

# Few settlements dotted Halton Hills bush 130 years ago

## First Acton settlers in 1829

ACTON is the most northerly town in Halton County. It is situated at the junction of two highways, Nos. 7 and 25. It is 40 miles from Toronto and 16 from Guelph. Its present population is 3,040 and there is slowly growth in housing and industry. The many progressive industries include a wide variety of articles including leather, textiles, plastics, ceramics, electrical appliances, machinery and equipment.

In 1829 Acton was known only as 400 acres on the 2nd and 3rd Concessions of Esquesing. The first settlers were Zenas Rufus and Kara Adams. Others soon followed. The first dry goods store was owned by Wheeler Green. Employed by him was a young man called 'Dan'. He must have been an up-and-coming young fellow as, for some unexplained reason the settlement was named after him and was called 'Danville'.

The first grocery store, owned by Miller Hemstreet, was known as 'Danville Grocery'. But maybe that name did not meet with un-

iversal approval either, as later the district was changed to 'Adamsville' after the first settlers. Even then the name could not have been entirely satisfactory to the pioneer fathers, for in 1844 it was changed again, this time to its present name of 'Acton.' The name was suggested by Robert Swan, the first postmaster, a native of Northumberland, England.

Acton, being the centre of a farming community, the first industry was naturally a grist mill, built on Lot 24, Concession 6. It was a log building and was known as 'McCallum's Mill.'

The first tannery was set up in a forest clearing about 1837 and was owned and operated by Abraham Nettles. Although it changed hands several times the tanning business had obviously come to stay. In 1865 the Beardmore Company took over the business and from then on it expanded until it became Acton's major industry.

Other industries located in Acton during its early days were J. H. Coates' Stave and Barrel factory;

W. H. Storey's glove factory Browns and Hall's Lumber and Shingle Mill; Spoilth's Blacksmith and Carriage Works and Acton's famous Plow Manufacturing Company. There were also lime works that went into operation in 1872 with two kilns capable of burning 350 bushels a day. Acton was also well supplied with stores, hotels, livery stables and bakeries.

The Grand Trunk Railway (now the C.N.R.) had its first service by steam railway in 1858.

As the pioneer population increased, Acton Citizens were affiliated with various religious groups—the Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Disciples of Christ. They worshipped in log cabins, crude frame buildings or in the homes of pioneers.

As more permanent places of worship were established churches were built in the following order: Baptist Church, 1842, first pastor, Rev. John Oakley; Knox Church, 1845, first minister, the Rev. John McLachlan; Methodist Church, 1852, pastor, the Rev. Wm. Willoughby. This was a

frame church. The present United Church was built in 1875.

The first Roman Catholic Church was built at Dublin, two miles south of Acton. Later the congregation of St. Joseph's purchased the old Congregational House of Worship and had it changed over to a Roman Catholic Church. The first resident priest was the Rev. Father Haley, appointed in 1893. St. Alban's Anglican Church was built in 1872. First Rector was the Rev. W. F. Swallow. The church was consecrated by the first Bishop of Niagara in 1875.

There is every indication in the records that the ministers of all the churches served their people faithfully and well but the Rev. D. B. Cameron left behind him a somewhat unique record. Mr. Cameron ministered to the Presbyterians in Acton from 1875 to 1885. At that time he retired but continued to reside in Acton. He died at the home of Peter Mann on February 25, 1890 at the age of 73.

He was a native of Inverness, Scotland, and was known to be a

man of fine character and high ideals. That he was an exponent of the simple life was obvious from the following codicil attached to his will. It read as follows:

"Considering the foolish extravagance displayed by the community in general and as a protest against it (I almost believe a solitary protest) I direct that my body, when dead, shall be decently wrapped in bleached cotton, neatly prepared for the purpose, laid in a simple coffin made of pine, with no ornamentation, not as much as my name, and carried to the grave in a sleigh, if in winter, or a spring wagon, and laid in the grave without a shell; and that no monument of any kind be put to mark the place unless some friend take a boulder from the field to mark the spot, and, if he fancy to do so, cut thereon the initials 'D.B.C.' In all other respects I confirm my said will."

