

Pioneer drinking habits alarming pendulum swings to prohibition

This is the sixth instalment of Ben Case's History of Halton County, written by him for the county Women's Institutes. It includes the formation of the townships, hardships which were alleviated by few pleasures (the most prominent of them liquor) and the early schools of the county.

By the Constitutional Act of 1791, Canada was divided into two provinces, Upper and Lower Canada, each with a Lieutenant-Governor, Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, the former of which was appointed and the latter elected. Upper Canada was divided at first into four districts and when Nelson and Trafalgar townships were surveyed in about 1805 they were at first attached to the Home District centred at York. The district mainly looked after judicial matters, registration of farm lots and survey work and the assistance in the building of necessary bridges etc.

A number of townships were grouped into counties, following the pattern of the Old Country but the purpose of this grouping was for the election of members to the Legislative Assembly. In 1818 the Gore District was broken off from the Home District, so called after Lieut-Governor Gore and consisting of Wentworth and Halton Counties, Halton deriving its name from Francis Halton, secretary to the Lieut-Governor.

At that time Halton consisted of the following townships - Beverley, Dumfries, Esquimaux, East and West Flamboro, Nassagaweya, Nelson and Trafalgar. In time the counties of Wentworth and Halton were reduced to their present size but continued united until 1853.

In 1849 the Municipal Act provided for the setting up of the County form of government, each county having its own judicial system, court house, gaol, registry office and county council with the necessary officials. The County Council as at present constituted takes care of county roads (as distinct from highways and township roads) welfare, health, care of the aged, planning and development and the children's aid etc. In 1853 the two counties separated and the first

county council meeting of Halton was held in the Village of Milton on July 12th when James Young, Reeve of Esquimaux was elected Provisional Warden.

We have this account of the early settlers from the Atlas: "These people who first came to Nelson and Trafalgar were almost exclusively U. E. Loyalists who preferred to begin life over again in the bush rather than sever their connection with the British Crown." When the upper part of the county was opened up for settlement in 1810 great numbers came in from the British Isles in addition to many descendants of Loyalists from the Niagara district and by immigration from the United States. The Atlas reads again: "Of the trials and privations of the pioneers those of their successors who have reaped the benefit of their labors can form little conception."

From early beginnings in 1805 the population increased enormously as the following chart with figures available from 1801 shows. It will be noted that the rural population decreased from a high around 1871 to a low around 1911 due to a decreasing demand for hand labor on the farms and a drift to the larger manufacturing centres in the towns and cities. Since 1951 there has been a tremendous growth in the lower part of the County due to the influx of huge industrial plants along the lake front, the lake shore highway and the Queen Elizabeth Way.

As settlers first came into the county, taverns sprang up for their accommodation along the main-travelled roads. As such they served a good purpose but they also had a bar with license to sell spirituous liquors. As most towns and villages had a distillery and a tax on liquors was unheard of, whisky retailed at 25c a gallon or a penny or two a glass. As there were few diversions in those days such as golf, ball games, movies, television, cars etc. to alleviate the drudgery of hard work, the bars took the place of men's clubs and the treating system often led to over-indulgence. As one traveller noted along the road south of Acton late one night he was overtaken by a neighbor with horse and rig. "Hop in," cried the neighbor. "You've a long road



MAKING MAPLE SUGAR IN THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY From contemporary photographs.

ahead of you." "It's not the length that bothers me," the inebriated one cried as he climbed in. "It's the width!"

At every bev such as a log burning, the building of a log house or barn and, later, a barn raising, hog-killing etc. the host was supposed to supply both food and drink. These parties generally became hilarious and were eagerly looked forward to by the men at least. In addition when labor was hired for clearing land or cradling grain one of the stipulations was so much grub both morning and afternoon.

In the course of time the evils of this excessive drinking became alarming, as too often it resulted in distress and hardship for the families involved. As a result temperance societies sprang up and every village of any pretension had its own Temperance Hall. A sharp line was drawn between those who drank and those who didn't. The village where the writer grew up was divided by the concession line between two townships. Township A had two hotels and Township B the Temperance Hall. It was said that, if a resident of Township B wanted a drink, he had to cross the road into Township A, and if a resident of the latter township wanted to join the Temperance Society he had to cross over into Township B to do so.

