

STOUFFVILLE AND ITS PIONEERS

A Paper Given Before the York Pioneer and Historical Society in Toronto on April 21st 1931 by David Stouffer, the Oldest Living Member of the Stouffer Family, Who Came to the County of York, Upper Canada, in 1804

"The village of Stouffville is situated about 30 miles from the heart of Toronto, on the Canadian National Railway, and in a direction north-east from the city. To be exact, it is on the townline between the townships of Markham and Whitchurch, and consists mainly of Lot 35, Concession 9, or 200 Acres, of Markham township, and Lot 1 Concession 9, or 200 acres, of Whitchurch township. This land, along with the adjoining Lot 2, Concession 9 of Whitchurch township, was all owned originally and occupied by the pioneer, Abraham Stouffer, and his wife Elizabeth and their two children after having emigrated from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada in the year 1804. Stouffville is in the midst of a fine agricultural district and, while it cannot boast of any large manufacturing establishments, is supplying the wants of the rural community very fully and is in a flourishing and prosperous condition, as we shall see later. The population of Stouffville is about 1,300.

About The Name
Doubtless Stouffer is the original and correct way of spelling the family name, but the Government made the change when perpetuating the name of the pioneer of the community, in naming its postoffice. They at the same time abbreviated the name and called the place Stouffville. Had I been there at the time and felt as I do now, I would have protested most strenuously, but then, you see, I wasn't there. This explanation seems necessary in order that the younger generation may know that we are one and the same people with the Stouffers. The Stouffer family can be traced back to 1630, when Daniel of that name was born in the town of

Thun, Switzerland. Abraham Stouffer of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, was the father of our pioneer, Abraham Stouffer, who was born in 1780. He learned the milling trade at his father's flour mill at Chambersburg—a knowledge which was to stand him in good stead after coming to Upper Canada. In passing we note that there have been six Abraham Stouffers in direct succession, the last five of whom were and are still continuous owners and occupants of Lot 2, Concession 9 of Whitchurch township in our county.

In Pennsylvania from Colonial days there were a goodly number of Reosors and Stauffers who favored the Loyalist cause and British institutions. Although they were no, strictly speaking, United Empire Loyalists, they desired to live again under the British flag and decided to change their place of habitation from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada. A large colony of the Stauffer family looked toward the County of Waterloo, to which in 1804 was directed one of the larger migrations of the time. A distinguished descendant of this Waterloo colony was the late Rev. Byron H. Stauffer, well known in Toronto.

You will note that Abraham Stouffer, my grandfather, was the only one of his name to settle in the County of York, he having married Elizabeth Reesor, sister of the Peter Reesor who becomes a prominent figure in this sketch. Naturally he became attached to the Reesor group of migrants to our county.

In 1802 it was decided that these families would seek homes in Upper Canada, but not without investigation. They therefore appointed Peter Reesor, an energetic and

trusted man, then 22 years of age, to be their Caleb, to spy out the land and report to them. Gladly accepting the responsibility, he was not long in getting ready for the journey from near Chambersburg over the Alleghenies through New York State to the capital of Upper Canada. He had only to groom his trusty young steed, put on saddle and bridle and a few other items of equipment and start on his 500 mile journey of exploration. In a few days this young man of keen observation arrived at York and at the Colonial Land Office, where he said he wanted good land, well timbered and with water power privileges for a party of intending settlers.

He was told to go about ten miles north and then ten miles east and he would come to the Rouge River, and there he would see what he asked for. Here in his mind he located the Reesor farm, for there he saw a few acres of the best that is now Cedar Grove. This seemed to him an ideal location and so he returned to Toronto, made such further arrangements were necessary and was about to mount his horse for the ride home when he was met by an ex-officer of the British Army accosted him with these words:

"I hear that you are looking for land. Now I have title to 400 acres well wooded, though I have never seen it, it is about the centre of the township of Whitchurch, about 22 miles north of this. I am willing to sell, for I want to return to Great Britain."

Peter said: "I am not prepared to buy yet; I came to look over the prospects of settling here, but I have no money with me."

Whereupon the officer said: "I will give you those 400 acres for your horse, saddle and bridle."