On this same subject it is particularly worthy of note that in Acton there are now no neglected

pioneer cemeteries. When the acreage of the old cemetery had been out of use for 50 years or more, the Board of trustees, headed by the late Nelson Moore, took measures to restore it from a state of neglect. Headstones were assembled to form a permanent cairn in the centre of the old cemetery as a tribute of appreciation and respect for the pioneer fathers who had laid the groundwork for the present prosperity of the Acton district.

For the size of the town Acton has excellent educational and recreational facilities. There are good, well-built schools, a Y.M.C.A. and a very fine park, Prospect Park, complete with wading pool. It has attractive entrance gates, band-stand and a large arena which is the site for the annual Acton Fair. But its chief year-round attraction is the lake, a body of water which covers an area of 88 acres. It was originally the Mill Pond but thanks to the foresight of Mrs. Augusta Secord, the town fathers were persuaded to use the more attractive name 'Fairy Lake'.

## Stewarttown was capital of Esquesing

STEWARTTOWN is on the Seventh Line, Esquesing township—a lovely little village nestled 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 saw-mill 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.

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 Fraser, township clerk; Joseph Standish and Thomas Barbour, Assessors; Charles Kennedy and John Stewart, Town Wardens; Thomas Frye, Collector. Meetings were held at the Standish home until the opening of a tavern on Lot 13, west, on 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.

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.

After the Baldwin Act had been passed a meeting of the ratepayers



The site of government returns to Esquesing in a new building this week. Above is the first Esquesing township hall as shown on an 1858 map by George C. Tremaine.

was held at Mackenzie's Tavern in the village, when, in accordance 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 1851-58, and had the honor of being appointed Warden to the Provincial meeting of the County of Halton, held in Mil-

ton 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, Continued on page 7

## Georgetown's founder was George Kennedy

THE five towns now incorporated in the County of Halton might be likened to the five digits of the human hand. This you can prove by placing your hand on a map of Halton with the palm resting between the townships of Nelson and Nassagaweya. Thus you will find the thumb, or first digit, points to Acton; the index finger to Georgetown; middle finger to the county town of Milton; fourth digit to Oakville and the little finger to Burlington.

By this method, following the index finger we come to the location where, in 1820, three men successively stopped and decided to make this their future home. We don't know if they were the first white men to reach the district as history seldom records the names of those who merely pass through any particular spot—history begins with those who settled, and in one way or another, made homes for themselves and their families. And so the first names we find mentioned in connection with Georgetown are those of George Kennedy, the founder of the settlement, and then Marquis Goodenow and Sylvester Garrison.

George Kennedy was born in New Jersey in 1792. During the war of 1812 he served as sergeant in the British Army. In 1818 he married Elizabeth Williams. In 1820 the young couple moved to Esquesing, near what is now Georgetown. Kennedy was a land-surveyor, naturally a lucrative occupation in a new country. The young surveyor was quick to realize the potentialities for agriculture and commerce

of the district in which he had decided to make his home and did everything possible to promote its settlement.

However, the pioneers must have had many difficulties in clearing the land and making a living, as, for a time, the settlement became known as 'Hungry Hollow'. Perhaps the name may have had something to do with its slow growth as up until 1837, there were still only the first three original pioneers and their families. Eventually the settlement became known as 'Georgetown' after its founder, George Kennedy. Apparently the change of name brought change of fortune as in 1837 along came the Barber brothers, first to erect a woollen mill and then a paper mill.

Georgetown was now safely launched into the world of industrial enterprise which, through the years, has been multiplied many times over by the introduction of other paper mills of various types in addition to stone quarries, carding factory, carriage works, planing mill and a knitting machine factory. In fact Georgetown became a busy industrial area, a reputation which it enjoys to this day.