In the course of time the forces of temperance waxed stronger and stronger with its battle-cry "Abolish the bar". Each municipality could, by a two-thirds vote, banish the sale of alcoholic beverages and by the early part of the century "local option" was adopted almost universally and Halton County became dry. During World War I the whole province became dry

by legislative act. In the twenties bootlegging became rife and retail liquor stores were opened and liquor was sold by doctor's prescription and many a budding physician had his financial start by prescribing "scraps".

Eventually the temperance pendulum gained momentum in swinging in the opposite direction. Liquor and beer were sold to all comers in their respective stores. In 1934 Premier Hepburn on the advice of a well known clergyman, opened beer parlors and later liquor lounges were licensed. Today not many social gatherings take place without their preliminary cocktails and martinis to break the ice and warm up the atmosphere. Who knows when the pendulum will start to swing the other way!

With this diversion on temperance - or intemperance as the case may be - let us now turn to the school system of the county. In the earliest times, a log school was built as soon as there were enough pupils in the locality to warrant it. A teacher would be hired for meagre pay - generally an old countryman who hadn't the experience or physical stamina to stand up to the demanding toll of the pioneer farmer. The teacher would board out at the various homes and his pay, small as it was, made up by subscription among those with children of school age.

Later, under various School Acts, the townships were divided into School Sections and a School Board consisting of three trustees elected by the ratepayers of the section and this board looked after the affairs of their own particular school. As the board would be composed of taxpayers it was in their own interest to keep expenses to a minimum and as school teaching was used as a

step up the ladder in days when jobs were scarce, the supply of teachers was greater than the number of schools, the old law of supply and demand came into play and salaries were held to low figures, annual stipends varying from \$200 to \$400 during most of the 19th century, according to the times and circumstances.

Each township appointed its own superintendent of schools, generally a clerical gentleman of some scholarly attainments. Although this entailed a considerable amount of time and labor on his part, a search of township records doesn't disclose any reimbursement for his work, which apparently was undertaken from a sense of public duty.

It might be of some interest to quote herewith from the annual report of the Rev. J. Armour, School Superintendent of Esquimaux for the year 1855. "Having finished the duties of the Superintendent of Common Schools for the year 1855, I deem it but just to lay before you a brief (?) report of the township expenditure for education, and of the progress of the schools with other matters connected with them which are of importance to be known."

The Common Schools of our township I have no hesitation in saying, will compare favorably with any other township similarly circumstanced in the province, whilst a respectable number of them will stand competition with any other schools in Upper Canada. In these the children are taught from the alphabet to the learned languages and from the simple figures of arithmetic up to the ordinary branches of mathematics.

There are in several of them, I should suppose, from forty to fifty pupils who were they otherwise qualified, would pass any board of instruction for second class teachers and a few others who might even obtain a first class certificate.

The style of reading in our Canadian schools is generally I am sorry to say of an inferior character. During six years experience which I have had in the office I at present hold I have only had two teachers under my charge that I could say taught a superior style of the most useful art, and in making this statement I beg not to be understood as doing so with any design of reflecting on the capabilities or zeal of our teachers. There are no doubt, with more care and taste, some of them who might greatly improve their pupils in this

department. In our own township the style of reading is, generally speaking, as good as in any other rural township. On this subject, I took it upon myself to write to the Education Office, Toronto, recommending that instructions for good reading be added to our very excellent series of school books. These would aid the teacher and improve the pupils. They reply by stating that such rules in instructions are given in a small work which is for sale there and which is recommended by the Council of Public Instruction. Its title is "Introduction to the Art of Reading" price 20c. We would earnestly, therefore, urge our teachers to the perusal of this work and for the benefit of their advanced readers, to get it introduced into their schools. It is a desideratum, which is much wanted in our school system.

Pennmanship is, generally speaking, well and successfully taught in this township and in several schools a superior style of writing, and, in one school, particularly, map drawing and coloring are taught with great taste and nicety.

Arithmetic also is well taught; and in a number of our schools scientifically so in its principles and rules. Geography in its different branches and more extended form, is very satisfactorily studied and delighted in by the children. Maps are being extensively got and used in our neighborhood. The government grant of one hundred per cent in acting favorably in this respect.

