

History of our region begins around year 1800 then rapid growth led to Milton's founding

The history of towns and villages is that of the surrounding country in that they reflect the needs and development of the wider community. In delving into the early history of the town of Milton, one must first look back at the history of the County, itself.

It is interesting to note that before the turn of the century, in the year 1788, the then known Province of Ontario was divided into four parts, namely Eastern, Midland, Home and Western districts. Halton and Wentworth formed a part of the Home district but more definitely in 1816, the Gore District. It was not until 1853 that these two Counties were separated by well defined lines and not without dispute, either.

Halton County is described by the Atlas of 1877, as one of the smallest but richest and most thickly populated counties in Ontario. "The soil, generally, when cleared, was good for farming and grazing and contained a wealthy and intelligent farming community."

The County is rectangular in shape, fronting on Lake Ontario, and extending approximately 24 miles in length and about 15 miles wide. It is divided into four townships, the upper two, Nassagaweya (Laughing Waters) and Esquesing (Land of Tall Pines) indicative of Indian occupation



It was always hard work in the 1800s as this road crew shows. Notice the older fellow on the left. There was no old age pension back then.

while the lower townships, Trafalgar and Nelson in the choice of names would seem to proclaim their early United Empire Loyalist settlers.

Geographically, Halton County was fortunate. Its position on the waterfront provided access by boat for the would-be settler in those early days of heavy stands of timber. Just a little later facilities for export were afforded as, for instance, when the enterprising Jas. Gage, in laying the foundations for Burlington (Wellington Square) built a wharf and warehouse. In its heyday of shipping, so say the records, as many as 200 teams delivered cargoes in one day.

Nor can one discount the advantages of the spur of the Niagara escarpment in the westerly part of the County. That well-wooded outcrop of rock gave rise to springs and streams which had much to do in determining "industry, wealth and population. It's lime and freestone has created good business and great buildings in our municipalities.

A search of the records reveals little as far back as 1800. We did note that the Township of Nelson was possibly the earliest settled part; that the first family to come into the Township was the Bates family. That was in 1800 and Mr. Augustus Bates was the first white child to be born. The second was Mr. George Ghent. Little progress was made until 1807 when a number of families came in. In 1817 it is recorded there were 68 inhabited houses, 476 persons, 2 grist and 3 saw mills.

Another item concerning Trafalgar, we note "It commenced settling about the year 1807 when wild land was selling at seven shillings, six pence, per acre (fancy the contrast now-a-days in the price of land along the lakeshore!)" The first Post Office was at Post's Corners, 1820. We learn that this was the only Post Office between Toronto and Dundas. His Majesty's Mail at that time was carried on horseback along Dundas Street from Toronto to Niagara. Settlers who had pushed their way to the northern part of the County, made the long trip down to the Front for their mail. Later on, Post Offices were established at Hanahsville (Nelson, on Dundas Street), Esquesing (on the 7th line, Henry Fyfe, postmaster) and Norval.

The town of Milton was incorporated in 1857. It is the County Town of Halton. At the time of the separation of Halton from Wentworth, a struggle took place between Oakville and Milton for the County buildings. Milton's central position may have helped win the decision in its favour. Yet Milton is not located on the Town Line but rather in Trafalgar township, between the 1st and 2nd Concession. Recorded history goes back to 1822 when Mr. Jasper Martin, who emigrated from Northumberland and who first came to Little York, drew one hundred acres from the Crown and moved to it on the Second Concession of Trafalgar, with his wife and four sons. Joseph Whitefield was another English settler, neighbor to Mr. Martin in these early days. He grew discouraged and sold his fifty acres of Crown Land to Mr. Martin and returned to the more populous Muddy York (Toronto). Another settler was a Mr. Hugh Foster who started the first cooper shop.

In 1826, Mr. Martin built a grist mill. The record states, "It being the only mill for miles around, the place became known to settlers in the surrounding country as Martin's Mills and the village as Mill Town. Mr. Jasper Martin died in 1833. The sons replaced the frame mill with a stone one. In 1853, it was destroyed by fire; then the present mill was erected at a cost of \$30,000 by John White and Edward Martin. In 1860 the mill became the sole property of Mr. Joseph Martin.

