

# Transportation vital in pioneer times in Halton

In any district, pioneer or otherwise, it would be difficult to overestimate the value of transportation whether by land or water. The settler had to be able to reach his newly acquired holdings with his family and all his worldly goods and, after becoming established, it would be still more important for him to be able to take his produce to the nearest mill or market. The miller had to have a means of shipping out his flour and the storekeeper a way to bring in supplies and taking out the goods acquired by trade.

The people living close to the lake had a great advantage in this respect as the water provided an efficient means of transportation in the open season. No doubt most of the effects of those coming in from Niagara or by way of the St. Lawrence were carried by schooner or scow and landed at easily accessible spots along the shore. Then harbors were eventually developed at Oakville and Wellington Square (later Burlington) and to a lesser extent at Bronte, there was a great shipment of wheat, flour, pork, salted fish, potash, lumber and oak staves. The latter were in demand as most goods with the exception of wheat and lumber had to be packed and shipped in barrels for easy handling.

Transportation by land was quite a different matter. We have seen how Dundas Street was laid out as a blazed trail in 1793, but it was not until 1805-6 that it was surveyed into the regulation 66 foot wide roadway. Although the first settlement was along this roadway, it was for long almost impossible to traverse except on foot or horseback. One obstacle was the presence of empty Clergy Reserve and Crown Land along this highway, leaving no one to clear out the stumps as the settler was required to do in front of his own property. After considerable protest, these reservations were moved to more remote areas.

Where there was low swamp land logs were laid across to form corduroy roads, but these were necessarily very uneven and in time some logs rotted more quickly than others, making travel by wagon a nightmare. Mrs. Jameson has this to say in her aforementioned book, (page 126), "I set my teeth, screwed myself to my seat and commended myself to Heaven - but I was well nigh dislocated. At length I abandoned my seat and

made an attempt to recline on the straw at the bottom of the cart but all in vain. I expected at every moment to be thrown over headlong."

Dundas Street became the main east and west thoroughfare and a mail service was instituted between Toronto and Dundas. The Trafalgar Post Office was opened in 1822 at the 9th line in the store kept by Alexander Proudfoot. This office was later moved to Post's Corners, now Trafalgar. (Oakville and the Sixteen, page 128). The next office was opened at Hannahsville (later Nelson) in 1825. The mail for north and south was taken from these Post Offices by horseback. An office was opened in Oakville in 1835 and one in Esquesing in the 1820's, just south of Ashgrove.

In 1818 a stage coach service was started along Dundas Street between Toronto and Hamilton, with a change of horses being made at the tavern at Post's Corners or Trafalgar as we know it. Through Halton and Peel there were great stretches of heavy clay and in the spring of the year and after a period of heavy rains, the condition of the roads can only be left to the imagination. The passengers were often called on to assist in extricating the stage when bogged down in the mire. Mrs. Jameson reports that on a road further west it took three and one half hours to cover seven miles. A difficult part of the journey was the crossing of the Sixteen Mile and Twelve Mile Creeks, the road having to negotiate the steep clay banks by precarious descent carved along the sides of the ravines.

In 1832 the Lake Shore Highway was opened up for coach service although the mail was still delivered along the more populous Dundas Street. This new road was not only a few miles shorter but the difficult and dangerous ravines were bypassed. It was over this road that

## Ben Case history continues

Here is another article in a series taken from a history of Halton, written for Halton Women's Institutes by Ben Case of the Silverwood area. There are only three copies of his history in existence; the Free Press has borrowed one to share the story with our readers.

Mrs. Jameson was driven when she came to Canada early in 1837.

It was by way of Dundas Street that William Lyon Mackenzie made his historic flight following the skirmish at Montgomery's Tavern on Thursday Dec. 7th, 1837. (The following account is taken from Mackenzie's memoirs as related in Sketches of Old Toronto by Frank N. Walker pp 206-218.) At three p.m. on Friday he reached Cornfort's Mills in Streetsville along with a companion Allan Wilcox. They were given dinner and were driven in a wagon down to Dundas Street and along it to the Sixteen Mile Creek. On being holy pursued they jumped out of the wagon before reaching the bridge. They took to the woods and crossed the creek further upstream, after asking a workman the road to Esquesing, to put the pursuers off the track.

