

Perry Township opened for settlement in 1873

The history of Perry Township, centred around Emsdale, has been compiled for The Forester by Harry Hayward and J. Fred McDonald, two of the old pioneer residents. Times have changed and Emsdale no longer occupies the position of importance as a staging point that it once held. Memory lives on however, and the area forms another section in the overall pattern of Muskoka's development.

Perry Township was surveyed and thrown open for

settlement in the years 1873 and 1874. Among the survey party were David Gilruth, the grandfather of the David Gilruth we all know today, and William Slorach, the father of William Slorach and Mrs. H. R. Hayward, who both still live at Scotia.

These two men decided to take up land in the new Township, and were the first settlers. David Gilruth settled on Lots 19 and 20 on the tenth Concession, 3/4 of a mile east of the present village of Emsdale, while William Slorach settled on

Lot 17 on the ninth concession at Scotia, where his son William is now living.

A sidelight on Wm. Slorach's choice of location was the fact that at that time the present marsh at Scotia was a shallow lake, which no doubt influenced his choice, but later when the railroad was built through to North Bay, they blasted the rock at the head of Ragged Falls, letting the water drain away and leaving his home on the edge of a marsh instead of on the edge of a lake.

At the time these men settled in Perry Township, their nearest neighbor was Ernest Norton Sr., one mile north of Huntsville at the top of Carpenter's hill, on the old Muskoka road.

The first Post Office in the Township was in the home of Wm. Slorach, who was also the first Postmaster, and, being a good Scotchman, asked that it be called Scotchtown, but as there was already a Post Office by that name in Ontario, the authorities came as close to it as possible and called it Scotia.

The first Post Office at Emsdale was in Robert Scarlett's store, a half mile west of the present village, on the old Muskoka road.

Soon the country became settled up and we find such names as the Mitchells, the Glendennings, the Hardings, the Jenkins, the Bacons, the Pettits, the McDonalds, the Pelchs, the Flemings, the Bices, the Fishers, the Collinsons, the Schamehorns, the Clearwaters, and a host of others.

In 1886 the railroad was completed through to North Bay, and Emsdale moved down off the hill to its present situation. In those days it did a tremendous amount of business, being practically the only outlet to the railroad for many miles on either side, to the east and west.

In the late 80's or early 90's, J. R. Booth built the first log of his railroad from Scotia to Depot Harbour and, as there was no station at Scotia, it used Emsdale as its eastern terminus. In those days if one wanted to get to Parry Sound, one came to Emsdale one day, stayed overnight and took the morning train to Rose Point, then across the bay by boat to Parry Sound. There was at that time four hotels doing a good business in Emsdale.

The beginnings of things in the south end of the Township was at old Cypress. Here we find such names as the Birchs, the Wicketts, the McCormicks, the Egertons, the Bates, the Wilkinsons, the Hooeys, and others. The first Postmaster was Wm. McCormick. There was a store, a church, a hotel, a school and several dwellings.

When the railroad came through, everything moved out to Novar, and here we find among the first settlers

such names as the George Savages (who built the first store in Novar), the Todds, the Parkers, the McGillivrays, who built the first saw mill; the HARRISES, the Hazelwoods, and many others we have not room to mention.

The township was incorporated early in the year 1888. The first meeting of the council of the new municipality was held in the old school house at Scotia, which was situated on the Hilliar farm, just west of the overhead bridge, south of Scotia station. The Council consisted of Joseph Mitchell, Reeve, and Councillors James Hopkinson, Thomas Downs, Wm. McCormick and Orin T. Hazelwood. They appointed F. B. Clearwater as the first clerk and Edward Handy as the first treasurer.

In 1896 the J. R. Booth

Railroad was extended eastwards from Scotia to connect at Madawaska with the eastern portion from Ottawa and Kearney on the eastern side of the Township, immediately began to boom. So much so that in 1908 it broke away from the Township and became a separated town. Such, in brief, is the early history of Perry Township. At present, she is traversed from north to south by King's Highway No. 11, and the main line of the C.N. Railways, Toronto to North Bay, and from east to west by the branch line of the C.N. Railways from Parry Sound to Algonquin Park. There is an air port situated within her borders. She has main line telephone communications and hydro facilities, so that it is a far cry from the days when those first brave souls settled in what was then solid bush.