

Beliefs stem from forgotten events

Historian says military conflicts inspired prejudice

Many of Ontario's traditional attitudes about residents who are not white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASP) were based on sound reasons which have disappeared into history according to a Halton Hills historian and collector of military memorabilia.

Speaking to members of the Esqueping Historical Society in the Acton Legion Monday Dr. Bill Gregg of Nassegoweya said that many deeply held WASP beliefs which seem unreasonable today stemmed from events in the 1700s and 1800s which have since been forgotten.

A hypothetical American Roman Catholic democrat of Irish descent, for example, would have been suspiciously regarded should he have had reason to visit Toronto during the last century or even the early part of this one, Dr. Gregg said. Had he been of a mind to move to that city his life style would definitely not have equaled that of a WASP.

Tracing the reasons early Canadians had to be wary of Americans, Irishmen, Liberals and Roman Catholics entails a look at the development of Canada's militia units and the various conflicts in which they were involved, he said.

Although a voluntary force existed in Quebec from the late 1600s Canadian settlers didn't get really involved in their own defense until after the American revolution in 1776. At that time Britain had to stop taxing her remaining colonies to sup-

port the military force in them. If the colony wasn't going to pay for the military force protecting it Britain wasn't going to keep the force in place and by the 1790s the force had dwindled to 2,000 men.

At that point it was decided that Canada should begin supplying her own protective force, Dr. Gregg said. The first Canadian militia was formed in 1791. The Royal Nova Scotia regiment was allowed to use the word royal as well as the colony's name and this psychology worked so well that double the required number of volunteers enlisted in 1793. The regiment also received permission to wear blue uniforms rather than the regulation rifle green. In New Brunswick however, authorities didn't try so hard to please the residents. They were never allowed to use the colony's name and the complement was never full. Ontario's full militia was the Queen's Rangers.

The militia served three purposes, Dr. Gregg said. Primarily, it was supposed to protect the colonies from attacks from the United States. It also built roads of communication through the colony and Dundas Street and Yonge Street remain today as a result of this program. It was also a way of dispersing settlers to colonize new areas. Those serving in the military were paid in land grants in areas the authorities wanted to see settled.

When Lord Simco founded the first militia units under the

Militia Act every male between 16 and 50 was automatically enrolled in the new militia. In 1802 the act changed to encompass those aged 16 to 60. This was only a paper unit, however. Members were required to provide their own arms, received no pay and mustered one day a year. No one objected much to the system because many of the settlers were from a British military background, he said.

In May 1812 there were 11,000 men on the muster rolls of Canada's militia units.

In letters to Britain General Brock expressed concern that the large numbers of loyalists who arrived after the American Revolution and were serving in Canadian militia units in the early 1800s could prove dangerous in a wartime situation since they had no loyalty to either Britain or Canada and no particular dislike of the United States, Dr. Gregg said. They had moved to Canada just to take advantage of the cheap land available here and were therefore not particularly reliable soldiers in his eyes.

The Militia Act changed again in 1863 and a volunteer unit was formed in each militia. This was made up of 25 per cent of the unit's members and the company commander could hand pick the men for this force. The other 75 per cent of the militia members remained a sedentary force which was called up only in emergencies.

Halton's volunteer force served with the Second York Militia at Lundy's Lane and Queenston Heights in the war of 1812, he said. Its members did very well for themselves in military objectives and also in the land grants received later. The Prince Regent's Land Act granted 500 acres to anyone who had served as a flank man in the war of 1812 and among the Halton settlers who arrived as a result of this grant was Col. Chisolm, the founder of Oakville.

The militia fell apart after the war of 1812. Annual musters deteriorated into a drunken brawl and it was no longer an honour to be a member of the militia.

Although it receives little recognition, Dr. Gregg said that the 1837 rebellion in Upper Canada led by William Lyon Mackenzie was one of great significance to the province. If Mackenzie had been of a more military mind it could have turned into a serious civil war based on the worst reasons—politics and religion.

Mackenzie's march on Toronto in 1837 was supposed to be a protest against the Family Compact, a small group of Toronto families who belonged to the Conservative party and felt they had a divine right to rule. They were Anglicans and upheld the Church of England as the state church and the one to benefit from land known as the Clergy Reserves.

While this attitude caused few problems in Toronto, Dr. Gregg said, it was a source of great dissatisfaction outside the city. Most residents in this area belonged to the reform party, the Grits (now the Liberals) and they hated the Tories. Feelings ran so high that even pacifist became involved in the rebellion and one

of the people hung after Mackenzie's flight was a Quaker from Norfolk.

When Mackenzie arrived on Navy Island in the United States he attracted a small band of followers who had also fled Toronto. However, he also attracted a number of Irishmen from the Boston slums who wanted to support him. The Americans were quick to use his protest attempt for their own purposes and this made Toronto WASP's wary both of the Irish and the Americans.

When the Crimean War broke out in 1853 Britain pulled most of her troops out of Canada and Canada finally had to develop her own defense force. Militiamen were to receive arms and get paid for the 10 days of service they must spend in training annually. They were rapidly over-subscribed as every area wanted its own unit. The 20th Halton Rifles was formed at this time, he said.

The Trent affair during the American Civil War almost got Canada involved in war and

as a result Halton's rifle company began training one day a week on money from the municipality. Britain almost declared war on the union army when a Union vessel stopped and boarded a British merchant ship carrying Confederate commissioners to Europe in search of foreign aid and removed the commissioners. Had she done so Canada would have been dragged into the fight, Dr. Gregg said.

Between 1864 and 1865 escaping Confederate soldiers came to Canada and this too created problems with the Union forces. Halton militiamen went to Chatham to guard the river there for two weeks in 1864 to repel a possible American invasion.

The Irish got themselves in even more disrepute with Canadian WASP's after the war when the Fenian brotherhood began raiding Canadian borders. They hated anything British and assumed Canadians would feel the same. They assumed that if they crossed the border, Canadians would rise up and join them in driving out the British. While the Fenians had some

support in almost every community it wasn't as widespread as they had expected it to be. It was just sufficient to create problems in many areas. Many areas including Oakville had to guard its armories.

In 1865 the Halton militia had to defend the border from Port Credit to Burlington while the Wellington unit went to St. Mary's and Sarnia, Dr. Gregg said.

For people living in those times the Fenian Raids posed a very real threat. Halton militiamen spent up to a month on the Niagara frontier at a later date.

The first federal department of militia was formed in 1868 and eight companies of 20th Halton Battalion were formed under Col. Chisolm. These men reported for a 10-day training camp in Oakville each summer for the next three years.

The Niagara camp opened in 1871 and Dr. Gregg said it seems likely Oakville residents and businessmen would be greatly relieved by this since the training camp had become a big 10-day drunk.



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