They were given dry clothing by a friendly farmer. Here Wilcox became ill and, proceeding alone, Mackenzie crossed Dundas Street by eleven p.m. Friday and the Twelve Mile Creek by midnight. By four a.m. Saturday he reached Wellington Square by the Middle Road. At the home of a friend, he hid all day in a pea-straw stack while the premises were searched. After dark he proceeded to

Dundas where a friend loaned him a horse. He made his way that night to Ancaster and thence on Sunday to Smithville and from there to Crowland, and crossed the Niagara River on Monday morning. From this account it would appear that Mackenzie was in Halton County only from late Friday afternoon till early Saturday evening, spending the daylight hours of Saturday in a straw stack in Wellington Square Village.

Equally important from the standpoint of the settlers were the north and south roads leading down to the waterfront from the north. It was along these by which the products of the settlements were brought down for sale and export, whereby the much sought-after cash was forthcoming. There were three such main roads in Halton - namely (a) the 7th Line, through the easterly part of the upper townships and leading to Oakville; (b) the Second Line through the central part of the County and leading to Milton, Bronte and Oakville and (c) the Guelph Line from the townships of Nassagaweya and Nelson and leading to Port Nelson and Wellington Square (later Burlington). It was by these roads that wheat was brought down to the local mills to be ground into flour for shipment in barrels, or else to be shipped in bulk to outside markets including those in the United States. Other products such as the frozen carcasses of hogs and quarters of beef and barrels of potash would also be transported, particularly in the winter months.

The roads would be ungraded and would be full of stumps especially in front of the unoccupied lots, and there would be swampy parts to be traversed by the unsatisfactory corduroy roads. One can imagine the long dreary trip from the upper end of the county and can hardly blame the teamster for frequent stops at the taverns along the way. It is said that there were twenty-four such establishments along the 7th line between Ballinacree and Oakville. With whiskey at twenty-five cents a gallon and no license required, at least in pioneer times, it didn't require much capital to set up shop and, with a watering trough for the horses and a good fire roaring in the fireplace or stove; it didn't take long to establish in business.

In 1846, a private joint stock company, The Trafalgar, Esquesing and Erin Road Company was formed as it was felt that this would be a profitable venture, as there would be sufficient teaming from the north to warrant it. Maintenance and dividends would be taken care of by tolls collected at toll gates erected at intervals along the road. Building commenced in 1850, construction consisting of three-inch planks laid across four-inch square stringers. It was completed as far as Stewartstown and at first all went well, but it wasn't long till the weaker planks were broken or rot set in. Repair costs became too high and the company went bankrupt and ceased operations by 1855.

With the coming of the railway the whole aspect of roads and transportation changed. The farmer was now concerned only with the condition of the road for hauling produce to the nearest railway station, and for proceeding to the local store, going to church and meetings of various kinds, and for visits to relatives and neighbors. They were maintained by "statute labor" whereby the farmer supplied his time and wagon and team free for two or three days each year for all necessary upkeep.

The Great Western Railway running along the lake shore to Oakville, Hamilton, Brantford and London, and eventually to Windsor, was completed in 1855. The Grand Trunk Railway crossing the county by way of Georgetown and Acton, and proceeding to Guelph, Stratford, Sarnia and Chicago was completed in 1856. The Hamilton and North Western Railway to Allandale through Georgetown, built after the other lines mentioned above, was later taken

over by the Grand Trunk. Lastly the Credit Valley Railway passing through Milton and Campbellville on its way to Galt, London and Windsor was later taken over by the Canadian Pacific. For years the railway reigned supreme in the matter of all passenger and freight traffic until the advent of the automobile and the truck.

### THE HIGHWAYS

With the coming of motor traffic, there came a demand for better roads than the gravel roads that had served all local traffic up to the time of the First World War. As a result the Lake Shore Road between Toronto and Hamilton, the most heavily travelled road in the province, was paved by the Provincial Government, amid great scepticism among the doubting Thomases, and was opened in 1915. It proved a great success and was a boon to motorists including the citizens of the lower part of Halton.

