

JAMES MUIR -WRITTEN BY HIS NEPHEW ANDREW MUIR

James Muir , born in West Calder, Scotland October 5, 1826, learned the carpenter or joiner trade at which he was employed for some time in the city of Edinburgh.

In 1855 he married Jane Fleming who was employed in the home of Dr. Sir James Simpson who was the first to utilize chloroform as an anesthetic in 1848. He must have had a high regard for Jane Fleming as he had her wedding in his own home as if she might have been his own daughter and also gave her a cash wedding present.

Soon after their marriage they came to Canada and settled in Port Elgin on the shore of Lake Huron in Bruce County. There he soon started a small furniture factory and business and was also an undertaker. He built the "Muir Block" from the south-west corner of Green and Goderich St. south to the alley-way. It had stores on the first floor and apartments above most of them. It was constructed mostly of pine lumber and was destroyed by fire in the spring of 1903.

I expect it would be in the early 1880's when the competition from large factories with more modern machinery made the manufacturing of furniture unprofitable, the factory was rented to one S.G. Kinsey who specialized in making chairs. That venture did not last long and after that the factory was operated intermittently making sash and doors and frames and trim and dress flooring, etc. At least when we built the new home in 1897 we got all such supplies there.

He had his share of trouble in his day, as on March 20, 1870, his first wife died, leaving six young children. As I remember hearing of it, she, along with some friends, went to a skating party or show, probably open air, too soon after her youngest child was born and got a chill which proved fatal.

I think he had trouble getting a satisfactory housekeeper until he married Jessie Robertson in 1875.

Another tragedy was the loss of one of his twin sons at the age of 22. Richard was his well liked and competent assistant in his business. Apparently the body of someone who had died elsewhere with typhoid fever had been sent to Port Elgin for burial and at the insistence of relatives he, against his better judgment, opened the lid of the casket and contracted the disease which proved fatal.

Uncle James was one of the prominent business men and property owners of the village.

He was a member of the first council. I also understand that he drew the plans and had the contract for the building of the first part of what is now the United Church in Port Elgin, also for the Town Hall which was demolished in 1960 to make room for the new Post Office Building.

He also had a large brick house built in 1888, now 506 Mill St. but never occupied it as the old home now 588 Green St. was so much more convenient to his business place.

After his second wife died in 1902 and his family all married or away except his blind daughter Jean, and being slightly deaf, he had a rather lonely life although his mind remained clear and he maintained an interest in affairs right up to his last short illness which caused his death.

He was a highly respected successful member of the community with a strong regard for the high moral and spiritual values, and was for many years a member of the Session and supporter of the Port Elgin Presbyterian Church and generous to the poor and less fortunate in the village.

One anecdote I recall hearing was that what I expect was the Literary Society, arranged for spelling matches between the east and west sides of Goderich St. In these he and his son John F. who were good spellers, always outlasted the east side. So it was proposed that instead of east against west, it should be married against unmarried to see if father or son won out. But that never came off.



James Muir

STORY OF A PIONEER-INTERESTING SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE LATE JAMES MUIR-PORT ELGIN TIMES
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He arrived in Southampton from Scotland with his wife on May 25, 1856. The journey from that place to Port Elgin was on foot, the roads being mostly of corduroy. The other members of the family including his brother had come to Canada the previous year and were then living on the property now occupied by Mr. Alex Anderson. Conditions at that time were very disheartening in the new country and returning to Scotland was sometimes thought of.

Shortly after settling in Port Elgin, the Presbyterian congregation was organized, Mr. Muir being elected the first elder. He had taken an active part in conducting the sabbath school, even previous to that the books of the library being brought by him from Scotland. To show his zeal for the cause, many times he would take the stove from his workshop on Saturday, set it up in the school-room, together with planks placed upon blocks of wood for seats, then replace the stove on Monday morning.

His home was the usual stopping place for visiting ministers until Rev. Alex Fraser was in 1861 settled as minister of the congregation forming the charge. At the time of his death he was one of the few remaining members of the original congregation and had officiated as elder for 53 years. In political and municipal life, the excitement in Scotland during his youth , was such, that on his arrival in Canada he found political questions of a similar type, topics of discussion, and allied himself with the Liberal party. Party workers of the present time scarcely realize the zeal which actuated the workers of those early

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