

SECOND OF A SERIES **SERIES NO. 2.**
DACRE



A view of the area from the Baptist Church.

A history

One hundred years ago, Dacre was an all-day trip from Renfrew and for lumbermen, farmers, commercial men and other travellers setting out on the Opeongo Road it was the first overnight stopping place after leaving Renfrew.

Next overnight stopping place was Plaunt's Mountain, then on to Foy's Mountain, Brudenell, Combermere, Whitney, etc. Gangs of men, headed for a winter's work in the shanties, were transported in the same way.

Early settlers of the area say it was not unusual in those days to see 50 or 60 teams of horses sheltered and fed at Dacre's two stopping places.

Large stables took care of many of them and the rest were tied to fences built to keep cows, which ran the roads then, away from the sleighs.

The womenfolk of hotel owners were kept busy preparing meals and sleeping accommodation for the travellers. Bread had to be baked, butter made and meat prepared. The latter was usually supplied by the innkeepers slaughtering and butchering their own animals.

Supplies and provisions for the various lumber camps along the Opeongo trail from Renfrew to the headwaters of the Madawaska were hauled by horses and sleighs and all

travelled through Dacre.

Dacre then consisted of two separate little villages, Upper and Lower Dacre.

Lower Dacre was close to where the Opeongo Road crossed Constan Creek. There were two or more stopping places there. Liquor and high wines were sold for five cents a glass and the crowds often became noisy and disorderly. (This probably accounts for the name of "Bully's Acre" sometimes given to the village.)

Land Grants

To attract more settlers into the district, the government set out the conditions for grants of land. Originally 50 acres, these were later increased to 100 acres.

A settler must be at least 18 years of age; he must take

possession of his allotment within one month and put in a state of cultivation at least 12 acres of that land within four years. He must build a house at least 20 by 18 feet and keep in repair his share of the road.

A settler first built a log dwelling and if his land prospered he built a frame or stone house. A brick house was a sign of the peak of success.

The log house of the size required by the government could be put up in four days by five men. The roof was covered with bark and the spaces between the logs plastered with clay and white-washed.

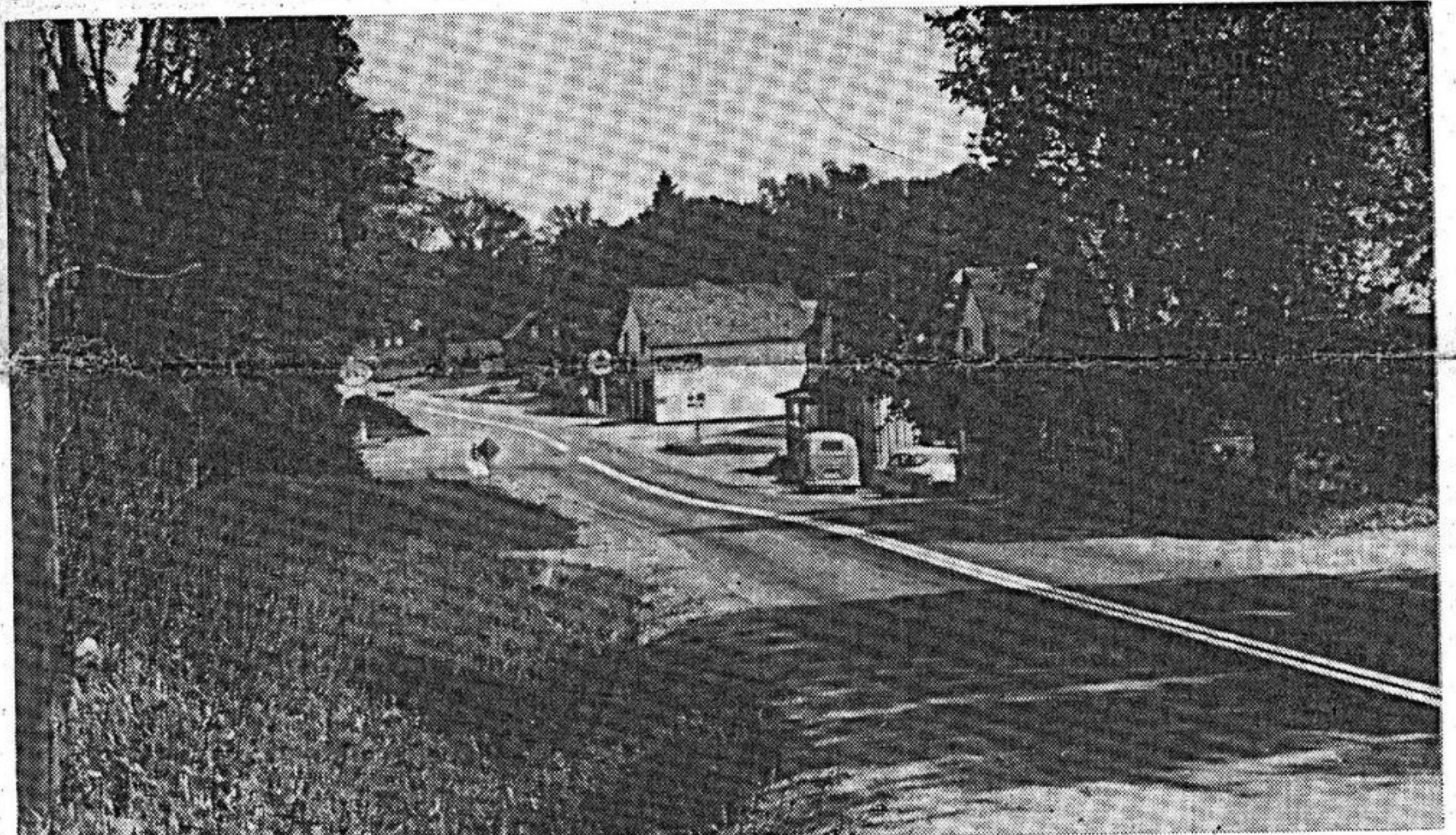
As time went on, most of the houses in Lower Dacre were vacated and there are few signs today to show that a

