

Esquensing rebel's story as told to judge

Excitation, of Insurrection, Rebellion, Public War and Regicide

W.L. Smith's, *The Pioneers of Old Ontario*, claimed that the "Old Boston Church in the Scotch Block of Esquensing may be considered the cradle of Canadian liberty." This 1923 book explained that the Boston Church deed obliged the use of referendum, recall, and periodic review of trustees by the congregation. (It is important to note that this "Boston" Church was located on Lot 8, Con. 4 West, and was known as the Seceder Church). Such democratic thinking was regularly discussed in 1844, but it was most unusual to see it applied; and it is for that reason that Smith claimed that John Stewart Sr. was the "father of the Scotch Block."

Readers of this newspaper will recall the Scotch Block covered all of Esquensing south of the 17 Sideroad, west of the Sixth Line. This district was settled by Highland and Lowland Scots beginning in 1819. The "Block" received its name from the fact that virtually all the residents in this area were Scots who wished to live among their "ain folk." The success of their endeavour was unmistakable. By the mid-Nineteenth century, the residents of the Scotch Block were known throughout Upper Canada for their staunch Presbyterianism, shrewdness, ambition, and liberal thinking. It was, ironically, the later quality which resulted in the dissemination of this chilling indictment of John Stewart Senior's son:

THE INDICTMENT OF THE "REBEL"

Upper Canada, Home District, To Wit:
The jurors of our Sovereign Lady the Queen upon their oath present that John Stewart the younger, late of the Township of Esquensing, in the district of Gore, and province of Upper Canada, yeoman, being a subject of our said Lady the Queen, not having fear of God in his heart, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil as a false traitor against our said Lady the Queen his supreme, true, lawful and undoubted sovereign, and wholly withdrawing the cordial love and true and due obedience which every true and faithful subject of our said Lady the Queen should and of right ought to bear towards our said Lady the Queen, and contriving and with all their strength intending traitorously to disturb the peace and common tranquillity of this province, and to stir, move and excite insurrection, rebellion, and war against our said Lady the Queen within this province, and to subvert and alter, the Legislature rule and Government now duly and happily established in this province, and to depose our said state, title, power and government, and to bring and put our said Lady the Queen to death—On the first day of December, in the first year of the reign of said Sovereign Lady Victoria by grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen Defender of the Faith, and on divers other days and times as well, before as after, with force and arms, at the township of Esquensing aforesaid, in the district aforesaid maliciously, unlawfully and traitorously did with divers other false traitors whose names are to the jurors aforesaid unknown, conspire, compass, imagine and intend to stir up, move and excite insurrection and rebellion and war against our said Lady the Queen within this province, to subvert and alter the Legislature rule and government now duly established within this province, and to depose our said Lady the Queen from her royal estate, power and government therein, and to bring and put said Lady the Queen to death. And to fulfill, perfect and bring to effect...with force and arms...did procure and provide arms and offensive weapons, to wit, guns, muskets, rifles, leaden bullets, powder, pikes and bayonets...did move, induce, excite and persuade divers subjects...to raise levy and make insurrection and war...and not having the fear of God before his eyes nor weighing the duty of his allegiance, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil and entirely withdrawing the love and true and due obedience which every subject should and ought to bear towards...and wickedly desiring and intending to disturb the peace and public tranquillity of this Province...with a great multitude of persons whose names are at present unknown, to the number of fifty or more, armed and arrayed in a warlike manner...offensive and defensive...did ordain, wage and levy public war against our said Lady the Queen...contrary to the duty of his allegiance.

John Stewart Sr. came to Canada from Perth, Scotland in 1817. He and his wife, Margaret, settled Lot 9, Con. 3, Esquensing, in 1819. The couple had six children and soon developed a prosperous farm. Indeed, the Stewarts built the first home in the Block of materials other than logs. Called Craiglea, this fine home was built in 1832 and still stands.