Peter asked to see the title to the land, and it inspected at the land office and after the offer "unsight, unseen," as we boys used to say when trading Jack knives. Afterwards the officer wanted also he halter, but Peter said, "No, a bargain's a bargain." Not that Peter Reesor was a generous man, especially to the poor, but he accepted the scriptural injunction, "Let your yea, yea and your nay, nay."

Curious how Peter Reesor got mixed up with the Stouffers and the affairs of some other Stouffville people, as we shall see. Peter Reesor continued to own these 400 acres until near the end of his life, when he willed 200 acres to his daughter, Mrs. Armstrong, of Markham, and the other 200 to his daughter, Mrs. Wheeler of Stouffville. In due time the latter holding became the property of Mrs. Wheeler's son-in-law, W. B. Sanders, afterwards, reeve of Stouffville and Warden of the County of York.

Up to a few months before Dec. 18, 1929 when he died at the age of 84. After the Nipissing Railway came to Stouffville, wood, lumber and timber, became much more valuable and Mr. Sanders made good use of his opportunity in turning his beautiful timber and excellent wheat land into a good return of ready cash. The value of the pioneer's horse saddle and bridle had grown into thousands of dollars.

We must now resume the narrative for we have left the Reesor standing in these streets watching his horse being led away. With the deed of the 400 acres in his pocket, he walked the 500 miles back to his horse being led away. With the sturdy stuff those men were made of, when the prospect of such a journey afoot could not daunt them. He was heartily welcomed by his people, who were greatly encouraged by his report. When he told them what he had done and that his intention was to make his home in Canada, his friends, as was understood from the beginning, at once decided to stand by him and accompany him to the promised land. Peter urged his friends and relatives to sell their holdings and get their affairs in shape as soon as possible, but it was 1804 before they were able to set out.

These families of Reesor and Stouffer immigrants belonged to the Mennonite Church, spoke the German language, were an industrious, thrifty and God-fearing people, and have contributed greatly to the financial and moral well-being of the communities in which they have lived. The pioneers at once decided to stand by him and accompany him to the promised land. Peter urged his friends and relatives to sell their holdings and get their affairs in shape as soon as possible, but it was 1804 before they were able to set out.

Now, what have our pioneers accomplished in the forty years of their active business life in Stouffville? They have secured 600 acres of good land, built mill dam and sawmill, built two gristmills, built houses, barns and outbuildings, formed the nucleus of a new community, of which Stouffville is the centre, and have left a family of 1,085 descendants now living. This is no small accomplishment for one man and his wife, and I am proud to-day to be counted as one of their grandsons.

From 1848 as miller, and merchant for the district, Edward Wheeler became for some years one of the leaders of the community. The village prospered and grew, although not very fast. Along with our physical improvements came also the intellectual and moral advancement of our people, for the churches and schools were doing their part faithfully and successfully. I must not overlook "The village printing press and the printer." During the Rebellion of 1837 Wm. Lyon MacKenzie had a printing

press in Toronto, from which he issued thousands of copies of his paper "The Constitution," the contents of which being highly democratic and inflammatory in their nature, aroused the opposition and anger of the Loyalists or Tories, who seized the press and dumped it into the Bay nearby. It was fished out by somebody and afterwards was placed in John Boyer's building in Stouffville.

Now, who do you suppose was the printer on the rebel press? Why it was a mere boy, Thomas Shaw by name, one of the most respected names you can mention in connection with Stouffville. He came to reside in this city about fifty one years ago, will be 95 years of age on May 9 this year, is in good health and walks down from 38 McGill Street to his office in the Court of General Sessions of Peace every day that the Court is in session.

When our population was only 600 we had no less than five taverns called by the whiskey trade "houses of accommodation." A better name would have been "houses of intoxication." However by the persistent efforts of some of the churches, the temperance societies and a number of enthusiastic temperance workers among the laymen and women, the sentiment of the people was changed so that at every election at which temperance was the issue, we always had a large majority in favor of temperance.

