



CAPTAIN F. B. HORNOR,
Grandson of Thomas Hornor, M. P. P.,
first County Registrar, and Oxford
County's first white settler.

These Men of Bonnie Blenheim Link Her Past Progress With Her Present Prosperity Each of Them Has Borne a Part Worth Recording in the Annals of Oxford County and of our Great Canada



DR. C. D. ROUNDS,
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BLENHIM'S PATRIARCH, THOMAS HORNOR.

The early settlement of Blenheim township, and indeed of the County of Oxford, must always be closely associated with the name of Hornor. Thomas Hornor was the township's first white settler. Shenston (and he is the only local chronicler of authority) tells us that Thomas Hornor was born March 16th, 1767 at Bordentown, State of New Jersey, then part of Great Britain. He was married in 1801 by James Ingersoll, J.P., father of Colonel James Ingersoll, who was for fifty-two years the Registrar of the County. Thomas Hornor died in Burford on August 4th, 1834, of cholera. He came to the township of Blenheim, Upper Canada, at the suggestion of his uncle, Thomas Watson. During the Revolutionary War, Watson had rendered Colonel Simcoe, who afterward became Canada's first Governor, some valued personal service, when Simcoe had been taken prisoner by the American forces. In recognition of this service, Colonel Simcoe, when he was appointed Governor of Upper Canada, wrote to Mr. Watson and urged him to come to Canada and bring all his friends and relations with him. As an inducement, the Governor promised that Watson should be given a whole township. In making this promise, Governor Simcoe had two objects in view: First, to reward Mr. Watson for his personal and patriotic services, and second, to secure a number of desirable settlers from the United States. Not being able to come himself, Mr. Watson sent his son, Thomas Watson, who brought with him a cousin, Thomas Hornor.

A PROMISE UNFULFILLED.

This was during 1793 and on May 17th, 1802. Lots ten and thirteen, Concession one (Governor's Road) were granted to Thomas Watson, and on June 24th, 1809, part of lot nine, concession one, Burford, was granted to Olive Hornor, wife of Thomas Hornor. This lot was just across the Governor's Road from Mr. Watson's. An earlier grant on December 22nd, 1804, of lots 15 and 16, concession one, Blenheim, was made to Thomas Hornor. But the promise of a township to Thomas Hornor, like many other official promises, before and since, was not kept. Thereafter Mr. Hornor lived for some time in Newark (Niagara) and Detroit which latter city he left in 1796 when it was handed over by the British to the Americans. He then resolved to return to Oxford.

HORNOR START A SAW MILL.

With this object, he bought at Albany, New York, the necessary machinery for a saw mill. The mill machinery and other necessities were brought up the Hudson in two small boats to Mohawk River, up that river one hundred miles, then across the Norvel Creek, then down the same creek to lake Oneida, then across that lake to the Oswego River, from there into Lake Ontario and thence along its southern coast to the Beach at Burlington Bay, Hamilton, Ontario; then across the

bay to the beach where subsequently stood Dundurn Castle, the residence of Sir Allan McNab and afterward of the Hon. Isaac Buchanan. From there the machinery and other impedimenta were drawn by oxen on roughly made sledges to Blenheim. The mill was thereafter erected and ready for operation in 1795. Before being started however, the dam was unfortunately swept away and it was not until 1797 that the mill was rebuilt and the first lumber sawed. Lumber from this mill was used in building the Hornor homestead, part of which afterwards became the first Registry Office in the County of Oxford. Later, Mr. Hornor erected a grist-mill also, the first in the County. In 1809 this was burned down and never rebuilt.

THE PIONEER GOES UNREWARDED.

From the foregoing it will be seen that Mr. Hornor fully fulfilled the conditions which should entitle him to claim the Township of Blenheim in accordance with the promise made to him by Governor Simcoe. The latter's successor, however, refused to acknowledge Mr. Hornor's claim and refused to carry out the promise made to Mr. Hornor by his predecessor.

HORNOR PROVES HIS LOYALTY.

