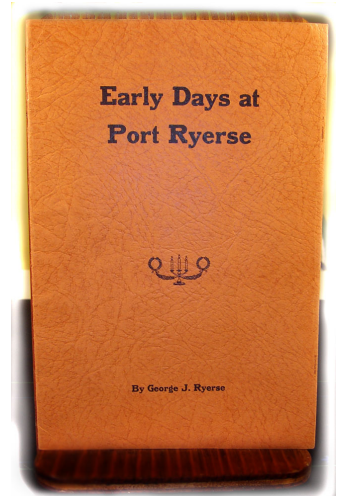


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Early Days at Port Ryerse
(Norfolk County, Ontario)
by George J. Ryerse, published c1900
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Early Days at Port Ryerse



By George J. Ryerse

Early Days at Port Ryerse

By



Mr. George J. Ryerse

Simcoe, Ontario

EARLY DAYS AT PORT RYERSE

By Mr. Geo. J. Ryerse

The first resident of what is now known as Port Ryerse, was Colonel Samuel Ryerse, who was born in New Jersey in 1750, and who died June 12th, 1812. Why two brothers of the same family, who lived but two miles apart, should have different names, namely Ryerson and Ryerse, is a mystery that has never been satisfactorily solved, as far as I know. My guess is that it came about by the name being written Ryerse when my grandfather received his commission as a captain in the British Army of 1776. His four brothers were Ryersons. One brother, Joseph, afterward Colonel and father of five Methodist preachers, joined the British Army near the same date, though but sixteen at the time, and not being in good physical health. The brothers served the full seven years to 1783. Their property being confiscated, both went to New Brunswick, Samuel being induced by friends to return to Long Island, found it a most uncomfortable place to live, as he was regarded as a Tory, and an enemy of the new republic. Writing to Governor Simcoe, he was urgently solicited by the Governor to come and make his home in Upper Canada, and promised liberal grants of land. They met at the Niagara River in 1794, when satisfactory arrangements were completed. My grandfather returned to his home, settled his affairs, and in the summer of 1795, with his wife, my father, then one year old, a son of his first wife named Samuel, who was then twelve to fifteen years of age, his worldly goods and some hired help, started to Upper Canada. It was a tedious and trying journey across New York State, but Niagara River was finally reached. Passing out of this river into Lake Erie by boat he coasted along the north shore of the lake until what is known as Ryerse's or Young's Creek was reached. There he landed, and going up the

hill adjoining the present English Church property, he surveyed the place and remarked, "Here I wish to live and die." He and his wife now sleep a few feet from the place where he stood at that time.

Some three years later his brother, Joseph, afterwards Colonel, came from New Brunswick and settled in Charloteville, two miles away on the road to Vittoria, where he lived till ninety-four years of age. Bringing assistants with him he appears to have had considerable means for that time. Securing a comfortable place of shelter for his wife and child at old Dr. Troyer's place, near Port Rowan, he commenced to build a place for himself and family. First it was a shanty made of any material that could be procured. The first three weeks were a most trying time for him. Before the shanty was hardly completed, his men cleared out and left him alone with his young son, Samuel. Surviving this sickness and trying time, at the end of three weeks he was able to do something for himself again. From his shanty door he shot a number of wild turkeys, which gave him much needed food. Procuring more hired help, he erected a fair sized, comfortable log house, so that his family were quite well provided for.

These buildings were located on the flat ground close by or the present site of Harry Brook's summer cottage. After a time the fireplace and chimney of this house, being made largely of sticks covered with clay, took fire and was burned down. We have no record of the next residence of my grandfather. However, he filled his place in the community and county to the full and faithfully served his fellow men. Governor Simcoe and those who followed him in provincial authority, honored him with various offices in their gift. For the first two or three years after 1795, if he required supplies of any kind he had to

journey all the way to Chippewa Creek on the Niagara River for them, either through the woods or by boat. We have a list of supplies with prices for the same purchased in 1797 from a merchant named Markham, of Chippewa Creek.

