

Dempsey ✓

SETTLEMENT AT MEYERS' CREEK

From the U. E. Loyalist period we inherit the settlement at Meyers' Creek—the beginning of our present county town of Belleville.

The site of Belleville has been occupied for many years. In Indian times the village of Kente may have been located here, according to Canada's epic poet Wallace Havelock Robb. Certainly the Indians used the site as a temporary campsite and as a burial ground. To the Mississaugas the site was "Asaukhknoak" (the place where the rushes end) and the river entering the Bay of Quinte at this point was known as the Sagonashkoken or Saganaskion.

When Thurlow Township was first surveyed in 1787, lot 4 of the 1st concession (what is to-day the business centre of Belleville) was reserved for the Mississaugas of the Bay of Quinte "ostensibly for an Indian burying ground," ^{although the real burying ground} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~believed~~ ^{supposed} to have been Zwick's Island just west of the river's mouth. In the early years of white settlement the Mississaugas are said to have wintered on this 200 acre reserve, ascending the Moira river to Lake Stoco each March to hunt and fish. Every year a canoe from Kingston brought the Indians presents of blankets, cloth, guns, kettles, etc., as partial payment for surrendering the lands along the Bay of Quinte to the British government in 1783.

Probably about 1784 the first Loyalists established themselves along the front townships of Hastings County, although only Alexander Chisholm and Captain George Singleton are likely to have had their houses close to the river. Alexander Chisholm held Lot 3 of the 1st concession of Thurlow, a section of land including much of west Belleville. Like many early settlers Chisholm engaged in some Indian trade. His house, in the style of a Scottish crofter's cottage, is the present residence of Lorne McDougall south of ~~233~~ 2 Highway Number just east of the Ontario School for the Deaf.

Captain Singleton's lands, lots 5 and 6, took in much of eastern Belleville. With his brother-in-law, Lieutenant Israel Ferguson, Singleton opened a trading post on the east side of the Moira River, possibly on the lot reserved for the Mississaugas. Both Singleton and Ferguson are believed to have died in 1789. Nevertheless, from about 1785 to 1790 the small community was known as Singleton's Creek and the river was referred to as Singleton's River, leading some historians to regard Singleton as the founder of Belleville.

As early as the summer of 1787 William Bell opened a small trading post in the Belleville area. This post, which at different times was in Sidney and Thurlow Townships but always near the mouth of the river, conducted trade with the Indians in such goods as tomahawks, ^{clasp} ~~large~~ knives, beaver spears, and scalping knives. To the early white settlers Bell sold such articles as, **WHISKEY**, farm implements, garden seeds and tobacco, which were supplied him by Kingston merchant John Ferguson who in turn had contacts with Montreal merchants. Bell later turned from trading to teaching, instructing the Mohawks at Tyendinaga from 1796 to 1802.

The Belleville area received its first main group of settlers in 1789 when some 50 persons crossed over from Prince Edward County to settle in Thurlow. Most of them went up the river five miles to the neighbourhood of Foxboro where they formed "a compact settlement." Among these was John Taylor who shortly returned to the front of Thurlow where he purchased part of Captain Singleton's property. For many years Belleville's east hill ^{WAS} ~~would be~~ called Taylor Hill ^{including} and the Taylor Burying Ground, the first ~~burying~~ ^{final} resting place of many of the hardy pioneers.

As the population at the mouth of the river increased, the community began to acquire the conveniences of similar hamlets in pioneer Ontario. About 1789, John Simpson, ^a United Empire Loyalist, built a tavern which soon became the social centre. Here the early political meetings were held, the local militia was organized, errant militia men faced ^{court} ~~court~~ martial, the ~~M~~asons first met, the all-too-few parties and dances were held, and the occasional traveller was made to feel at his ease. Indeed, the tavern gained a reputation for the strength and purity of the whiskey dispensed by the host. After Simpson's death, his widow Margaret carried on the business, purchasing the necessary whiskey from William Bell at five shillings per gallon. She was the only woman

tavern owner in the Midland District and apparently well able to meet competition from at least three ^{other local} taverns in the early 1800's.

