed the township.

The land in the Township was put on the market by the Government very soon after, classed as School Lands, and were offered for sale in 1852 at \$2.00 per acre. The original settlers, however, were given Squatter's Rights.

Saugeen is the smallest township in the County, and it was the second to be surveyed, Brant being the first, though the free grants along the Durham Road had been opened some time previously.

The first actual settler in the present limits of the township is said to have been the late Peter Smith of Lot 14, Concession 5 of Saugeen, who made the first clearing on the river lot now owned by Mr. Walker Daniels.

The site of Port Elgin was then a dense wilderness, but two families had settled at Saugeen Village, now Southampton, and the township was not surveyed until two and a half years later.

Mr. Peter Smith put in the first crop ever planted in the township in the fall of 1850, and in 1852 was one of Mr. Vidal's party who surveyed the township.

Among the very earliest settlers, most of them previous to the survey were - Alexander and John Wallace, David Kennedy, Thomas Burgess, Philip Strowger, John and Jacob Atkinson, William and James Gowanlock, James Rowand, Peter, John and Thomas Smith, Thomas Turner, Neil and Dougal Bell, Thomas Bryce, Archibald Pollock, James Henry and Laughlan McLean. The latter kept a little tavern on the lakeshore, in front of the present town of Port Elgin.

A son, in the family of Mr. Alexander Wallace above mentioned, was the first boy born in the township, and Flora Smith, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Smith, was the first girl.

Most of these early settlers came to the township to make their new homes in the bush by way of the river Saugeen, either on rafts or scows. Many an exciting story has been written telling of the hair breadth escapes during the course of their passage down the turbulent and treacherous waters of the Saugeen.

For some time after the first settlement, Owen Sound was the nearest market, and some of the early settlers drew their grain through the bush by oxen and jumper to have it ground into

flour, but most of them ground it at home by hand mortars.

The number of incoming settlers was greatly increased in 1852 - 53, and as the population of Saugeen had so augmented as to entitle it to separate Municipal Government, we find the first township organization was effected in 1854, in which year Alex. McNabb was Reeve, John Valentine, John Smith, James Calder and Thomas Turner as Councillors, and James D. Cathay, at whose house the first meeting was held, as Clerk of Saugeen.

The first meeting of the County Council of the new County of Bruce, was convened at Walkerton, on the 22nd day of January, 1867. The meetings of the Provisional Council having been previously held in Kincardine. Our first Reeve to County Council was James Rowand, and Deputy was John Stafford. We had a Deputy until 1873, when Port Elgin became a village.

The first census taken after the original occupation of Bruce by white man, was that in 1851. We find there were 460 habitations within its limits at that date, more than one half of which were described as shanties. There were 499 families, containing 1,837 souls. The extent of the school system may be judged from the fact that there were 16 pupils attending school in the whole County, but by 1861, the population had risen to 27,499 and 4,665 families.

The first connection with the outside world came by electric telegraph in the year 1869, followed in 1873 by the first rail connection, with the building of Wellington, Bruce and Grey Railway. Up to this time, the only means of transportation was by water or stage coach.

The first schools in Saugeen were built around 1855 - 1858, and were of logs and benches for the seats, and our first church meetings were in people's homes and out in the open in the summer time. I have heard Grandma Clazie speak of Sunday School being held over under the old pear tree, and Mr. Thomas Turner was the teacher. In fact, that was Sandy Bell's first Sunday School.

Women's organizations were being formed also, as one of our early pioneers, in the person of Mrs. Donald McTavish, was the first President of Port Elgin Women's Institutes in the year 1897.

(The foregoing article was compiled by Mrs. Grant Clazie, from an 'Old Atlas of Bruce County' and old copies of the Port Elgin Times).

Mrs. Donald McTavish referred to in the above sketch was the Maternal grandmother of Mr. Donald Lamont, Reeve of Saugeen Township, in this year of 1960.