The first saw-mill and grist-mill on Ryerse's Creek came into existence between 1800 and 1810. When the Government of Upper Canada made the grant of Lot No. 2, Woodhouse, to my grandfather, it was on the condition that he would erect both of these on the most convenient site. This he proceeded to do and both served a most useful purpose until the grist mill was burned by the Americans in 1812. During the seventeen years of his residence at Port Ryerse, he cleared land, built bridges and buildings, and served the general public in many ways. He was the first judge of the district, took an active part in military affairs, as Colonel of the militia, and gave encouragement and help to anything and everything that contributed to the welfare of the district.

If ever I meet with the record of his military service to England from 1776 to 1783 I will write up a detailed record of his life's activities. Dying in the early part of 1812, his place was taken by his two sons, George and Edward. One of the earliest activities of my father was to build a substantial home for himself on the hill just west of the old dam. Here the Ryerse family were sheltered for seventy-five years, until its loss by fire on May 24th, 1893. Here both the first and second family of my father resided. Major Edward Ryerse lived first in a small frame house on the site of the present brick one occupied by George Smith, and which was moved to the north part of the farm when the brick one was built.

The ordinary work of useful citizens occupied their time from the death of their father onward.

Educational Affairs at the Port

Port Ryerse School Section No. 1, being quite probably the first schoolhouse in the Township of Woodhouse, was erected there between 1830 and 1835. The eldest member of the Ryerse family, William H., attended

the Chadwick Academy, southwest of Vittoria, in 1830. He was then twelve years old and his well-written copy books of that date are still in existence. Where my father, Major Ryerse, and their sister, Mrs. Harris, of London, received their education, I do not know; but all three had a fairly good education and wrote a very good hand. The other members of our family obtained their education at Port Ryerse, Simcoe, London and Buffalo. The first schoolhouse was located on the southwest side of the road to Simcoe, about two or three hundred yards from the present one. This building was set on fire and destroyed previous to 1850. The next one was on the road to Port Dover, three or four hundred yards northeast of the present site. The school section at that time extended from Amos Stickney's farm, in Charlotteville, well down the gravel road to Port Dover, taking in the farm of Alex. Bowlby. The third or present brick building was built in 1871. In 1870 serious differences arose among the ratepayers about the site for a new and larger building, and the result was that the northerly part of No. 1 was set apart as No. 14, and a school building erected on the farm of Mr. Allan Culver. Who the early teachers were I do not know, but from the beginning of 1856 to September, 1860, they were Delia Holmes, Miss Emerick and Mr. Corey. Miss Emerick was something of a pre-millennialist, for the sect to which she adhered had set a certain day in the fifties for the passing away of all things and the coming of the Lord Jesus. On that particular day she dressed herself in white and sat in a chair all day waiting the coming of the Lord. But as on occasions previously, He did not appear, and this sect had the chance of making another guess.

On Sept. 1st, 1860, there came to our section a young man, Peter Nicol, afterwards the Rev. Peter Nicol of the Presbyterian denomination. He remained with us five years, and could have stayed five more had he wished, for he was a very competent and popular teacher. Desiring to enter the Presbyterian ministry he resigned, and after teaching for a time at Port Dover, entered college at Toron-

to. Now, after spending forty-four years in the ministry, on his retirement it is a great pleasure for me to have my old, highly esteemed teacher located in Simcoe for the rest of his days, where I can frequently meet and associate with him.

Since then the section has had many different teachers. The first three after Mr. Nichol being Jesse Ryerson, Harry Hayne and Mr. Carter. In the winter of 1876-77 there were on the school roll ninety-four names, but an epidemic of diphtheria took eighteen of these. The village physician also died of this disease. So great is the change since that time, I am told there are now but eleven children of school age in the section. In the year 1860 smallpox came to the village, brought from Cleveland, and resulted in the death of a fine young man named Edward Raymond, the captain of the schooner Rebecca Foster. He was to have been married to Melissa Underhill on that trip in. She bravely undertook to nurse him, but was stricken with the same disease and very narrowly escaped death. Her companion, Rebecca Foster, also was very sick with it.