Stores naturally became a necessity so in 1840 John Sumpton opened the first general store. Two years later James Young started up in opposition and carried on a good business for many years. Other business men in the '80's were Wilson and Thayer, furniture; hardware, Reid and Whitaker; drugs, Ruston and Dr. Star; Jewellery, Armour and Continued on page 7

## Back Issues of The Free Press

20 years ago

50 years ago

75 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 31, 1953.

For the first time in the history of Acton, citizens have been summoned to the third nomination meeting in an effort to select enough representatives for the municipal council. The third meeting is Jan 8 with election Jan. 14. The initial nomination meeting secured only seven of the necessary nine and the second meeting only one more.

Margaret Cleghorn and Bill Toth were married in Knox church chapel, Guelph. A capacity crowd enjoyed the varied program at Lorn school under Mrs. Lorne Simpson and Crawford Douglas. Recitations were given by Valerie Crofts, Simmy McPhedran, Catharine McPhedran and Lyle Broughton.

Major John Anderson, who was minister of Knox church for several years, has been posted to Korea as senior chaplain.

Don Schroeder is one of the winners in a Canada-wide photography contest. Both pictures include his young son Richard. He is imparting his knowledge to the Boy Scouts.

A film God and The Atom was shown at the annual fireside sponsored by the Bible Society. M. M. Coles was chairman and J. Greer read scripture. C. Landsborough gave reports.

Parties and special sports events were held at the Y.

Retiring members voiced their praises of warden George Leslie at the last meeting of county council.

John Black joins the news staff of the Free Press and Champion.

O. S. George Ware and O.S. Bill McHugh have returned to Cornwallis after a month's leave.

Over 250 bags were given out at the United church concert. Mrs. Muriel Simpson and Mrs. Shirley Dills directed the program and Frank Bean played the piano.

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, January 3, 1924.

The annual Methodist Christmas tree and entertainment at Rockwood was held in the town hall Monday evening. The scholars of the Sunday School were presented with candies and oranges. Rev. Mr. Geiger, the popular pastor, received a fine fat goose as a Christmas present from the choir and a basket of fruit from the Ladies' Aid. The Christmas tree and the fireplace, from which Santa emerged, were a delight to the little folk. The splendid programme was enjoyed by a crowded house.

The annual Christmas treat for the children of Churchill church was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Murray, Cloverdale farm.

At the close of Esquesing council meeting it was resolved that the treasurer pay members of council \$3 per meeting and mileage for attending meetings and \$3 per day for commission work.

After 76 years the Guelph Herald ceased publication and has merged with the Mercury.

A very enjoyable afternoon was spent at the annual piano recital of Miss Lauretta Gray. Musical numbers were contributed by 22 pupils followed by holiday games and a general good time.

The new principal of Acton Continuation school is Mr. James Macdonald M.A. who has been on the staff of Toronto University. Hurrah! for Mayor Hiltz of Toronto. His boyhood was spent in this locality. Tommy Church found out he has no perpetual claim to the top post of the city.

Our local coal dealers deserve the thanks of the community for their foresight in securing ample coal for the needs of all so far this season, notwithstanding the reported shortage.

Under the new Highway Traffic Act intoxicated persons are not to drive motor vehicles.

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 29, 1898.

Christmas week in Acton is essentially the Sunday Schools' time for coming into prominence. The evenings at this time are pretty well monopolized with their anniversary entertainments. St. Alban's Sunday School gave a cantata. The children of the Baptist Sunday school were delightfully entertained when a series of colored Lime Light views of the city of London were shown.

For a quarter of a century Christmas night has been made eventful, especially to the scholars, by the anniversary entertainment of the Methodist Sunday school. This year the programme comprised a cantata with choruses, motion songs, recitations, etc. Largely of a devotional and missionary character. The orchestra played. The part filled by the Soldiers of the Cross was most attractive. The 12 young ladies robed in white wearing crowns of silver and bearing swords and shields, charmed the audience. The average attendance of the Sunday School is 222.