Simpson's tavern stood on the southern ~~side~~ side ofundas Street near Front Street, and this area was one of the two centres from which Belleville grew. The second centre was on Station Street (or Mill Street as it was called in our early history) about the site of the present Belleville Creameries. Here about 1790 on land purchased for \$100 from John Taylor, Capt. John W. Meyers ^{after} established Belleville's first industry—a lumber mill ^{whose} ~~whose~~ saws depended on water obtained by Meyers by damming the Moira. In 1794 ^{ground} a grist mill followed, for several years the only such mill ^{ground} between the Napanee and Don rivers. Settlers came from as far as Port Hope to have their grain ~~grinded~~ into grist, "the grain being dragged through the pathless woods on rough sleds." No longer did settlers from Hastings County have to take their grain to the earlier Kingston, Napanee or Adolphustown mills. No longer could a writer record, as one did in 1794, that grain from this area had been taken to Berczy's Mill at Markham in York County.

Captain Meyer's life was exciting, though not always easy. A native of the Albany area in New York, he had been caught up in the American Revolutionary War, ~~struggles~~, displaying a good deal of intelligence and bravery on the British side. After the fighting had ceased, Meyers squatted on land at Lachine until ordered to move. Arriving on the Bay of Quinte about 1783, he obtained two lots at Kingston and then squatted on the front of Sidney before that township was surveyed. When an attempt at mill-building just east of Trenton was foiled by a poor water supply, he moved to the banks of the Moira. It was his hope to be allowed to build his mill closer to the river's mouth, however, the sought-after land was part of the Mississauga Indian reserve. Although Meyers apparently worked out a 99 year lease with the Indians for this land, the government refused to recognize the claim. Accordingly Meyer's property was

See Damfury's account of Meyers.

Belleville

1818

October 6, 1818

"Notice. Ran away from the subscriber, a Servant black woman, by the name of BETT, with a male child, two years old and upwards. Whoever will return the said Wench and boy, to the subscriber, or give information, so that she and he may be brought back, shall receive six penke reward, and no charges paid. All persons are strictly forbid harboring or trusting him on my account, under the penalty of the law. R. Leavens.
Belleville, 29th September, 1818."

Kingston Gazette

Shortly after 1800 Simon and James McNabb came from Scotland and built a second mill dam and mills including a small ^{cloth} ~~store~~ factory on the west bank of the river near Meyers Dam. This competition between the McNabbs ^{and Meyers,} ~~and Meyers,~~ accentuated by developments during the War of 1812, would lead to Meyers name being removed from the settlement at the mouth of the Moira.

Along with this somewhat limited commercial expansion, Meyer's Creek developed in other ways. About 1800 the Hastings Militia was formed at Belleville and in 1804 the Masonic Lodge commenced. The first bridge across the Moira, a floating structure placed near Dundas Street, was erected only to be carried off by floodwaters: about 1806 it was replaced by a more permanent structure at Bridge Street; Ferry service was commenced between Belleville and Hennessey's Point in Prince Edward County.

All History

By 1810 John Watkins was operating a school in a small frame building near the present market, and Dr. Seth ^{Meecham} ~~Meecham~~ who had resided in Sidney ^{and then for} since 1801 was physician to the growing population. Other prominent inhabitants ^{included} ~~is~~ Captain John McIntosh (store-keeper) and ^{Roswell} ~~Roswell~~ Leavens (blacksmith). Both John Taylor and Capt. Meyers were regarded as living outside the community.

Progress during this period was hindered by the settlers' inability to get title to their homes and businesses, many of which were located on the Mississauga Indian Reserve land (lot 4). John Meyers had made several efforts to get a grant or lease of all or part of this land and several petitions from other settlers beginning in 1807 requested the government to lay out a town plot on the reserve, but to ^{no} ~~no~~ avail. The request of James McNabb and others that such a town plot could

Dr. Meecham (a member of Thurlow Lodge No 17. Masons) was a brother-in-law of Simon McNabb. born about 1770 in New Hampshire. His son James Hubbard Meecham was first Postmaster of Belleville 1812, Surgeon to Hastings Battalion of Militia, stationed at Kingston

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be arranged, because few Indians used the lot, was rejected. Then action was delayed by the outbreak of the War of 1812, a war which was to have dramatic consequences for Meyer's Creek.