The Various Mills at Port Ryerse

As I have written, the first saw and grist mills were built, and in use some time previous to 1812. Either this saw mill, erected by my grandfather, was spared by the Americans or another one built shortly after 1812. The community could not do without one. It just comes to me, as I am writing, that my father told me he built one shortly after that date. The next grist mill was built by my father in 1849, and shortly after that date, some time in the fifties, a plaster mill was added to it, the building of which I can just remember. In the early days land plaster was considered a necessity for clover and meadows. It was brought to Port Ryerse by the vessel load and dumped on the side of the street, close to the mill. The source of the supply for this article in the rock state was the mines near by the Grand River. Previous to the erection of this plaster mill, farmers would drive all the way to the Grand River in the winter time for their supply. But little is now heard of land plaster, which shows how

ideas change. The saw mill that was dismantled when the grist mill was built no doubt was used to cut the lumber needed for the two new mills. In 1860 there was a fine lot of lumber at our place that was sawn in the old mill, among which were basswood planks four feet across.

In connection with the fine pine and other forests of early days in Norfolk County, I have a letter written a few years ago by Mr. Geo. Hotchkiss, who for many years was secretary of the Northwestern Lumbermen's Association, with headquarters at Evanston, Illinois, and who was on business at Port Dover in the early fifties. He says the very finest pine he ever saw grown on this earth he saw in Norfolk County. Prices were not very high then for first-class stuff, for my brother, William, brought clear stuff pine at four dollars per thousand in the early fifties. My own purchases for bill stuff in 1869 were at six dollars per thousand feet, and good stuff it was. With the building of the Air Line and Canada Southern Railroads in 1872 the price advanced to \$10.00, and remained quite steady at that price as late as 1890. My father's mills were lost by being set on fire in the spring of 1860, and the unfortunate part of it was there was no insurance on the buildings, so he could not rebuild.

On February 26th, 1869, my father sold the mill privilege to Mr. Edward Harris of London, who with Mr. John Potts, built a fine up-to-date mill for that time, with five run of stone and a sixth turbine to run the rest of the machinery. This was leased to Mr. John Shaw of Normandale for ten or more years, and who conducted during that time a very successful business. This mill stood there till one day in August, 1890, between twelve and one o'clock, when fire broke out on the third floor, though there had been no fire in the mill for many weeks, and thus Port Ryerse was deprived of the last industry of any account that brought people there. It was a case of spontaneous combustion perhaps. Truly the several mills on this site have had a most unfortunate history.

Home of Elder George J. Ryerse

My father's house was on the hill west of the village, and south of the

road over the dam towards Vittoria. It was a lovely site and was always much admired. The date of its erection was 1818 or 1819, and the Ryerse family were sheltered here for about 75 years, until the 24th of May, 1893, when it was accidentally set on fire, and passed out of existence. It was formerly noted for the large number of cherry and other fruit trees on the premises.

The White House on the Hill

Sometime near the year 1835, the prospect for an across-the-lake passenger and freight trade appeared very fair, as steamers called at times, landed passengers, and took aboard a supply of wood for motor purposes. Anticipating this trade my father built what was known for many years as the White House on the Hill. It was a good sized building with a large dining room, parlor, kitchen and bedrooms on the lower floor, and bedrooms in abundance on the upper floors. But the expected trade did not materialize, and it could be used only as a private dwelling. When Mr. James Hooker lived there in the early fifties, with its beautiful flower garden in front, surrounded by the hand-somest rustic fence I ever saw, and other flowering bushes on the north side, it was a fine appearing property. However, there was one useful purpose it served. Painted white, a two-storey building, and located on a hill as it was, it could be seen by navigators of Lake Erie many miles away, and thus it was a bright landmark of the north shore, as well as a guide to the harbor of Port Ryerse.

Some Physical Changes

In going through the Port now to the Lake Shore, no one would realize that in the fifties, directly across the street, opposite the blacksmith shop of Robert Stalker, there was quite a strip of land between the wagon track and the running stream on which was a good sized barn and a strip eight or ten feet wide between the barn and the creek. The water was then two feet or more higher than it is now. Directly back of the first cottage from the harbor, within my memory, the bank extended forty feet farther south than at present, while west of the row of cottages, two or

three hundred feet of the bank of Lot No. 2 has gone into the lake.

The Travelling Craftsmen

In early days they had the travelling tailor, who went from house to house and made up a supply of clothes for the male portion of the family. There was also the itinerant shoemaker, who looked after a supply of footwear for all the members of the household. These two craftsmen were through with their work shortly before my advent in August, 1851. However, when I was old enough to realize what would contribute to my enjoyment in life as a young boy, and get into all kinds of mischief, I found in our home a shoemaker's bench, with tools, lasts and everything quite complete; also a large supply of all kinds of leather. All these things furnished a great deal of happiness for me for the bench was used for many years to crack various kinds of native nuts and of which we always had a large supply, which we divided with the family of red squirrels which always dwelt in the garret part of our house. What I did with the tools and leather I cannot remember.

