

JAMES TATE

Ruddy-complexioned and in appearance many years younger than his age indicates, James Tate, pioneer resident of Westmeath, celebrated his 95th birthday on June 3. He possesses a remarkable memory, clear brain, and all his faculties are but little impaired. He enjoys life and thinks he may yet live 15 years. Mr. Tate attributes his longevity to temperate habits and careful diet. One of his keenest pleasures is motoring over the fine roads.

He has seen much of adventure, years of arduous toil, care and privation during pioneer days in the new land.

Mr. Tate was born on his parents farm just outside the city of Bedford, England. As a boy, he remembers his father taking him to see the jail in Bedford, where John Bunyan was imprisoned and the post outside the jail to which Bunyan was chained and allowed to sell needles and pins in support of his wife and family who lived near Bedford. He remembers when matches were first introduced in England and his bringing them into the house to replace the laborious steel and flint, in disobedience to his father's stern injunction against the new invention.

Mr. Tate taught school in England for a few years, then, restless with the spirit of adventure, he began to plan to go to Australia. Finally he and his brother-in-law decided to come to Canada.

In 1857 he married Medelina Dixey, and a few days later with his brother-in-law, his wife and three children, they sailed from Liverpool on a sailing vessel, the "Martin Luther". The ship was coming to this country for timber and was temporarily fitted to accomodate the 600 passengers and 40 of a crew. Each family did their own cooking and cared for their sleeping quarters.

After twenty days out, a terrific storm arose. The masts and sails were swept from the deck of the ship, and it was tossed helplessly about by the high seas. Rockets were shot into the air signalling for help. After two days and two nights of suspense and fear a ship was sighted. It was a West India Government Mail Steamer. Only one man on the rescuing ship was brave enough to row to the tossing vessel with a huge tow rope. The "Martin Luther" had drifted in the region of the Bay of Biscay and was perilously near the rocks. They were towed into Plymouth, where each person had to find lodging in the city and was allowed one shilling, five pence a day till the ship was repaired.

At sea again, life was made miserable by the tyranny of the captain over crew and passengers. He put a Spaniard, to whom he had taken a dislike, in irons on some flimsy pretext. The crew mutinied and forced him to free the prisoner. Another time they seized the captain and debated throwing him overboard or else through the hatchway to the lower deck. There was continual fighting and disorder aboard. Finally, when they docked at Quebec after 15 weeks had elapsed since leaving Liverpool, they had the captain arrested and his sailing license was suspended for several years. Mr. and Mrs. Tate and Mr. and Mrs. Bettel and children went to Montreal and thence to Bytown. After a brief stay there, they took a bus for Aylmer, then a boat to the Chats Rapids, where they had to cross over bridges over ravines and streams in a horse drawn train. Then another boat brought them by a laborious route to Portage du Fort. Leaving their wives there Mr. Tate and his brother-in-law, John Bettel, walked through the bush to the Front Westmeath where they were to work for John and Rex Tucker. The next day the wives were brought in a wagon. The young bride, Mrs. Tate, preferred walking to riding in the desperately jolting wagon and walked till she wore the soles off her boots, on the rough road.

When Mr. Tate came to Westmeath seventy-four years ago there were but six houses in the village, The Tuckers, The Frasers, the Goddards, the Achesons and Samuel Adams were some of the earliest settlers he remembers. The mail came three times a week from Ottawa to Portage du Fort to Beachburg, and then to Westmeath.