

HISTORY OF EARLY SETTLEMENT

Two hundred years ago (1776) Prince Edward County was a forest wilderness completely unsettled. From time to time the Indians had pitched their wigwams in the county, but, thrust out in the lake as it is, it was a vulnerable target for raiding parties. The Hurons roamed the land to the north of Lake Ontario, the Iroquois the land to the south. Between them the county was a no man's land. Besides, the county - almost an island and a small one at that - did not provide the range needed by game in any numbers.

Champlain was the first white man to see the County. In 1615 Champlain, in the company of 500 Indians and 14 fellow French explorers, paddled through the Bay of Quinte. Champlain wrote: "It was a rich and cheery land. All this lovely region was uninhabited, for its Indian population had abandoned it in fear of Iroquois raiders."

It was left for missionaries to be the first to attempt to establish themselves in the County. For 12 years, from 1668 to 1680 two Sulpician priests ministered to the Indians at an Indian settlement on the north shore of Conseccon Lake. The word "Conseccon" was an Indian word meaning "big fish". The Indian village was called Kente, spelled Quinte by the French, which gave the name to the Bay of Quinte and this whole area. The missionaries came at the invitation of the Indians themselves. It was a nightmare trip for the two priests from the Sulpician seminary in Montreal to the county - 26 days of back-breaking paddling from dawn until dark, wet clothing, starvation diet, and the close contact with the Indian canoeemen. They suffered great privations in their lonely struggle at Kente. Their hut was of bark, divided into two sections. The one half served as a chapel, the other their living quarters. Their mission did not last for the Indians abandoned Kente when the beaver and game were exhausted. In 1680 the Sulpicians abandoned their mission. To-day only traces of it remain in a field on the north shore of Conseccon Lake. For another century after the missionaries left no white man settled here.

It took a revolution to settle the county, and almost overnight it was settled. Within a generation the entire 250,000 acres were surveyed, farms cleared, villages established, roads built, and wharves run into the bay and lake. For Prince Edward County was settled by Loyalist refugees, disbanded soldiers and Quakers. When their countrymen in the 13 seaboard British colonies struck for independence in 1776, these were the people who refused to fight the Crown. George 3rd was King at that time. When the war was over, the winning side showed no mercy toward the losers. Their property was confiscated, they were disfranchised, imprisoned, some were tarred and feathered. Those who for religious reasons remained pacifist (e.g. the Quakers) were treated just the same as the soldiers and loyalists. Those who wouldn't fight for independence were not welcome in the 13 new states.

Tens of thousands of refugees escaped to Canada. The British Government offered land and transport to all those who wished to leave the United States. Many thousands were transported by British ships from New York harbour to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Quebec in 1783. Other people came overland from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, by ox-cart, on foot, any way they could. A refugee camp was established at Sorel, Quebec - a place to stay while the surveyors were measuring and sorting out land for them.

Surveyors worked furiously to bring order and organization to the woods so it could be distributed in lots. The winter of 1783-84 was cold; the work was hard. The survey crews lugged their chains and carried their transits through hip-deep snow, chopping through ice and forest to run the lines meant to divide the farms. Such was the haste to get land surveyed and allotted that sometimes ignorant and careless men were employed to measure it; many blunders and errors were made.

There were ten townships surveyed and settled in this area. Townships were then called towns. First town was Kingston; 2nd - Ernestown; 3rd - Fredericksburg; 4th - Adolphustown; (Ernest, Frederick and Adolphus were 3 sons of King George III) 5th town was Marysburg; 6th - Sophiasburgh; 7th - Ameliasburgh. Mary, Sophia and Amelia were daughters of King George, Amelia being the 7th daughter and 15th child. Prince Edward for whom the county was named, was the 4th son of George III, and he was Queen Victoria's father.

The first five townships were supposed to be all surveyed and allotted in 1784. Actually Marysburgh wasn't completely done when the Loyalists arrived there in late spring of 1784. The settlers were transported up the St. Lawrence River to their new homes in large flat-bottomed boats called bateaux, four or five families in each. The batteaux were propelled by the men with poles. Rapids were a formidable prospect, and there were many rapids on the way. It is 250 miles from Sorel to the Bay of Quinte.