The Work of Women in Early Days

Possibly no housewife of early days did more hard work during the years of her active life than my mother. Married at four o'clock in the afternoon of January 13th, 1835, by Elder McDermand, of Port Rowan, her wedding trip shortly after six was taken to the barnyard to milk the cows. Not much honeymooning with autos or anything else in those days, but plenty of work and still more work. This was her start in married life, and she kept up the pace, the most of her active days. Her first care was to look after my father's five children by his first wife, who died some time previous, the eldest being sixteen. Then nine children were born in the second family, which of course made still more work. When father was building his mill in 1849 she would take care of eighteen men at a time, and do it with very little assistance. No mowers or reapers in those early days, for grain of all kinds was cut with cradles, and hay with the scythe. Grain was threshed with the flail; and so there were plenty of

workers to provide for. And there were some fellows who could handle the cradle then. Two of them, named Murland and Underhill, cut twelve acres of wheat for my father in one day. It took a lot of binders to follow them. The every day work of my mother was much the same as that of many capable housewives of that time, namely, preparing the food, clothing and other necessaries of the family, and looking well after their households. My father was a good provider for the table at least. Every fall a half dozen or more fat hogs would be cut up and packed in barrels. In the spring the hams and shoulders would be smoked and only a limited amount of the salt pork disposed of. Then every spring the product of four hundred maple trees in sugar and syrup would be put away for the coming year.

When the sheep were washed and sheared, the wool would be sent by my mother to the carding mill, which was located at the bend of Young's Creek, one-third of a mile east of the Vittoria mills, where the bridge now stands, for making into rolls; then it was spun by hand into yarn and taken generally to Neighbor Stickney's, where his daughter, Margaret, wove it into cloth, blankets, shirting, dress stuff or anything else that was required. If it was cloth that needed fulling, it was returned to the carding mill, where this work was done. It was my mother's custom during the fall and winter months to rise at half past two or three o'clock in the morning and spin yarn until time to get breakfast. A few minutes' sleep was taken about nine, and then the regular work for the day, and bed at 8 to 8.30. This routine was followed for years both before and after my birth. There are now but few nights in the year that I do not hear the clock strike two or three o'clock with a wakeful hour or more at that time. Another thing the housewife had to do was the making of tallow candles by dipping. Candle wick was cut into proper lengths, placed on small round sticks three and a half feet long, doubled and twisted on these sticks in quantities probably of 20 to each stick. Then sufficient tallow was melted in a boiler with plenty of hot

water under the tallow, and into this combination the wicks were plunged again and again until the candles were large enough for use. The upper end of these candles was small and the bottom large enough to fit nicely into the candlesticks in use. One amusing circumstance I remember in connection with these dipped candles. My father had a peculiar way of reading all his own. When evening came he would always place the light between his eyes and the newspaper he was reading. Sometimes the paper would come too close to the candle and get on fire, and this made lots of fun for us youngsters.

The making of soft soap, dyeing, and many other household economies was a regular part of the work of the home-makers of those days. Here is an experience of my own in connection with soft soap, when I was a young boy. I was fixing a fishline on our south verandah when, glancing behind me I thought I saw a hard seat to rest on. Backing up I sat down and landed in the bottom of a tub of soft soap. For once in my life I was thoroughly soft-soaped.

It was thus our mothers spent their time, and I think mine was only typical of many other good mothers, and the grand women of early days in Glorious Old Norfolk. Well do I remember when the first stove and coal oil lamp came into the house. Previous to that time our cooking was done in a fire-place, excepting the bread, meat, vegetables, and other things were placed in kettles and swung over the fire by means of the crane of the side. Poets have spoken of the swinging of the crane, but my experience with its swinging has been that there was not much poetry in it, but a lot of continuous hard work for the housewife. The baking of bread was frequently done in a brick oven. Some built their ovens outdoors. Ours was attached to the fire-place, on the north side, was about six feet square, with a flat top and removeable door in front. The flat top was a handy affair, for it always held a large amount of household hardware of all kinds. This oven was properly heated and when the right temperature, the most of the

hot coals removed and the bread placed in it. Pies, cakes and anything else required were baked in these ovens.