Of course we had our Confederation demonstration on July 1, 1867. In the procession were first the Union Jack, second a company of young men on horseback, painted and feathered to represent our original inhabitants; led by their chief, Pete Libbithird, and a company of youths on horseback to represent the coming generations of white people; led by Captain Jim O'Brien, fourth, the Sharon Brass Band led by their veteran conductor, Jesse Doan, one of the finest bands in Upper Canada at that time. And after the band came a host of people on foot, some in buggies but not a single solitary automobile. Arriving at William Brown's beautiful maple grove, dinner was in readiness for the hungry crowd who received it with patriotic enthusiasm. At 2 o'clock the platform meeting was called to order by the chairman, Mr. George Flint, Senior, in a rousing speech, after which he called on several prominent speakers who delivered patriotic addresses appropriate for the occasion, the band filling in the intervals with their excellent music. As the Scotchman would say, it was a grawn success.

The next order of business for Stouffville was its incorporation into a separate municipality, which took just ten years after confederation in 1877. While James Dougherty became its reeve the first two years, Edward Wheeler was reeve the next two and W. B. Sanders, of whom we have been speaking, the three following years. There was much to be done and the work was done cautiously and progressively by undertaken, each year showing some improvement.

The first important undertaking was the construction of the water works system on the gravity plan during the reeve ship of Mr. J. J. Stouffer in 1897. Our reservoirs are about 3 miles north of the village on what is called "The Ridges" and furnishes an abundant supply of pure, cold spring water; has a fall of 108 feet to the village and cost \$25,000, which was paid for in 1897. Our annual revenue of \$2,800. It is also a great success, solving also the question of fire protection, which was badly needed.

The village has also a splendid public library under the Carnegie benefaction, which is greatly appreciated. Next comes the Hydro-Electric system, another profitable addition which will be paid for by 1939 and thus help to reduce the taxes of the people of Stouffville. Then comes the Horticultural Society, which is doing a beautiful thing and is doing wonders towards making Stouffville one of the fairest, healthiest and most desirable residential towns in Ontario.

Along with these we have good public and continuation schools; seven Protestant churches, two first-class banks, a fine public park, municipal oversight of the cemetery and a good roads system. We have also foundry and machine shop, planing mill, chipping mill, creamery, gold fish hatchery, two grain elevators, all kinds of stores and several public halls. In summing these up, we have a wide-awake up-to-date newspaper called the "Stouffville Tribune," and a good brass band.

Stouffville, being surrounded by such excellent farms and gardens, has become noted for the amount of shipping by rail and road of grain, vegetables, fruit, horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, poultry, butter and eggs.

Now, Ladies and Gentlemen: When and where does all this improvement start? Why of course we have to look back to the pioneer days of which we have been speaking, when not only Abraham and Elizabeth Stouffer, but also the other hundreds of sturdy men and women of vision and action who laid the foundations of our citizenship along the frontiers of our great Dominion.

What Sir Wilfred Laurier prophesied is coming true—"The Twentieth Century belongs to Canada." This Dominion has only fairly started on his career. Every year is opening to our view the now and wonderful potentialities of our lands, our forests, our mines, our lakes and rivers and our waterpower. We are a wonder and an astonishment to all who have given to our Dominion serious thought. I believe that those who are permitted to live 25 years from now will witness the great ships of the "Sword Seas" laden with apples, fruits, vegetables and other tropical merchandise coming up through our rivers, canals, and lakes, going up, up, up into the very centre of our North America continent, distributing as they go their precious