In 1798, Mr. Hornor had been appointed Captain of the Norfolk Militia and in 1806 he was appointed deputy lieutenant of the County of Oxford. But on the breaking out of the war of 1812, official influence seems to have again interposed itself against Mr. Hornor's interests. Political intrigue was clearly doing its work. Mr. Hornor was known to be a liberal and representations had been made that he was a person not to be trusted as a loyal citizen. True, he had left the United States chiefly because of his attachment to the British Crown and to British institutions. But this did not prevent the intriguers from misrepresenting his position, character and services. Mr. Hornor, however, rose above the petty prejudices which had been falsely raised against him, and offered his services for any position where they were needed. He was known to have great influence with the Indians on the Grand River. Thus far all efforts to induce the Indians to join the expedition, which was being then formed under General Brock, had

been unsuccessful. Mr. Hornor eagerly seized the opportunity, proceeded to the Grand River, assembled seventy-five Indian warriors and with them marched to the scene of action. In doing this he incurred great personal risk, as General Hall, the American officer in command, had already issued a proclamation, threatening to give no quarter to any white man who enlisted or fought beside an Indian. Mr. Hornor and his force remained upon the frontier until discharged. It should be added also that every penny of the expense of this expedition was paid by Mr. Hornor himself, and not a penny of it was ever returned to him.

HORNOR ENTERS PARLIAMENT.

Such conspicuous public service as Mr. Hornor had given to the new Colony of Canada, could not fail to favourably impress his fellow pioneers and colonists. He was consequently elected the first member of the legislature for the County of

Oxford in 1820. This position he continued to occupy, except for an interval of two years, until his death in 1834. He seems to have been an industrious representative and took a prominent position in the committee work of the House.

An incident of Mr. Hornor's fidelity to principle, his independence of character, as also his recognition of the rights of his constituents to be consulted by their representative, is thus related by Shenston:— Just before the passage of the "Alien Act," which caused such intense excitement throughout the Province at the time, Mr. Hornor called a meeting of his constituents, and addressed them as follows: "Gentlemen, I wish to know how you desire me to vote on this bill, and I will vote just as I am instructed by you; but mind, if you say I shall support this



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bill, I will do so, because there is not time for you to elect another member before the vote is taken, should I resign, but I never will come to the County of Oxford again. I shall give my vote as you direct, leave the House, and the country, send for my family, and never return again." He was directed to oppose the bill.

WHEN MARRIAGE WAS COMPLEX.

In early days in the Province of Ontario, marriages were lawfully performed only by clergymen of the Church of England. In many isolated settlements where there were no clergymen of that church, this was found to be an inconvenience and hardship. Public opinion and the personal convenience of matrimonially inclined pioneers demanded a change, and at last governmental and ecclesiastical influence united so

THE DETERMINED BRIDEGROOM.

On one occasion this territorial limitation stood in the way of a young couple who were very anxious to be married at once. They were only fifteen and a half miles distant from the residence of the parson of the church of England, as calculated by Mr. Hornor to whom they had applied to perform the service. But as "love laughs at locksmiths," so also it disregards unreasonable, legal and ecclesiastical limitations. In his dilemma the resourceful bridegroom proposed that they should walk through the woods, a distance of two and a half miles farther from the parson's residence. This was promptly agreed to by everybody and the bride, bridegroom, their friends and the Magistrate penetrated the woods until they had surely reached not less than the required eighteen miles from the home of the dreaded and distant parson. There, perched on a log, under Heaven's high dome as a Cathedral, and with the sighing of the wind through the forest trees as their bridal anthem, and the flowers and trees of the forest as the floral decorations, they were made a happy man and wife. Gretna Green, the Mecca of Scottish couples similarly circumstanced, was never more well. Mr. Hornor married many of the early settlers who became prominent afterwards and whose names are still known throughout the township and county.

AVE ET VALE.

May the writer be permitted, in closing this somewhat hurried and very imperfect sketch, to say what a real pleasure and labor of love it has been to collect and prepare such local facts with reference to the history of the good old township of Blenheim and the County of Oxford. The more so, that this is being made public through the columns of the same old journal that some member of my family was wont to speak through weekly to his friends, men and women, boys and girls, for more than one-third of a century. The kindness and confidence always extended by them to the editors during that long period have always been a source of profound gratitude and unfeigned pleasure. Meantime, the mellowing influences of time have given us all a broader and certainly a more kindly and charitable outlook. The asperities of the past, if such there were, have disappeared and are forgotten. And now, as we reassemble to meet and greet each other in friendly reunion, we can all unite in a common and unalloyed friendship.

NOTE.—T. S. Shenston, from whose Gazetteer are drawn some of the data above given, was in early days a highly respected business man and citizen of Woodstock. He took a keen interest in politics and was a warm friend of Sir Francis Hincks, by whose influence he became Registrar of the County of Brant. This position he held with credit to himself and the satisfaction of the public until his death a few years ago.