John Stewart, the "rebel", was born in 1808 and died in Paisley, Ontario in 1893 after his pardon. He is considered one of the fathers of Responsible Government in Ontario.

John Stewart Jr., the subject of this article, was John Stewart's fourth son. He was born November 30, 1808 and in 1834 he married Mary Scott, whose father was the first settler of Nassagaweya Township. John Stewart, as the following article demonstrates, was greatly influenced by the liberal thinking of his father, as well as that of the Scotch Block community. His convictions led him to direct area farmers in armed opposition to the corrupt administration of the Family Compact in the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion.

Stewart was captured the very day the conflict broke out and he was eventually imprisoned in Fort William Henry in Kingston. A combination of good fortune and incompetence on the part of the prison guards intervened in Stewart's favour, and he and 13 others escaped; most making their way to the United States. John Stewart was pardoned for these "pernicious" activities in 1840, and he returned to his father's farm in Esquensing, where he lived with his wife and eight children. In 1876, the Stewarts moved to Paisley, Ontario. John Stewart Jr. died in 1893 and is buried in the Paisley Cemetery.

What follows is an interview of Mr. Stewart by Judge A.B. MacCullum of the Toronto Globe, which appears in that newspaper's May 17, 1890 edition. Thanks to Mr. Alex Cook of Milton for donating a copy of this article to our Archives, as well as providing further documentary support. Thanks also to Mr. Walter Lewis and the Halton Hills Public Libraries.

Canadians may be divided in their verdict as to the wisdom of the leaders of reforms in 1837 in forcing an insurrection to accomplish their purpose, but they are pretty unanimous in their conclusion that the country was badly governed at that time. Time, with unfailing certainty, has swept the majority of the ardent followers of William Lyon Mackenzie from the things that he fought, but there yet live a few scattered over Ontario whose greatest pride in life is to relate to their children and their children's children the part which they took in establishing, at the point of the bayonet and amid relentless persecutions and sufferings, responsible government in Canada.

They were Liberals at a period when it was a crime and a source of loss to profess such doctrines, but duty impelled them on, and now those of them who are yet with us have the satisfaction of seeing the province governed by the masses, and not by the classes. Let us honor the men who took their lives in their hands to reform grievances incompatible with British institutions and braved the taunts and persecutions of rascally officialdom.

One of the Survivors
Among the so-called rebels of 1837 was John Stewart, who is now spending the evening of his life in Paisley, County of Bruce. He is in his 82nd year, but he is still as enthusiastic over the troubles of 1837 as he was when he shouldered his musket to force the government of the day to govern the country according to the spirit of the Constitution. Many a young Canadian has sat for hours listening to Mr. Stewart's recital of rebellion incidents, and many a tear has been shed as he told of his own sufferings in gaol, and his peril on land and water while fleeing from the wrath of the powers that were. He has recently committed to manuscript the leading incidents of the time under consideration, and from this, as an heirloom for his descendants, I was enabled to glean what is confidently hoped will prove interesting to those who care to learn at what price responsible government was obtained and the fullest liberty of the subject vindicated in British North America. John Stewart came from a grand Highland stock, having been born in the town of Perth, Scotland, November 13, 1808. The hard times, which prevailed in Britain during and subsequent to the Napoleonic wars, forced his father to emigrate to Canada in 1817, arriving in Montreal thirteen weeks and three days after leaving the Clyde in a sailing ship.

He comes to Little York
There they remained for 18 months, when they removed in November, 1818, to Little York. Young Stewart did not derive much benefit from even the inefficient schools of that time, but due to the intelligence and strong native shrewdness of his parents, he was indebted for the talents which enabled him at a subsequent period to become a confidential and trusted agent of the band of Reformers in Toronto who were struggling against the tyranny, corruption, and high-



Mary Scott, (1800-1881), wife of John Stewart was the daughter of David Scott, the first settler in Nassagaweya Township on the Milton "mountain".

handed administration of the Family Compact of Little York. Mr. Stewart says: "It was such a miserable hole that if we had money enough we would all go back to Scotland again."