Grammar and in some cases composition is studied to a considerable extent. This rather dry subject is being pursued with great avidity and considerable success. In higher branches of education, in particular cases some are making considerable proficiency such as Bookkeeping, Mensuration, Algebra, Geometry, Latin etc.

A number of these literary sanctuaries, if I may use the expression, being under superior management and having superior means by which the pupils are instructed, show, as a necessary result superior scholarship. One thing I would beg to refer to here hoping that all our teachers will follow the example. There are two or three of our most efficient teachers who are at great pains to instruct their flocks in the derivation of the English language in its prefixes and affixes by which means the pupils obtain a much



Round the stove in a Country Store

more correct and extensive understanding of the meaning and structure of their vernacular tongue. This duty I would strongly urge on the attention of all our teachers.

"In order to fill the Church well, fill the pulpit well" said the eloquent Dr. Chambers, and so it is with school tuition. An enterprising, industrious teacher, with the blackboard, with tablet and object lessons, maps and all other apparatus, with a school house properly seated and furnished, having all necessary appliances and conveniences for expediting and furthering his professional skill will produce scholarship of a superior description alike honorable to himself and profitable to all concerned. But on the other hand where there is nothing but the bare walls of a schoolhouse, with old-fashioned forms and desks and nothing to attract the pupils' attention nor aid the teacher in giving his instructions and instructions in such circumstances to expect a teacher to lead forth his pupils to high attainment, reminds me of the iron-hearted monarch of Egypt who required Israel to make bricks without straw."

There follows some statistics showing the numbers of pupils, maps, examinations, the amount of expenditures etc. It then concludes: "I have thus condensed as much as possible the principal items of

information such as appeared to me as likely to interest all who feel an interest in Education and have thus laid them before you. These statements will show the total expenditure which education has cost during the year as also it will tend to illustrate the machinery now in motion for raising the intelligence and usefulness of the young and rising generation. And we hope the time is not far distant when Upper Canada will become one of the best educated and influential Kingdoms of the world and in conclusion we may observe that not only has Canada, but the world generally, entered on a new phase in its history in which however we turn ourselves, west, east, north or south, we find a cry rising in earnest and which cannot be resisted and the thrilling cry is for "Education". I have the honor to be, gentlemen, Your obedient servant, John Armour."

In those times when the schools were filled with fifty or sixty pupils especially in winter time, a teacher had to be a stern disciplinarian or else he had a troubled life. An old-timer from up in the hills thus related his impression of his school days - "In those times they didn't have any of the luffen like they have in the schools now. All we had was readin' and writin' and 'rithmetic and when the teacher told us to read, we sure rote!"



In Nassagaweya

Plans take shape for Founders Day

With a committee of 3,200 plus that will become involved in the First Annual Founder's Day celebrations the event is shaping up to be the event of the year for Nassagaweya residents who are proud of the township history and their heritage.

Chairman of the committee Gus Goutouski said the event would be held in the spring. He reasoned that spring was the beginning of life in a sense and it is the time of year farmers are involved in planting a crop. "The whole Township is our committee," he said. "We want everyone involved."

Founder's day will be officially opened with the unveiling of a cairn to be placed at the front of the Township Municipal Hall in Brookville. The cairn will be made of stones from historic farms in the township and a craftsman has already been appointed to assemble the cairn. A bronze plaque with an appropriate engraving will be placed on the cairn.

A walk-a-thon will lead

youngsters on a tour of historic sites of the township. At each point of interest refreshments will be served by committee workers in old fashioned clothing.

At each point of historical significance people will be stationed who are familiar with the history. "This will help young people to be more aware of the great history of the township," the chairman said.

Some of the committee members are already researching township history. The township's oldest resident will have the honor of unveiling the cairn. Among the guests of honor will be descendants of early settlers and long time residents.

Youth oriented

The First Annual Founder's Day will have a youth oriented theme. "It is the youth that will inherit the land after all," Mr. Goutouski said.

"We're quite excited about this and have workers young and old pitching in to help make the event a great one," he indicated.

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