Appearance in Early Days

In its early days Port Ryerse made a fine appearance, and it is quite plain why grandfather chose this spot as his future home. The view from the lake northerly up the valley was very attractive. When approached from the Simcoe road, surrounded as it was by forest wealth and so many grand old walnut, butternut, hickory and chestnut trees all over the village survey, on its hillsides, and elsewhere, and its abundance of oak, elm and other trees, with Lake Erie in the background, it presented to some of us at least a charming appearance. Then there was the lovely mill-pond with its handsome woodland on the westerly side and its shaded bays and its long stretch into the adjoining woods of cedar, hemlock and maple. There is where I spent many and many a happy day with my boat, fishing in its waters or paddling a goodly distance up the stream. But, alas! nearly all this beauty and loveliness has gone forever. The most of the nut and other beautiful trees have long since had to yield to commercialism, and only their memory remains.

Early Harbor Improvements

Both Lot No. 2, Woodhouse, where my father lived, and Lot 3, where Major E. P. Ryerse resided, were entailed property. A bill to release certain parts of each on which to found a village, was passed by the Legislature of Upper and Lower Canada at the session of 1856, at Quebec, chiefly through the influence of Dr. Rolph, who was then the member for Norfolk. I have no means of knowing the date of the first improvement at the harbor by the erection of a pier and warehouses. The appearance of the oldest warehouse betokened an early date. Major Ryerse was the first to finance and push ahead this work. The first dock was built of piles placed in rows of three or four, a proper distance apart, capped by a heavy cross timber, then by timbers lengthwise of the pier, and plank securely spiked to these timbers. All was made secure. It extended well out into the lake, for only boats of

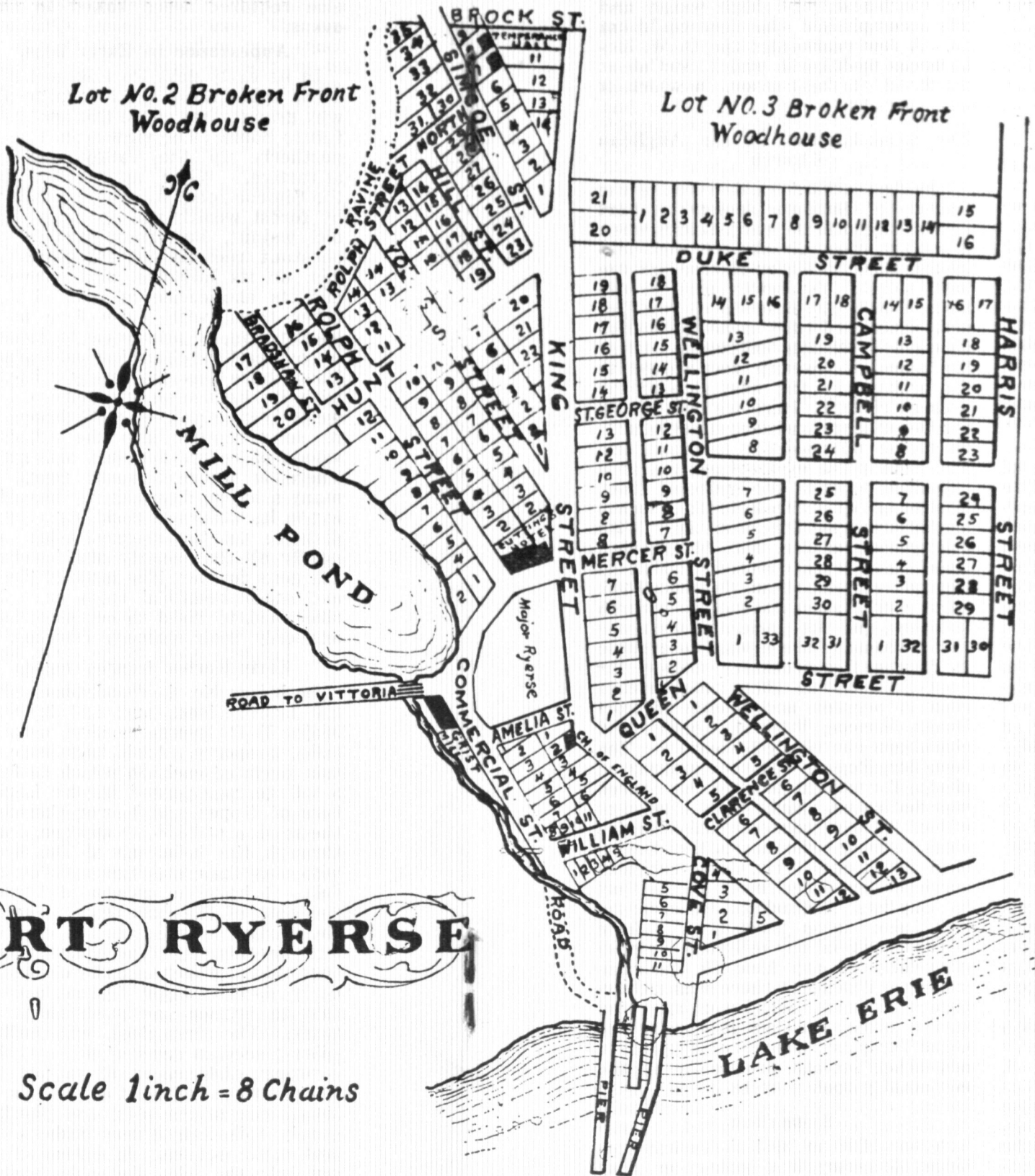
moderate draft could use this creek.