Water power for the mill was furnished by the Sixteen Mile Creek. Originally the stream crossed Main Street three times. One infers that the course of the creek may have been changed at the time of excavation for the pond—that reserve of water which was to keep the great water-wheels turning and which, maintained by the Martins through the years, has been a source of power and beauty for countless folk who looked upon it.

Looking back to 1837, it is recorded of Milton that there were 100 inhabitants, a well stocked general store run by an energetic Scotchman, named Geo. Brown, a blacksmith shop and the inevitable tavern.

Later on, George Brown became Mayor of the municipality and he with Dr. Fell, the schoolmaster, and James Cobban, the first physician, formed a committee, on whom responsibility rests for the selection of the name "Milton". Someone may have been an admirer of the blind bard Milton, or the name may have grown out of Mill-town. At any rate, a public meeting was called, the name chosen and a Post Office opened.

There are always firsts. Interesting to know that the first schoolhouse (a log one, later replaced by a frame) was built on the bank of the Sixteen close by what is now known as the "Old Cemetery". (Site of the P.L. Robertson Manufacturing Co., at present). The first teacher was a Mrs. Harrison. The third school was in the east end of Main St.; we learn that this was a grammar school. It was a brick cottage building (Brown, florists). Later, the stone schoolhouse was built which has served as Public, Model and Continuation (High School departments) School. Mr. James Black and Mr. Findlay McCallum are mentioned as early teachers.

In 1858 the first School Board was formed with Mr. John White, ex M.P., as chairman. In 1871, Mr. Robert Little, head teacher at Acton Common School, was appointed by the County Council as Inspector of Public Schools throughout the County. We have heard older folk who were pupils in that day say that Mr. Little was a stern Inspector. Certainly great credit for educational progress is due him. Where persuasion failed, in backward areas to get a school established, he did not hesitate to resort to legal authority. By 1875 there were in the County, 59 school houses and 35 brick or stone, the remainder frame, log school houses, now almost obsolete. The total number of pupils, 6,163 and teachers, 80.

An additional educational help was that of 20 Public School libraries and 56 Sunday School libraries.

Milton established a Mechanics Institute Library in 1855. In 1876 it possessed some five thousand volumes for circulation also a Reading Room in connection with library headquarters.



This is one of the first known steam road rollers in Halton.

The County Buildings were erected in 1957. The Atlas says they were the most imposing structure in the town with an adjoining public square. The front elevation which adds architectural beauty was not completed until some time later. One thing Miltonians note with pride in its stone buildings is that the beautiful free-stone was quarried in our own County. Incidentally, also, Milton pressed brick has gone out into the world to fashion many homes and edifices.

Communication by rail was a great step forward for Milton. For it is recorded that "the roads as a rule are only fit for travel in the summer or when covered with snow. At any other time the mud is something to be remembered with anything but pleasure."



Horses were the only real way of getting anywhere or getting anything done.

outside world by rail was set up. The Credit Valley came through and a little later, the Hamilton and North-Western. An Oakville, Milton and Guelph project never materialized.

Milton has a great asset in a reservoir of water fed by mountain springs located one and one-half miles west of the town on the mountain side. Its capacity (and we quote the atlas of 1877 again) is half a million gallons of water with pressure of 80 pounds to the square inch. The reservoir and watermain at that time cost \$29,000.

The very first church erected in Milton was by the Old Kirk Presbyterians in 1846. The first Methodist Church was built in 1852 and later replaced by a brick edifice in 1890. Knox Presbyterian Church of brick was also built that same year. It was in 1854 that the first Anglican frame building was erected and replaced in 1895 by the stone building. A former Governor General, Lord Aberdeen and Lady Aberdeen, visited Milton on the occasion of the corner-stone laying of Grace Church in 1895.

It is interesting to read that in 1888 there was organized in Milton a very live Council of Milton Board of Trade on which many leading citizens served. Its long list of committees, market, railway, mercantile, manufacturing, finance, printing, etc., must have challenged the imagination and ambition of its citizens for the welfare of Milton.