Further road-building was halted during the war years but from 1919 onwards there was a great upsurge in highway construction. The Ontario Highways Department commenced on a system of paved roads which interlaced all main roads in the province. Each provincial road was numbered as part of the King's Highway, and with the aid of these numbers and road maps one could go from any part of the Province to the other without confusion.

Dundas Street was one of the first to be so treated following the war, and was extended west to join Highway No. 2 at Paris. In Halton high-level bridges were constructed over the Sixteen and

Twelve Mile Creeks and a great rock-cut was made to mount the escarpment west of Nelson. Highway No. 7 was next in line, traversing the county from Norval and through Georgetown to Acton and west to Guelph and Sarnia. Highway No. 25 followed from Burlington to Palermo and north to Acton and beyond.

The main secondary roads such as the 7th Line from Oakville to Ballinacree, the Guelph Line from Port Nelson through Campbellville, the Base Line through Hornby and some side-roads are taken care of by the County Engineer's Office, while the remaining concession lines and side-roads are looked after by the Township or Town Councils.

With increased traffic both from cars and trucks, the necessity for further highway construction arose and the

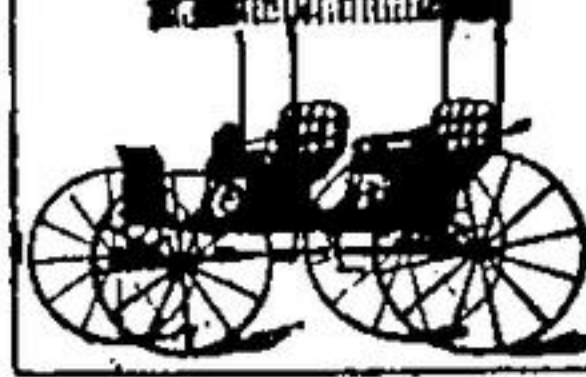
divided Super Highway was evolved. This consists of a double line of traffic each way with a dividing strip separating them and cross traffic eliminated by a series of bridges and "Clover-leaves" at strategic points. In the 1930's the Queen Elizabeth Way was built between Toronto and Fort Erie, passing through Halton between the Lake Shore Road and Dundas Street, and in the 1950's the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway or "401" as it is more familiarly called, has been constructed from the Quebec border to Windsor and passes midway through the county near Hornby, Milton and Campbellville.

This revolution in roadway building has resulted in a steady increase in traffic over the years to the great detriment of the business of the railways, both from the standpoint of carrying passengers and also freight. The public prefers travelling by car to the extent that railway travel has been reduced to such an extent that the number of passenger trains has been greatly curtailed or, on many lines, cancelled altogether. As regards freight the same situation applies and except for long distance bulk freight, shippers have found it more convenient to ship by truck with door to door delivery and a minimum of handling.

We have thus seen tremendous changes in the way of travel and haulage, and can only conjecture what further changes the future may hold in store for the generations to come.



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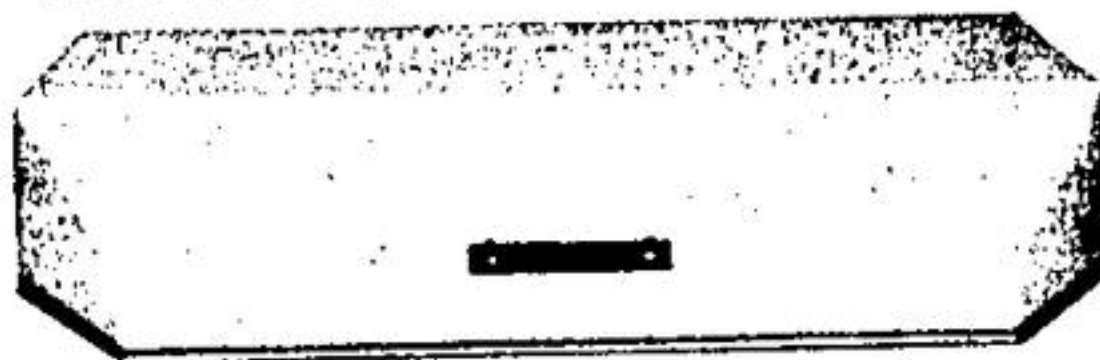
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