The first warehouse was a low one, of very moderate dimensions, located quite near the site of the summer cottage of Harry Brook. No. 2 adjoined it on the north side. No. 3 was a long, low one that covered the west end of the pier. No. 4 was quite a large one and was attached to No. 1 on the east end. Thus they were all together. To finish loading vessels a track was laid on the pier and a car propelled by hand or horse power, about 12 by 24 feet in dimension, was used to convey barrels of flour or any other goods to the end of the dock. Watching the men working this car one evening in the fall of 1857, I saw the first beautiful comet in the southern sky.

Very many goods and much grain passed through these warehouses during the fifties and sixties, both going out and coming in. The distilleries at Simcoe and Vittoria would send deckloads of fat hogs to Buffalo to be slaughtered. It was large, fat hogs that were dealt in then, and some of them were so large they reminded me of young elephants. A number of them would appear to me now as if they would weigh 600 pounds each dressed. After the signing of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1856, till its abrogation in 1866, and especially during the American Civil War, there was a very large volume of trade outward. On May 26th, 1863, Major Ryerse deeded the whole harbor property to the Port Ryerse Tram or Railroad and Harbor Company, the leading spirit of which was Edward Harris of London. The proposition was to build a tram road to Simcoe. A dredge was purchased and various improvements made at the harbor of a permanent nature. Cribs filled with stone were used on which to build docks. Two large warehouses were constructed on the east side of the harbor, so that vessels could load grain directly from these warehouses. The large warehouse on the west side was moved to the water's edge, and its capacity doubled. A large dredging outfit was brought from Buffalo with tugs and scows, and the water in the harbor was deepened to about ten feet. The first harbor-master was William Mercer Wilson, and the second Mr. John S. Austin, also of

Lot No. 2 Broken Front Woodhouse

Lot No. 3 Broken Front Woodhouse



PORT RYERSE

Scale 1 inch = 8 Chains

Simcoe. Later came Mr. Walter Holmwood from Port Stanley, and who lived in the Port for a number of years afterwards. During the period of 1861 to 1873, Port Ryerse experienced its palmiest days, for the building of the Air Line and Canada Southern Railroads, in 1872-73, was the means of destroying its grain and import trade, and the grand forests of Norfolk were rapidly disappearing. It is claimed that in one year, about 1871, there was seven and a half million feet of lumber and timber shipped from the Port. As to its grain trade, long rows of loaded wagons could be seen almost any day during the grain season waiting to unload. During the greatest year of the lumber trade, almost every available space about the harbor and streets was filled with lumber, timber, pailwood, staves, ties, stave bolts and other stuff.