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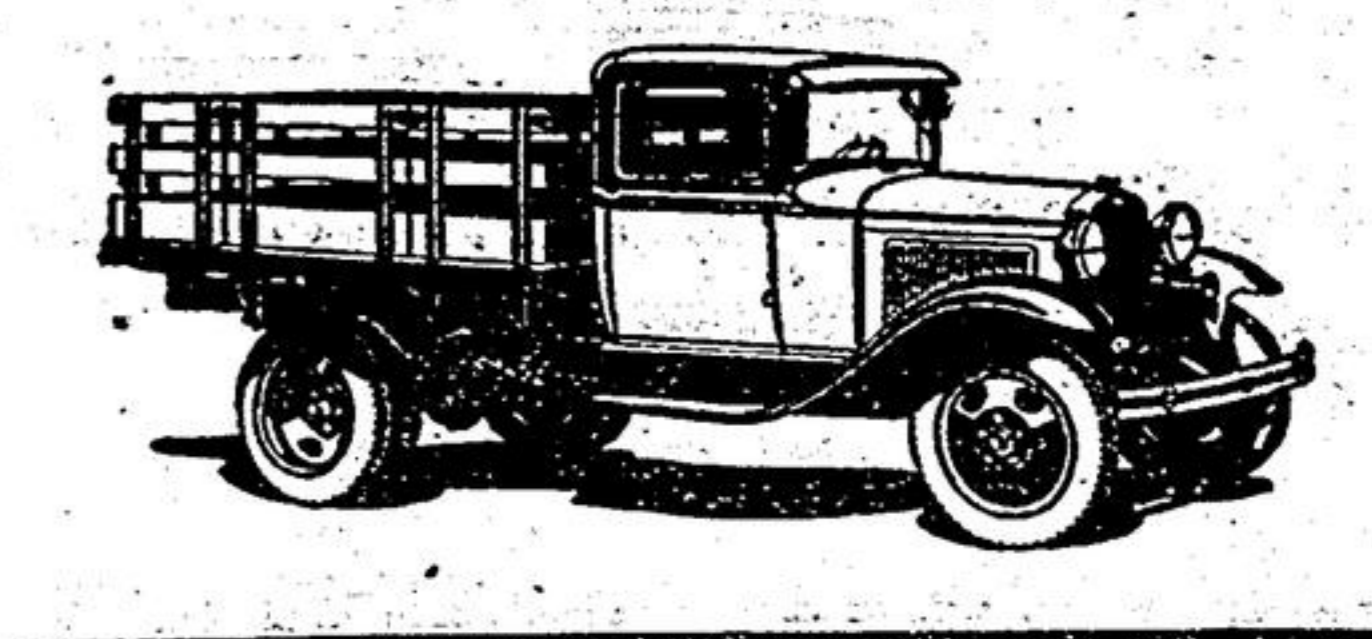
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Highways Crowded But Accidents Few

Thousands of Cars Out Under Influence of Fine Weather

Thousands of motorists went travelling on the highways over the week-end to enjoy the mild air and warm sunshine and many of them spent the time inhaling gasoline fumes from the car ahead. Traffic was the heaviest of the year on all highways but there were no serious accidents and few minor ones. Provincial and suburban police officers were kept busy throughout the day and evening superintending the endless flow of traffic going in both directions. The Kingston, Dundas and Hamilton highways were black with vehicles all through the day and at night the headlights seemed like fireflies in the distance. "Lots of traffic but no accidents," was the pleased announcement of police officers Sunday night.

Canadian Wins Skating Trophy

Former Toronto Professional Triumphant in England

London.—With an exhibition of school figure skating which stood out almost in a class by itself, Harold Nicolson, Canada, at the London Ice Club recently carried off the first cup presented by the National Skating Association for international style competition. The event is open to professionals who have practised on British rinks during the season. Nicolson was placed first by all seven judges, and but for the fact that he had only been in England for a week since his voyage from Canada would undoubtedly have given as perfect an exhibition in free skating as he did in the school figures. Harold Nicolson is a native of Switzerland who came to Canada some years ago. Last year he acted as professional at the Toronto Granite Rink.

Falls Tower Looted

Niagara Falls, Ont.—For the second time within a week, and the third this year, burglars visited the observation tower at Falls View. This time the intruders spent considerable time inside, selecting the most valuable articles, and got away with goods valued at around \$400. Other visits had netted the thieves little of value.

Argentine Exports Increase Over 1930

Buenos Aires, Arg.—Argentine exports for the first quarter of 1931 showed an increase in volume but a decrease in value as compared with the same period of 1930, the National Statistical Department announced recently. The exports were valued at 162,014,600 gold pesos, approximately \$113,408,000, as compared with 189,987,000 gold pesos for the first quarter of 1930. That the decrease was due entirely to the lower prices of exports is shown by the fact that the volume increased 1,638,000 tons over 1930.

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