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Halton's Pages of the Past

Stewarttown Dates Back to 1818; Believed First District to Have Settlers in Esquesing Township

BY GWEN CLARKE
Stewarttown is on the Seventh Line, Esquesing township—a lovely little village nestling between two hills on the west bank of the Credit River. It dates back to 1818 and is said to be the location of the first settlers in the township. It derives its name from the Stewart brothers—John and Duncan—who were the first to take advantage of the abundant water supply. They built a dam and established a sawmill and grist mill in 1820. The mill was later taken over by Jas. Young and then by Walter Lawson. It is now operated by Walter Lawson and Son, and has been in the Lawson family for 90 years.

A section of the Seventh Line, running from Hornby to Georgetown, is the main street through the village. According to the Halton Atlas, John Judson and Young streets branch off from the Seventh Line.

Township Capital
Stewarttown is the capital of the township and the seat of the local governing body. The first organized meeting of the ratepayers was held at the farm home of Joseph Standish, Lot 13, 6th Concession, on New Year's Day, 1821. At this time, following the opening of the townships for settlement throughout the county, and until the passing of the

Municipal Act of 1849 (known as the Baldwin Act) the townships were governed by the Justices in Session.

For this reason the initial meeting at Stewarttown was under a warrant signed by William Thompson and F. S. Jarvis, Justices for the Home County, of which Halton was a part. With their authority the following officers were installed: James Frazer, township clerk; Joseph Standish and Thomas Barbour, Assessors; Charles Kennedy and John Stewart, Town Wardens; Thomas Fyfe, Collector. Meetings were held at the Standish home until the opening of a tavern on Lot 13, west of the Seventh Line, by Thomas Thompson, which became known for miles around as "Long Tom's Tavern," and was the chosen site for the township meetings.

Cattle Marks
The chief business of the council at that time was to define and settle disputes over the proportion of a land fence, deciding what animals should be allowed to run at large, appointing pathmasters for road work and supervising the registration of cattle marks; each settler being required to have a distinctive mark for his cattle by which identity could be established. A favorite mark was in the form of a half-penny cut out from one or other of the ears of the cattle, or sometimes a portion of the ear snipped off.

Once township business was concluded it was customary for the pioneer legislator— together with others who happened to drop in—to wind up the day in a social way, partaking of such food and liquor as was obtainable from Long Tom's cuisine. Very often this "social time" led to arguments, and arguments to fist-fights before the day was out, especially after the 1837 Rebellion when party feeling still ran high.

McNaughton First Reeve
After the Baldwin Act had been passed a meeting of the ratepayers was held at Mackenzie's Tavern in the village, when, in accordance



STEWARTTOWN SCENES shown above indicate the community's early beginnings. In the top photo a view of the street in front of the right the first council chamber, John Tracy's property; Tom Bell's paint shop, formerly the meeting place of Mackenzie sympathizers; Lawson's second mill and Mitchell's-Cooper shop. In the lower photo is shown is the original Stewarttown Community Hall before it was remodelled.

with the act, the first council was elected as follows: John McNaughton, Reeve; Ninian Lindsay, deputy-reeve; James Young, Robert Hall and William Thompson, councillors; Richard Tracy, Clerk. At subsequent election James Young was elected reeve from 1851-56, and had the honor of being appointed Warden to the Provisional meeting of the County of Halton, held in Milton at Thompson's Inn, July 12, 1853. This was the first meeting after an agreement had been reached to separate the two counties of Halton and Wentworth.

Richard Tracy, the first Township

clerk, was succeeded by his son John, who held that office for a number of years. For a long time he had on the wall of his office a poster, dated February 24, 1848, calling a meeting of the ratepayers to discuss the building of a township hall. This old poster was lost for many years but we believe it has since been recovered—and in excellent condition. At the meeting in question it was moved by Jas. Young, seconded by William Barbour, that a decision about building a hall be left over until the next nomination day. The question was undoubtedly shelved due to the fact that the location was a controversial issue—whether the hall should be built in Stewarttown or Georgetown.

First Council Chamber
The matter was left in abeyance for a considerable number of years. During that time Messrs. David Cross, Nevin and Jones built a store, with living quarters and a hall overhead, with the idea of selling it to the council. It was a brick building with a quaint two-storey verandah and an outside staircase. Time necessitated the removal of stairs and verandah in the interests of safety.

The first council chamber, rented from John Tracy, was on the south side of the building, the other side being used as a store with living quarters at the back. The top floor was used for dances and other community affairs and the place became known as the Community Hall. The last storekeeper was Isaac Bennett, Georgetown, who for many years was also township clerk. In 1848

Cooking School Planned By W.A.

Final plans for the cooking school were made when the Women's Association of the United Church met at the home of Mrs. D. Lindsay on Tuesday of last week. The president, Mrs. H. Burns, presided and the meeting opened with the ode and prayer. Devotional period was taken by Mrs. Pickett, Mrs. Ingles and Mrs. Johnson.

The quilters are busy with their work and quilts will be for sale. Hot call was Spring. Ten cents was asked from each member to purchase tea towelling.

Final plans were made for the cooking school to be held in the town hall. The ladies were asked to make candy for sale on both nights. Several cards were sent to shut-ins and sick.

Mrs. Lindsay served refreshments assisted by Mrs. M. Walker, Mrs. G. Ingles, Mrs. E. Lambert and Mrs. C. L. Poole. A social time was spent together.

