

Grist Mill On Indian River Was First Building Of Warsaw In Pioneer Days

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Back in the earliest days of the history of this county and only six years after the first attempted settlement of the present city of Peterborough, 1,950 solid British immigrants from the county of Wiltshire, England, braved the hardships of sailing ship and wilderness travel to make new homes in the newly-surveyed Township of Dummer in Upper Canada. Most of them financed their own passage and settlement, except for 150 who were sponsored by the Marquis of Bath and a remaining 100 persons who came under the British Government colonizing scheme of that period.

Survey Township

Much ground work and enterprising foresight took place before such large numbers could be brought into the wilderness. Richard Birdsall surveyed the township in 1823 and the Hon. Zacheus Burnham of Cobourg chose a saw and grist mill site at a strategic spot on Squaknagossippi Creek (Indian River) which was to become the nucleus of the present village of Warsaw. It was known in those days as Dummer Mills.

Choate And Burnham

The names of Choate and Burnham are synonymous with the earliest beginnings of Warsaw but their first joint enterprise in Upper Canada was much earlier. They were both "Late Loyalist" stock from the state of New Hampshire and they felt out the possibility of Canadian settlement as far back as 1796 in a farm clearing venture in Wentworth County near the present site of Glanford. During their first two years, they travelled on foot from their New England homes

to clear the bush and plant crops, returning again in the fall to harvest them. As their project got larger, friends accompanied them and they used ox wagons to carry implements and baggage. Not even the scourge of smallpox prevented them from finishing their long journeys nor did the mighty Niagara River. They tied a stout timber to a flat-bottom scow and the protruding ends to the horns of an oxen on each side and their forced swimming propelled the scow from side to side.

Elected To Assembly

Here the history of these two pioneers becomes obscure for a while, but there are stories told of Burnham reaching Cobourg with four shillings in his pocket with which he purchased an acre. He picked a spot on the fertile bench lands of Ontario just west of Cobourg, and apparently by wit and brawn thrived mightily, because he became a member of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada in a few years time. It was during this period that he decided on the millsite on the Indian River, and after building it put Thomas Hartwell, a Wiltshire miller, in charge of the mill operation. After Hartwell's death, Thomas Choate entered the picture and took over the mill. He and his descendants headed business and cultural enterprise in the village for almost a century. He established the first post-office which was opened at the same time the postal service was inaugurated in Chicago, and it remained in family custody for 100 years.

Boon To Village

The grist mill in the village was a boon to the struggling colonists in the township. The land

was much poorer than that being settled by the neighbouring Irish immigrants in Douro, and being without oxen or horses for many years, land had to be cleared by hand-logging. Their earlier homes were no better than one-room shanties covered with the traditional split basswood shakes with sugar holes for windows.

Directs Project

Capt. Rubidge directed their project with untiring efforts from the beginning, and in a very business-like manner. He had guides conduct advance parties to each location and tickets were issued to heads of families and their grown-up sons for 100-acre lots. Conditions of settlement stated that 1 shilling per acre was to be paid each year for 4 years, and at the end of 8 years, a payment of £80 gave the settler his title.

Call To Arms

During the back-breaking chore of settlement came the calls to arms against William Lyon Mackenzie and his party of rebels. Settler Ensign Robert Wigmore founded up five other officers and 35 private volunteers to train as militiamen. In the spring of 1837 they gathered in the village, and during a heavy snowstorm bivouacked in the old stone grist mill. They marched to Port Hope, to find they were not required, and returned within a few days. Early in June they were ordered to Toronto, and returned again without seeing service. Volumes of correspondence between Wigmore and heads of the militia board were of no avail in getting a shilling of pay for any of the

men, and the case was finally dropped. A few patriots enlisted for service in the Boer War, about 25 joined up for World War I, and 15 men for World War II.

Not Enough Power

At the time of the Mackenzie Rebellion, Zacheus Burnham found that his water mill was not getting enough power to operate it efficiently. He theorized that if more water was let into Indian River from its source that his troubles would be overcome. At Gilchrist Bay, on Stoney Lake, about a quarter of a mile of red granite stemmed the flow of water into the river and White Lake. Thomas Choate, who undertook the job, decided that he would blast a channel through the rock and make the necessary spillway, but when he tried to buy several kegs of blasting powder for the job, local storekeepers

viewed the project with much concern and doubt as to whether or not they had a rebel in their midst. After much investigation, he was given the explosives and the engineering job was completed with splendid results in greatly increased water flow to the mill.

Population 300

At no time did the village population exceed 300 people, and 20 years ago it fell off to about 200. Four churches, a town hall, large school, two general stores, garages, a branch bank, a saw-mill, a cheese factory and chopping mill comprise the town at the

present time. In the days of the horse and buggy, the allied trades of cartilage and harness-making and livery business flourished. Bakeries and taverns also played their part in the business of the community.

Few Old-timers

Although there are very few old-timers still resident in Warsaw, the village doctor, Donald Monro, can forge strongest links between past and present. He says that he probably knows too much about its history, but perhaps he refers to his medical knowledge of its inhabitants. No one is better informed than the doctor, who personally has brought over 3,000 infants of the combined Douro-Dummer townships into the world. His stories as a horse-and-buggy doctor are experiences that

could be recorded in much detail, preferably by himself.

Three Fast Horses

He kept three fast horses in his stable at all times, and his calls and vigils in lonely cabins of upper Dummer and with major operations performed in co-operation with the late Dr. Alex Fraser Sr. of Lakefield in farm-house kitchens, would make present-day medical history, he says. The "doc" has taken time out from his busy practice to be active in politics, and has been president of the East Peterborough Liberal Association for 28 years, and an additional 12 years president of the county association as well. Together with medical and personal calls, he probably did a finer job of political canvassing than any riding executive in the county.

He is a testimony that a busy and fruitful life make for a youthful outlook on life, for not many men are as busy as he at his age.

Like New Hampshire

It is interesting to note the similarity of the township to that of the state of New Hampshire from whence the Choates and Burnhams emigrated. The rugged limestone-strewn fields and the lush river bottom lands would make the New England tourist feel quite at home. And if by chance he were to stop in the picturesque little village for a bit of shopping, he would understand and appreciate the canny bargaining powers of its merchants which has been passed along from father to son for the past 122 years, a tradition of the Down East Yankee.