

P E D L A R S

In the 1790's and early 1800's the first settlers in Seventh Town were living in log cabins along the Bay, for it was their life-line and road. It was a great event when the pedlar's boat came along. He travelled up the bay by canoe or flat-bottomed boat, stopping at each clearing along the bayshore. He usually stayed an hour or two and perhaps the most important thing he brought was news, news of the outside world and of other families along the bay. He brought calico prints, needles and thread, pots and pans, pewter plates and spoons, tools such as shovels and axes, ribbons and combs, tea and tobacco. Even when they could not buy it was a luxury for the settlers to look at the pedlar's wares. They had no money, but the pedlar would take furs or grain or other produce in payment. Sometimes a family possession was parted with for sorely needed goods.

We know the names of several of the early boat pedlars. Best remembered of the Quinte pedlars was Asa Wallbridge. He came to the Quinte area from Vermont in 1792. He was a bachelor, a bit crochety, who lived by himself in a log cabin near the Indian camp at Meyer's Creek (now Belleville), on the corner of what is now Front and Dundas Street. One-half of his shanty was living quarters; in the other half he kept store. But he set out regularly in his flat-bottomed Schenectedy boat with a mission in his heart. He carried bolts of bright calico and muslin, combs, twists of candies and pewter plates. He also carried apple-tree seedlings. He must have loved his new land, wanted to leave something to it, this man without wife and children. As he made his rounds, he offered his seedlings. When the settlers told him they had no money for his trees, he gave them away. He was the Johnny Appleseed of the Quinte area. Many of the old orchards in the County came from his plantings. He periodically returned to the States to get a fresh supply. Asa Wallbridge's brother Elijah and his family came to Canada from Vermont in 1800 and took up 1200 acres, the entire east end of Massassaga Point. Asa died at the home of a nephew, William Wallbridge, at Massassaga in 1827.

Shubel Huff was another boat pedlar of the early days. He was always sure of a welcome and came every two weeks with the news, He usually sold something, if only a halfpenny twist of candy. He carried tea too - a great luxury, and calico, muslin, ribbons, pots and pans, clockworks and pewter. He bartered for grain and other produce. He never dealt in cash; none of the pedlars did.

They belonged to a special time and place, the waterway pedlars. They provided, as well as the goods they sold, a link with the old country across the lake, and with other pioneers along the bay. They obtained their wares from across the lake or from Kingston, which in turn had come from Montreal.

Captain John Walter Meyers, who later set up the mill at Meyers' Creek (Moirs), had a batteau which he plied up and down the bay, not only for peddling but for carrying