A vote of thanks was given to Mrs. Lindsay for her home and to the lunch committee.

the building was entirely remodelled and now presents a spacious and up-to-date Community Hall, including council chambers and an office for the township clerk.

First Post Office
The post office was opened in 1820 and was the first in the township. It was given the name of the Township—Esquesing—an Indian word, meaning "land of the tall pines." From 1838 mail was brought from Trafalgar by Duncan McCall, a young man from the Scotch-Block. He made the trip twice a week on horseback, delivering the mail to the postmaster, Henry Fyfe, Lot 9, 7th Line. In 1840 the office was moved to Stewarttown but retained the old name. It remained in operation until 1900 when Stewarttown was serviced by rural mail delivery from Georgetown.

By 1850 Stewarttown was a busy, thriving village with three hotels, Cross's Tannery, Edward Nixon, saddle and harness maker; J. Fitch, saddler; Jones and Nevin, makers of chairs, cabinets and fanning mills; Applebe and Young brothers, merchants. There was every sign of further expansion—until the building of the Grand Trunk Railway changed the picture, business then being diverted to Georgetown. Apparently the railway line in Esquesing is noted for its crookedness. According to an old-timer, who worked on the line, this was because every time the construction "boss" took a drink he made another curve.

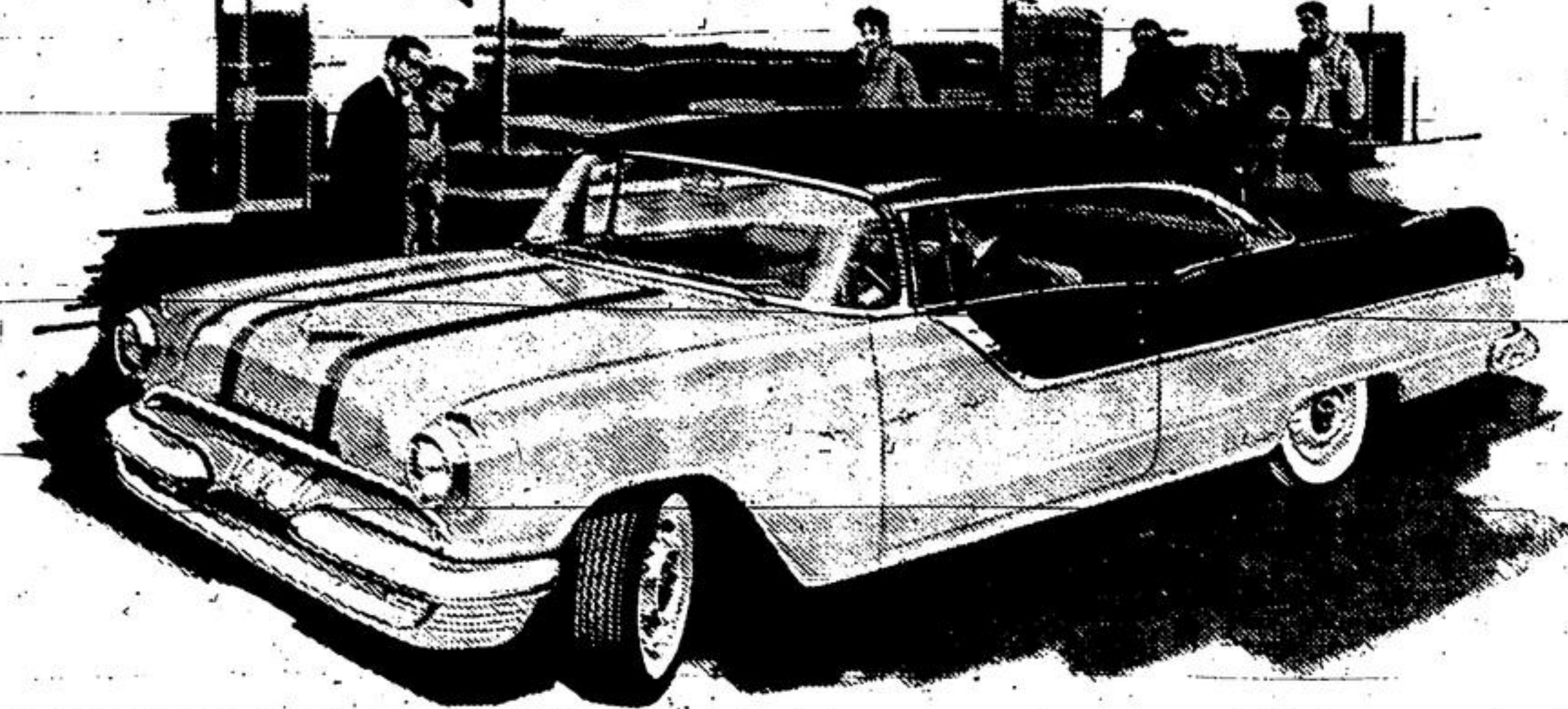
Sympathizers Meet
The blacksmith shop featured in the accompanying picture—later Tom Bell's paint-shop—was the meeting place of Mackenzie sympathizers, previous to the 1837 Rebellion. It was here they foregathered in great secrecy, to fashion spikes and spears in preparation for a display of force—should it become necessary—against the Government and the Family Compact. On the other hand, the Dr. Shed, head-quarters of No. 2 Company, 20th Battalion, under the command of Captain Applebe, was also in the village. So it would seem that, although the pioneers of Stewarttown held strong opinions they were by no means united on the political issues of the day.

(Next week—Stewarttown—continued.)

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