In the year 1819 Mr. Stewart's father took possession of 200 acres in what was known as the Scotch Block, in the township of Esquensing, Halton County, and in December of that year moved in with his family, they being the first settlers in the township.

From the year 1830, John began to take an intelligent interest in the politics of the day, his political gospel being that preached by Lyon Mackenzie in his newspapers, then circulated widely amongst the Scotch settlers wherever they were situated.

This is the first instalment of a series on John Stewart contributed by the Esquensing Historical Society.

The annual Christmas outing for members of the Historical Society, their friends, relatives and anyone else interested in local history will be to the Halton Regional Museum tonight. For those who prefer not to drive, a bus will leave Georgetown at 7.00 from the parking lot behind Bi-way. It will return at 10.30. The evening's programme features a talk by the curator, Mr. U. Ernest Buchner, a tour of the Museum and "pot luck" snacks. Tickets for this event are \$3.00.

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STOP! THE MUNICIPAL COMPLEX

EVERY CITIZEN OF HALTON HILLS SHOULD READ THIS!

IT COULD SAVE SIX MILLION DOLLARS OF YOUR MONEY

Recently our Town Council approved a motion to purchase property known as the Stevens Estate for a sum of \$600,000.00. It is their intention to develop this property and sell the lots. A portion of the property will be used to construct a municipal complex at a cost of between 5 and 6 million dollars.

The Citizens Committee opposed to this maintains:

- 1) That there are some serious questions of legality and propriety in Council's plans;
- 2) That insufficient research has been done to determine alternatives;
- 3) That our Council has misinterpreted public response.
- 4) That Halton Hills MAY NOT NEED a municipal complex at the expense of other more pressing needs;
- 5) That our Council has no mandate to be in the land development business putting public funds at risk

IF YOU AGREE HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO!

- 1) Phone a Councillor and tell him/her how you feel.

The following Councillors voted in favor of the Stevens Estate purchase:

D. Whiting	853-3725
J.R. Knechtel	853-1751
P. Sheldon	878-8103
F. Poultrop	877-7868
P. Carney	877-8837
M. Armstrong	877-8785
M. Sarjantson	877-7720
H. Levy	877-4708

- 2) Write a letter to your Councillor and mail a copy to the Editor.

- 3) Fill in the attached tear-off at the right and mail it right now.

- 4) Attend the Council Meeting on Dec. 19/83 at 7:00 p.m. at the Trafalgar Road offices.

I support the movement to stop the municipal complex and land purchase.

NAME.....
ADDRESS.....
PHONE NUMBER.....

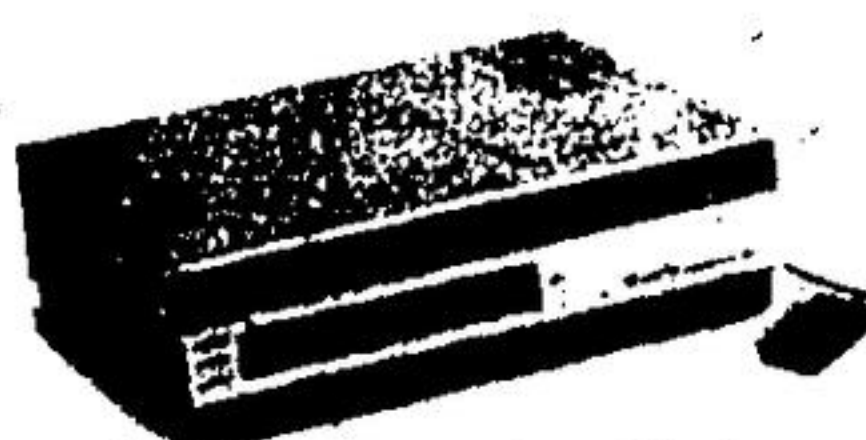
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