

# Purple Valley History

Compiled by Mrs. Jack Urbshott  
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The first settlers into the community now known as Purple Valley came on the Indian Trail which now forms a part of the Bruce Trail. They carried their supplies from Warton and Colpoys Bay over this trail for several years.

To Highland-born Peter Cameron must go the distinction of being the first settler. He was followed a few months after by the four Watchorn brothers, Charles, John, Thomas and Henry and Edward Rothwell with their respective wives and families around the year 1870. They were soon followed by many other families.

Many of these settlers originated from northern Ireland the birth place of Orangeism. Therefore one of the first things they did was organize an Orange Lodge, holding their first meetings at Colpoys Bay.

The first school house was built in 1871. It was constructed of logs with desks running lengthwise with long wooden benches for seats. This building was also used for an Orange Hall and for Church services. It continued to serve in this triple capacity for a goodly number of years. When a new school was built in the year 1888 and the Orangemen built a hall of their own close by on the site of the present one which was built in 1936-37.

In the summer of 1884 the post office was secured and it became necessary to formally name the community which up until this time had been known as the Watchorn Settlement.

Alex McNeil, M.P. at that time suggested to Chas. Watchorn that the post office and surrounding community be named Watchorn after him, but Mr. Watchorn wouldn't agree to this. Instead, suggested the name Purple Valley. The color purple was suggested to him by a degree of that name in the Orange Order. While the community is not a valley in the true sense of the word, Mr. Watchorn preferred to regard it as such because of the succession of flats that traverse it north-east to south-west.

The buildings were all built of logs except for one frame house which still stands today. The post office was in this house which was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Charbonneau. Mrs. Charbonneau started the first grocery store here, her original capital being one hundred dollars. Mr. Charbonneau died of a heart-attack in 1890. Mrs. Charbonneau later married Malcolm McMillan and they erected the store and dwelling in its present site.

Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Gilbert bought the store from Mrs. Gilbert's grandmother and in the year 1962 had the distinction of having operated a country general store continuously for 50 years.

Grey elm, rock elm and basswood were considered the most valuable timber in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Although there were several sawmills only two at a time operated. John Henry Watchorn operated the first sawmill. John Ashcroft operated a sawmill for 15 years on lot 26 Con. 12, then operated a broom handle factory for 3 or 4 years. Wm. Hambly and John Wright built their sawmills below the bluff on what is now known as Mallory Beach. Wm. Hambly had wooden ladders built up the side of the bluff for going to and from his mill. These ladders are unsafe today.

John Wright had a log slide built to shoot the logs down over the bluff to the mill. Unfortunately many logs were split or damaged from so much force. The steam boiler that ran this mill printed the first "Globe & Mail" in Toronto before Mr. Wright bought it.

Many stories are told of experiences at the bottom of the 10th Con. known then as Pruder's Dump where the bluff is not as high. The logs were taken down with team and sleighs to the water below. Most of these logs were rafted to Owen Sound and Warton from these mills.

The community of Purple Valley had at one time three churches, the Methodist Church, later the United Church, St. Thomas Anglican Church and the Baptist Church.

The Methodist and Anglicans first held services in the school. As the congregation grew, the Methodists decided a new place of worship was needed. About the year 1885

the Oxenden Methodists, having built a new church, sold their old one to Purple Valley. This building was sawed into three sections and hauled across the ice on Colpoys Bay and erected on the site where it now stands.

The Anglican Church was first built at what was then known as Bell's Corners in 1888 and later in 1905 moved to the central location beside the United Church. Some of the Ministers resided in Lion's Head and made the trip by horse and buggy. In 1959 this church was closed and the building sold to Purple Valley W.I.

On the 12th Concession at the 20th sideroad corner sometime in the 1890's a Baptist Church was built. Rev. T.C. Robinson was their pastor for several years, but the destruction of the church by fire and many of the members having moved away proved too heavy a blow to the weakened congregation.

At the upper or northern end of the 12th line, settlers began taking up Crown lands in the early 1870's. Some of these were the Melvor, Holler, Forbes, Coveney and Duncan families. They were followed by Scales, McLean, Bittorf and Urbshott families, as well as many others.

This settlement had a post office early and received its name, Melvor, from the first postmaster, John Melvor. He also operated a store at his home for a time.

The Melvor farm was enlarged to 600 acres and known as the Albemarle stock farm. John Melvor was an enterprising citizen and early saw the necessity of stock improvement and imported many pure bred animals in cattle, sheep and swine. He was early in planting substantial orchards and was one of the largest maple products producer on the peninsula, having a modern sugar house and appliances which included two large evaporators. He frequently tapped 1000 trees.

During construction and clearing time, it was not uncommon to see workmen numbering 20 to 30 around the Melvor board. On special occasions such as barn raisings or logging bees, Piper Currie of Cape Chin, McLaren's Pipe Band of Warton, or other special music would be provided.

A sawmill also operated on this place for a while. In 1901 the present substantial residence was built.

The first school was held in a log house on the farm of Andrew Holler. After a short time it was decided to purchase an acre of land on Lot 15 Concession 12, EBR, where a little red school house was built in 1881. Inside were enough double seats to accommodate about 40 pupils. In 1901 a brick school was built on this same lot. The school served this community for church, Sunday School, dances and box socials.

The attendance over the years dropped to 4 pupils by 1949 when the school was closed and arrangements made for the children to go to Purple Valley School. In 1963 this school was sold and made into a home.

The 15th sideroad was put through in 1891.

The Oak Flats, as it was known before it was all timbered, quite often flood in the spring of the year covering some 75 acres making the road between the two communities impassable for up to 2 to 4 weeks.

One year in the early 1900's the flats flooded early, then froze over. The children of the community had a gala time sleigh riding down the hill and ever so far out on the ice.

Agriculture has always been the chief industry of these two communities and still is for the majority of the few families left. Wayne Ward operates an implement business and William Hepburn operates the only sawmill.

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