The scholars of the Disciples' Sunday school were given a tea and Christmas treat last Tuesday evening by the teachers. The children enjoyed the good things very manifestly.

Christmas promotions have been announced at the school including Oscar Brown, Ferri Brown, Freeman Coleman, Brant Swackhammer, Roy Arnold, Ida Laird, Bertie Smith, Maggie Harvey, Myrtle Matthews, Vida Folster, Ruby Clark, Annie Corry, Florence Holmes, Frank Havill, Marcus Perryman. Mr. Graham gave his pupils at Ballin-stad school a taffy pull the last day of school. The children presented him with a handsome dressing case.

Celebrated Indian cures at Agnew's Hotel, Acton, last Wednesday of each month.

Dear Miss Papillon:

How grateful we are to the Acton Branch, Activity Group of the Canadian Cancer Society for the marvellous contribution they have made to our Christmas here at the Lodge.

We were just speechless when your many boxes arrived and words cannot express the appreciation that we feel for your kindness, generosity and thoughtfulness.

How to express our gratitude is almost impossible but I am sure you know how pleased we are for the hundreds of items that we now have for distribution.

Will you please extend our thanks to all of the members of the Activity Group for the many hours of work that it took to provide these items as well as packaging them for delivery. To those who knitted socks, mitts, toques, bed-jackets, pullovers, lap throw, to those who sewed and to those who donated so many useful articles—we say thank you a thousand times. To those who baked and cooked, the grateful thanks of all of the patients goes out also.

We just cannot begin to tell you how many patients will have a more pleasant Christmas and Holiday Season due to the busy Actonites.

The best wishes of the Lodge patients, staff and volunteers goes out to each one of you and may 1974 be good to all of you.

Sincerely yours, Miss Helen E. Howes, Director of Volunteers.

(The boxes contained eight scarves, 16 knitted slippers, 14 faced slippers, 12 bed jackets, 21 socks, 36 small pillows, six toques, two mitts, a lap throw, two pullovers, two dummies, a flannel bed jacket, five rolls wrapping paper, five men's pyjamas, five short-sleeve shirts, hair brush, nine sweat socks, 2 pair nylons, underwear, a sweater, a sweater set, a suit and a skirt; and many, many candies and cookies.)

## OUR READERS WRITE:

The Editor: Acton Free Press Acton, Ontario Dear Sir:

During the past year we have come to respect the great value to a community, and to particular citizens as well, of a news paper.

I should like you to know how much it has meant to us to find that there is so much concern for one's fellow-man in this world which is so often called 'cold-hearted' or even 'apathetic'.

Through the Letters to the Editor column we have been amazed to discover the numbers of good folk there are in this world. Also we found that the Members of Parliament realize as well that this is a reliable source of information on issues that the public considers important.

We would like you to know what a debt of gratitude we owe to you, Sir, and the freedom of the press.

May the new year bring you much satisfaction and plenty of good news! Yours truly, Mrs. Oscar Drijber

The Free Press, Acton Ont. Dear Sir:

I had not intended to write to your paper again so soon, but I had such a unique Christmas. I felt that I would like to tell someone about it.

'Tis not unique because of the many cards, heart-sent, and remembrance brightening, which I read o'er and o'er. Dr. Crawford Smith, an eloquent minister of yesterday once said:—'Christmas cards keep the bond of friendship unbroken.'

'Tis unique because a pupil of 62 years ago (a lady) sent a box in which was one article (among others) which she had made herself, 62 years, think of it! and her remembrance of her old teacher was still fresh and green.

Another pupil, of 40 years ago, a lady, brought me a gift which was most unique. It was in a round tin box, and had sailed or flown across the sea from Ireland—a cake, 'Celebration Cake' they called it. It was described on the tin as a 'Traditional Plum Cake,' with brandy, but I couldn't resist cake. It was delicious. I wonder if any of your readers have tasted Irish Traditional Plum Cake. Yours truly, Millicent Milroy.

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