

Officially Waterford doesn't exist but centennial still celebrated

Officially it no longer exists, but the former Town of Waterford, now in City of Nanticoke, is still celebrating its 100th anniversary during 1978.

It failed to survive a full century as a municipality, cut down in its prime (96) by a political force known as Regional Government. On April 1, 1974, The Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk came into being and all municipalities failed to exist as individual communities.

The former Town of Waterford has a history as intriguing as any community, studded with interesting characters and numerous important events, some happy and others disastrous.

From the time the first building was erected and the first family moved in, through incorporation as a village and amalgamation into regional government, the community of Waterford has gone through many changes.

The town got its start back in 1800 when Paul Avery built the first grist mill on Nanticoke Creek. With the mill to attract farmers and other businesses the community was starting its growth.

The War of 1812 set progress in the area back through burning and looting by American troops. Waterford suffered as did the rest of Townsend Township, with one of the main targets of the flames being the mills.

However, by 1815 repairs to the mills had been completed by Job Loder and growth continued. In the 1820s the community, after going through a series of names, came to be called Waterford. The name stuck and through that decade distilleries, mills, stores and other businesses took their place in the town.

In 1826 the community got a post office and by 1830 the saw mill was doing a booming business.

According to "Townsend and Waterford, A Double Portrait", a history of the area, "half way through the 19th century the village boasted two distilleries, a tannery, steam sawmill, three wagon-makers, a brickmaker and a range of stores and other services."

Townsend contained a number of hamlets and other small communities such as Boston, Bloomsburg, Villa Nova, Townsend Centre, and Wilsonville.

In 1847 Waterford was given the nod as the principal community in the township when a public meeting of area residents selected it as the site for the township hall.

There were about 450 people at the meeting and Waterford was selected over a strong minority who wanted the hall built at Townsend Centre. The presence of the township hall (which burned in 1897 and wasn't rebuilt until 1902) encouraged the growth of Waterford.

Another major factor in the community's expansion at that time was Green's

foundry. Established in 1844 by James Loder Green, the small operation eventually grew into an internationally known factory producing reapers, mowers, saws, seed drills and other agricultural implements.

The Waterford factory produced 2,000 reapers per year and won awards in a number of international agricultural expositions. By the late 1870s the foundry was the town's largest employer with a payroll of 200 people.

In 1878, after reaching the required population of 750 on less than 500 acres of land, Waterford was incorporated as a village. Being separate from the township, the village elected its own council, handled its own taxes and passed its own bylaws.

The reeve and four councillors passed bylaws ranging from limiting the number of taverns and regulating billiard tables in the village to allowing for street repairs and prohibiting bicycles from running on the sidewalk.

Unfortunately, fire control seemed not to be among the town's priorities and through the years a number of fires caused extensive damage to the town and its economy.

A furniture factory burned in 1881, Green's foundry in 1883, and a paint shop in 1889. Fire protection was improved with a cistern under the town hall in 1914 and other additions of equipment afterwards, but damage had already been done.

Coupled with several bank failures, and high tax rates, it was enough to discourage continued growth in the village. Before the turn of the century Waterford's population peaked at about 1,200 in 1891. Ten years later it stood at only 1,000.

Population started growing again in the 20th century, especially after the first and second world wars. However, there was not a substantial growth in business to accompany the growth in population.

Better transportation methods meant people were able to get to Simcoe and Brantford to take advantage of their larger shopping districts.

With the introduction of regional government in 1974, Waterford was again tied in with Townsend, this time as part of City of Nanticoke. Growth in the

city is expected to be considerable in the next few years, particularly because of Stelco's Lake Erie development project.

Under the region's official plan proposal Waterford would eventually reach a population of between 4,000 and 5,000. That's a long way from a single grist mill.