

Milford: The County's Inland Port

By Conrad Biernacki

From the late 1850s to 1870s, Milford was known as the County's inland port. Schooners built there and elsewhere in the County sailed between Toronto, Kingston and other ports on the Great Lakes. From 1860 to 1890, the boom period known locally as Barley Days, enormous amounts of barley and hops were shipped to breweries in the United States, primarily through the New York State port at Oswego. County barley was considered the best. It was a drought-resistant strain developed in the 1850s that grew well during the dry summers and was particularly suited for beer making.

A surprising coincidence is that where these schooners were built is immediately adjacent to where the annual St. Philip's Anglican Church Black Creek Canoe Trip launches—the Guernseys' home at 17 Chapman Crescent. Equally amazing is that the destination for the trip, the dock at Black River Bed and Breakfast at 68 Morrison Point Road, is right in the midst of four additional wharfs.

In Milford, the shipbuilding wharf, known as Cole's Landing, was on the J. Cole farm, subsequently owned by John Head. The wharf was also used for transporting local produce such as apples, fish, lumber, rye, oats, buckwheat, corn and, of course, barley to other markets, and for bringing goods to Milford. (There were also potash and soap factories at Cole's Landing.)

Although the total number of schooners built at Milford is unknown, two are recorded: the *Mary* and the *Ellen*. The only information known about them is that they were both called "small" schooners and that the *Ellen* disappeared near Scotch Bonnet Island with a cargo of fish. A third vessel, the *Silver Spray*, was a steamer built in 1880 by Captain John Fegan (a Milford resident listed in Belden's Atlas of 1878 as a joiner and contractor). It was to provide regular service between Milford and Kingston. But after one trip it was found to be too small to make the journey safely. The *Silver Spray* then went to the harbour at Picton where it eventually rotted and burned.

Other schooners such as the *Albion*, *Prince Edward*, *Robert Bruce* and *Waterloo* were logged in the customs books for the Port of Picton as having owners who lived in Milford. But it is not known where these ships were built. Also, as a port of registry in the 1870s, Milford recorded vessels that were not built there. Those made at nearby Port Milford were recorded as Milford vessels.

Building a schooner had several requirements:

1. Lumber. White oak for the keel and hull, and white pine for the masts and other spars. Milford was the lumber trade depot for the entire county. Sawmills at Milford produced lumber that was sent as far away as the United States and Britain. Shipwrights in Milford got their masts from primeval pine forests near the Sandbanks. A trail was cleared through the woods, called a mast road, and 20-metre pine poles were hauled along it to the shipyard at Milford. Evidence of this road can be found today if you know where to look. Some of the last remaining stands of tall pines can be seen at the Glenwood Cemetery in Picton and the Old Quaker Burying Ground in Bloomfield.

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Picton, Ontario

Milford's March Musicfest

*Plan to attend this musical fundraiser in support of the
South Marysburgh Volunteer Fire Department and
Prince Edward County's Paramedics*

**Sunday, March 12 from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Mount Tabor Playhouse**

Performers to include:

Dave + Lenore Bongard

Mark Despault

Michelle Found

Stan Hicks

Dayton Johnson

Bill + Susan March

Roy Rorabeck

Len Smith

Tickets at the door only \$10.00 each
50/50 draw and a donation jar

*All proceeds go directly to these two
vital community services!*



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