Two weekly newspapers were published. The Canadian Champion was established in 1859 and the Milton Reformer was for years



This road crew is shown laying the first stone on Trafalgar Rd. It was Trafalgar Rd. which was the way north to Jasper Mar-tin's town from Oakville. Photos on this page were kindly supplied by the Halton Region Museum.

It was in 1879 that communication with the a live paper, also.

An annual event which promoted the town's interests as well as those of the whole County, was the Agricultural Society for the County of Halton, organized in 1853. The hall on the grounds was built at a cost of \$2300. The occasion of "The Show" was a very important reunion time and gala time indeed for many, many folk for many years.

The semi-centennial booklet of 1907 calls attention to the progress Milton made in fifty years. One would love to quote names—they are as music to the ears of Haltonian

descendants. A few from the annuals of 1877 may provoke memories.

Three early medical doctors; Dr. C. Freeman, Dr. D. Robertson, Dr. J.H.B. Bennett.

Mayor at that time (1867-69) George Smith; Reeve, Mr. Duncan Dewar.

Merchants: Jas. Holmrake, dry goods; J.P. Roper, groceries, crockery, hardware; J. Cartmer, groceries, boots and shoes; A.F. Johnson, groceries; P.M. McKay and Son, dry goods, groceries, baking; Chas. Nielans, boot and shoe; Thos. Henderson, groceries

and baking; George Davis, baker and confectioner; George Hume, flour and feed; R. Husband, harness maker; J. Little harness maker; Jacob Bastedo, hatter; Bews and Houston, merchant tailors; J.L. Dinsmore, watchmaker and jeweller; W. Sloan, watchmaker and jeweller; G.A. Hemstreet, photographer; D. Butchart, photographer; Henry Watson, drug and stationery; Messrs. McCallum Bros., drugs and stationery; Benjamin Jones, cabinet maker; James Field, pump maker; John Hunter, builder; Wm. E. Mitchell, builder; Messrs. Wallace and Pantou, press.

Slim council majorities the rule, not exception

Slim majorities and healthy elections have been typical of Halton's political history.

Among the early representatives of the county, according to the County of Halton Atlas published in 1877, were the Hon. James Crooks, Mr. Scollard, James Durand, Col. William Chisholm of Oakville, Mr. Shade, Hon. Mr. Whetenhall and Caleb Hopkins. The atlas fails to give the political affiliation of these members, except for Col. Chisholm, who was a Liberal Conservative and held the position of member for 16 years.

These men represented Halton prior to 1849 when the county was part of the District of Gore. In that year the division into districts was abolished, and Halton and Wentworth formed a united county. In 1853 they were divided and Halton assumed its present day form.

From 1851 until the 1890s the political history of the county was predominantly Reform. In 1851 the Reform candidate, John White of Milton, was elected over D. Hamilton. He held the seat until 1854 when he was defeated by Col. G.K. Chisholm of Oakville by a majority of more than 300. In 1857 White and Chisholm again contested the county, and White was elected by a majority of 520. White was re-elected in 1861 and 1863, defeating Finlay McCallum by 331 and escheriff Levi Wilson by a majority of 831, a record in those days.

In 1862, on the election of a member of the Legislative Council for the Home Division, the Reform candidate, J.C. Atkins of Peel, defeated the Conservative, Col. Clay of Halton, by a large majority. Ontario in 1892 had been divided into four divisions—Eastern, Midland, Home and Western—and Halton formed part of the Home division.

In 1867, in the first election following Confederation for the newly constituted House of Commons, John White was again opposed by Col. G.K. Chisholm and was elected by a majority of 137. Sheriff McKindsey ran as Conservative in the election of 1872 but White defeated him as well, by 135.

By a curious perversion, Halton voted Reform as long as the Conservative administration of Sir John A. Macdonald ruled the Dominion, but elected a Tory candidate when the Reform ministry of the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie led the country. In 1874 White was defeated by D.B. Chisholm of Hamilton by the slender majority of 23. Chisholm was unseated for bribery by an agent, however, and a new Reform candidate, William McCraney of Oakville, was elected in 1875 by a majority of 135. The Conservatives in turn appealed against his election but without success.

In the 1878 election the Conservatives returned Hon. William McDougall, C.B., with a majority of 24, but McCraney won again in 1882 by 80 votes.

