



Early Settlement of the Township of Elderslie

The township of Elderslie is named after Scotland's patriot Sir William Wallace, Knight of Elderslie.

This township has a large amount of heavy, clay land with parts of it low and wet, also a considerable amount of swamp. A portion of the township is broken up by the Saugeen River. However there is very little waste land and on the whole it is a fair, average township.

Elderslie received its first settlers on April 18, 1851 when Simon Orchard and his family after floating down the Saugeen River on a raft from Walkerton landed where the village of Paisley now stands. Three weeks later Samuel T. Rowe with his family followed his old friend in the venturesome voyage down the Saugeen and settled beside him. The lands in the south western part of the township were the first to receive their quota of settlers owing to the fact that the Saugeen River permitted them to float down its waters on rafts conveying them — their families and belongings from the vicinity of either Hanover or Walkerton.

Elderslie township was surveyed in the summer of 1851 (survey party headed by G. McPhillips.) and being classed among the school lands of the province was opened for sale in July 30, 1852. Pioneers who located themselves on farm lots prior to this date were known as "squatters" and they had, on the appearance of this notice offering the lands for sale, to take immediate steps to have their squatters rights recognized. The first person to purchase land in Elderslie was "John Fraser" (Eldon Fraser's grandfather) for lot 34, concession A now the property of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Cottrill. The date of purchase was December 6th, 1852.

The first to follow Messrs. Orchard and Rowe in taking up lands in Elderslie were David Lyons and Thomas Hembroof, who settled on the northern branch of Saugeen, at the point now known as Lockerby.

Hembroof and Lyons who were now living where Chatsworth now stands lost no time after Elderslie was surveyed to select a point at which to settle and one morning in October 1851 they left home loaded with necessities to stay in the bush. They travelled south and at length reached the north branch of the Saugeen river following it partly on foot and partly by canoe. They arrived at the county line and owing to the amount of driftwood in the river they had to make

the rest of the journey on foot. When they arrived at the spot they had selected they did enough work to secure a "squatters claim" — returned home (to Chatsworth) returning with their families and all their worldly goods the following spring. The first lapse of the journey was made by team (from Chatsworth to Hanover). There a raft 12' x 30' was constructed and on it the families and their possessions were floated down the Saugeen to their new home. That summer a shanty (the fourth to be erected in Elderslie) 16 ft. square was put up in which both families lived. This shanty was later on used as a school house, the first in the township of Elderslie with Mrs. Thomas Pearce as teacher.

In early fall two men Henry Brown and Robert Cockrane walked from Durham to see their old neighbours Rowe and Orchard and to see the much praised lands of Elderslie. They located lots — returned home and came back again in November to take possession. They moved their belongings to Walkerton (which by now contained two stores and a post office) and made the usual trip down the river on a raft. The river was very low and neither men knew how to handle a raft. It became caught on stones and the men had to jump into the icy water to pry the raft loose. They continued on their way and night found them on the 4th of Brant — cold, wet and very miserable.

Their match supply which they carried in their pockets was very wet but luckily the powder in their gun was dry so with some batting pulled out of a quilt and the gun powder they soon had a fire going. They dried themselves, made a bed out of brush and each man rolled himself in a blanket. When they wakened in the morning they were covered with six inches of snow. They again started on their way and by night had arrived at Rowe's tired and very hungry. The next day with the help of Rowe and Orchard they built a shanty 12' x 14' floored with split basswood — the fifth shanty in the Township of Elderslie. Mr. Brown stayed until midwinter but Cockrane returned to Durham. Wolves were very plentiful and howled around the shanties all night. Nevertheless Mr. Brown enjoyed his two months and remarked "With a few good books the solitude held no terrors for me."

In 1853 the Clements, Greens, McBrides and McCartneys came in. Then the Gillies family came followed by Taylors and Curries — and so a whole colony was settled.

The Scottish element figured largely in the settlement of Elderslie.

In 1853 Mr. Rowe built a tavern of hewed logs on the site where the Central hotel now stands, giving ample accommodation to the rapidly increasing travel. Mr. Valentine's sawmill enabled the settlers to build better buildings.

In 1854 the great rush began with the McBeaths, McDonalds, McGregors, Balfours, McLaggans, Fortunes and others arriving. Andrew Dobbins followed took up 1000 acres of land around where Dobbinton now stands and so Dobbinton was founded and named.

In the fall of 1854 a great land sale took place at Southampton and in the rush every lot was taken up. So great was the number who passed through Paisley to attend the sale that in two days Mrs. Rowe had cooked and served a whole ox, while Mr. Rowe attended to the "liquid" portion of the business. Two large kettles, one with beef and the other with potatoes were kept boiling all the time but as Mr. Rowe had a good stock of cattle and a field of potatoes, it was simply a question of "killing and digging."

The polling booth for the first municipal election was in "Rowe's tavern", Paisley, Ont. in 1854. John Gillies, George Williscroft, Charles Ginty, Robert Falconer and R. T. Rowe were elected as councillors and these at their first meeting (as the law was then) elected R. T. Rowe for reeve. Thomas Orchard was township treasurer.

There was much work clearing roads etc. and it was about 1854 that "Elora Road" was mapped out by Mr. G. McPhillips and it still is Elora Road — but with the high hills cut down — the curves straightened and its hard surface. We, who now live on the Elora Road consider ourselves very fortunate indeed. Lockerby settlers had great hopes of the road going through their section, but it passed right through Paisley so Lockerby never developed.

The water power at Lockerby was early made use of and a grist mill was in operation in 1856. The water power later supplied electric current for lighting up the village of Paisley.

One of the most noted men of Elderslie was John Gillies who for 17 years was reeve of the township. He and his family settled in the part of Elderslie township now known as "Gillies Hill."