settlement ever existed there. Upper Dacre is today's Dacre.

When the O.A. & P.S. railway (Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound) was built from Ottawa to Whitney by J R Booth (widely known lumber king) men and supplies were transported by rail. The long portage line of men, horses, sleighs and supplies eased off and Dacre ceased to be the bustling place it once was.



Chief forest ranger Mike Mulvihill, left, with Jack Stewart and Ken Schonauer in front of the Department of Lands and Forests headquarters near Dacre.



Looking down towards the village from a slope on the western approach.

The Opeongo

The idea of the Opeongo was born in 1851 when the continuing tide of Irish and German immigrants demanded colonization roads into the Valley.

Much earlier than this, however, some sort of a trail must have existed. It has been noted that in the War of 1812 the shortest and safest route from Georgian Bay to Bytown (now Ottawa) was along the Opeongo.

Many land grants were made by the government following this war to veterans of the action. Harold (Curly) Collins' great-grandmother was one of these.

Opeongo is an Algonquin Indian word meaning "shallow narrows".

In 1856 Dan McCauley blazed out the Opeongo Line. Dan, the son of a Hudson Bay factor, had been sent to England in his youth but his education failed to dim the lustre of his Valley boyhood. The spirit of adventure and a promised timber limit (later sold to the Skead firm for 100 pounds) prompted him to accept the task of pushing the road into the wilderness.

Under the direction of T P French, then Dominion Crown Land agent who settled for a time at Clontarf, colonists poured into the area. The hardwood slopes of the mountains were easily cleared and

potash became a major source of income. The pine grew tall and stalwart, furnishing material for the timber barons.

Homesteads were built, fields were cleared and fenced, orchards were planted and children grew up.

And always there were lilacs! Beside the old foundations of abandoned homesteads, they remain as memories of someone's search for beauty.

The Line started from Conroy's wharf at Bonnechere Point on the Ottawa and ran westward through Horton township to the then village of Renfrew. It crossed the Bonnechere River here, skirted Carswell's Hill and wound on through Ferguslea, Shamrock, Dacre, Clontarf, Foymount, Brudenell, Barry's Bay, terminating at Wolf Lake near the border of Algonquin Park.

Over its long-rotted corduroy stretches and rocky ledges once crawled caravans of wagons loaded with provisions for an army in the shanties of the Madawaska range.

Lumberjacks worked with primitive tools — axe, cross-cut saw, broad and scoring axe, canthook. Rafts of square timber began to descend the rivers.

Tote roads were transformed into logging railways when the steam engine arrived.



A portion of the Opeongo Line running parallel to highway 132 near Dacre.

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