With the election of 1887 a particularly confusing period began in Halton's political history. At that time the Conservative, David Henderson of Acton, lost to John Waldie by nine votes. The election was set aside for bribery by agents and in the next contest, Waldie was replaced by McLeod of Georgetown. Henderson received a majority of 149, but in 1888 he was unseated

and the election was again declared void for bribery by agents.

Waldie was again nominated to oppose Henderson, taking unrestricted reciprocity as his platform. This time he defeated Henderson, who was campaigning for prohibition under the Temperance Alliance, by 27 votes. Another trial to unseat Waldie dragged on for more than a year until the charges were finally dismissed.

In 1891, Henderson again led the Halton polls with a majority, but he was unseated in 1892 for bribery, and another election was called.

For the first time in Halton, the Reform party had no candidate in the field, and Henderson was opposed by J.D. McGregor, the nominee of the Patrons of Industry. The by-election resulted in a 440 vote majority for the Conservatives, and Henderson was returned to the House of Commons for the third time within four years.

In the campaign of 1896, Waldie lost his last attempt at re-election, and Henderson polled a majority of 84. The total vote that year in Halton was 5,006 as compared to 19,626 in the 1949 federal contest.

From 1896 to 1935 Halton voted Conservative in every election—for Henderson until his retirement in 1917 at the age of 78, and following that, for Dr. R.K. Anderson until his retirement in 1935.

Following comparatively quiet elections in 1900 and 1904 which Henderson led with majorities of 1146 and 139, the 1908 campaign proved more colorful. Dr. W.S. Harrison was defeated by an increased Conservative majority of 212, and a large victory parade was held in Milton.

According to the Champion files, a huge crowd of enthusiastic supporters met Henderson at the station and escorted his carriage to the bandstand next to the town hall. Heading the procession were enthusiasts carrying brooms which they set on fire and converted into torches, and a band followed.

The defeated Liberals filled the hall and when Henderson attempted to speak, his voice was drowned by hooting from the upper windows of the hall. Those outside decided to stone the windows, and to prevent a riot, the major and chief constable went to close the windows. With them went the men and boys carrying the flaming broomsticks. Wild talk and shaking of fists followed, and political disaster was barely avoided.

The 1911 election which followed was "the most keenly contested in Halton's history," but not nearly so violent. The Liberals supported reciprocity, which the Conservatives said would be only a preliminary to the annexation of Canada by the United States. Henderson's majority in this case was 419.

In the 1917 elections, Dr. Anderson polled the largest majority in Halton's history of 2,072 as a representative of the non-political Union government. During this campaign, it was said at the Liberal Conservative convention, "Halton has been loaded to the muzzle for 50 years with politics, and now that we have a war on our hands, it is time to drop politics and join hands with the war winning Liberals for the duration of the war." W.D. Gregory of Oakville ran as an Independent Liberal in opposition to the Unionists, and unfortunately

forfeited his deposit when he failed to poll 50 per cent of his opponent's total.

During his 18 years as Halton's member, Dr. Anderson polled three record votes. The second highest majority in the county's history was his of 1,897 in 1926, and the third highest, a plurality of 1,476 in 1921. Until 1917 the record majority had been White's 831 in 1863.

Following Dr. Anderson's retirement in 1935, the county sent a Liberal representative to the federal House for the first time in 45 years—Hughes Cleaver of Burlington. In this election, Cleaver defeated the Conservative, George Currie, and a Reconstructionist, M.M. Robinson, by a plurality of 1,035. A C.C.F. candidate was nominated, but he withdrew before election day.

Cleaver remained the county's representative for 18 years, until his retirement this year. His highest majority was polled in the 1940 election—1,604—the fourth highest following those of Dr. Anderson.

In 1953, the county elected its first woman member, Sybil Bennett, Q.C., who served the riding until her death late in 1956.

June 16, 1870—On Saturday, a venerable looking specimen of the genus Yankee, hailing from Kent County, was in Milton looking after a "stray wife" who he described as a "pretty tidy chunk of woman." Anyone having such property in their possession will please return her for identification to the owner.

Bicentennial

Trivia Quiz



What is it?