From 1860 to 1864 was the era of shipbuilding at Port Ryerse. The yards were on the beach immediately west of the harbor, where the summer cottages are now located. David M. Foster and W. H. Ryerse constituted one firm, whose output was the schooners Brittanian and E. P. Ryerse. The other boat builder was Captain Lewis Ryerse, who first built the small fore and after Emily Ellen. Then he purchased a new but sunken twomasted scow, raised her, put the boat in good trim and renamed her the Kate Kelley, after the maiden name of his wife. The man who built this craft did a peculiar and unheard of thing, namely, instead of properly caulking his boat, he filled the space between the lining and outside with land plaster, with the result that the water soaked through and she sank in the bay. This venture proved a most profitable investment. My brother Lewis was a very expert sailor and could find a way to cross Lake Erie at almost any time. Later, he built the large schooner, N. C. Ford. In 1863, in partnership with John S. Austin of Simcoe, the large and substantial three-master, J. S. Austin, was constructed. This was the vessel that gave so much trouble in getting her into deep enough water, for it was so shallow in front of the boat that weeks were spent and a va-

riety of ways tried to release her. Finally a heavy storm came from the southwest, with high water, and this accomplished what men could not do. A few years later the D. W. McCall was built by H. and T. McCall at the head of the harbor, in which it was launched.

The Establishment of the Anglican Church

The first work towards forming the Church of England Society at Port Ryerse began in the early sixties when a weekly open air service was held in the yard of Major Ryerse, on the west side of the north part of the house. Rev. Mr. Baldwin of Port Dover, afterward the beloved Bishop Baldwin of Huron, officiated. Later the place of worship was moved to the orchard on the west side of the present church. Here we had a desk for the minister, with seats of boards on blocks of wood for the audience. The next place of meeting was in a fair-sized room in the house of Chas. Shellburg, with the Rev. Mr. Rogers of Vittoria, as the minister. With the coming of Mr. and Mrs. Holmwood, who were devoted Church of England people, about the year 1865, steps were taken to erect a church building, and the present church was the outcome. There was no trouble in raising the necessary money, for Port Ryerse was then much richer than at present, and friends in Port Dover, Simcoe, Vittoria, London and elsewhere contributed liberally. The Rev. Mr. Rogers was the minister in charge for some time after this church was dedicated. Since then a number of worthy men have conducted its services, among who were the Reverends Evans and Davis. Other religious services have been held in the Port by Baptists, Methodists and evangelists, also union meetings. I have never known of any religious jealousy or rivalry of any kind in the community. Whenever there was any religious or moral activity of any kind taking place, whether it was by the Good Templars, Church of England or any other society, practically all the community took part in it.

Smuggling

About 1858 to 1861 there was considerable smuggling going on from

the United States in the vicinity of Port Ryerse. I have known some of our young ladies of that time pleasantly entertaining the customs officer of an evening, while their friends were very busy unloading goods by small boat at the foot of Lot No. 1 and carrying them up the bank and through the woods to be distributed through the county. Sometimes when the way was clear small boat loads at a time would be brought into the harbor to be met by teams and taken away. This work took place generally about two or three o'clock in the morning. However, when finally store stocks, small and large boats, were seized and sold for this kind of law-breaking, the participants gave way to a tired feeling, and this industry ceased.

The Hotels of Port Ryerse

Four buildings in the Port have been used as hotels. What is known as the Cutting Hotel was erected in 1851, and has been in use continually from that time for hotel purposes. In early days its trade was large and remunerative. The next one to be built was the house one door north of Cutting's Hotel, and known as the Thompson property. This was put up by David M. Foster for the combined purpose of hotel and boarding house for his men, who were engaged in ship-building. The next one to go up was just across the street, southwest of Cutting's, but before it was finished, fire destroyed it one night and it was not rebuilt. This property belonged to Mrs. Green of Windham, and her son-in-law, John Morrow. Number four was the present Collins house, by the harbor, which was used for several years for this purpose. A part of the time the large front room was used as a grocery.

Loss of Buildings

I have known of a loss of sixty buildings in the Port, all excepting one, viz., my grandfather's mills, in my time. In the fifties the village blacksmith shop was located across the street, directly east of Mr. Buck's barn and Moses Berry was the blacksmith. These buildings passed out of existence either by fire or removal, but chiefly by removal, and were of various kinds, namely, ware-

houses, dwellings and business places. The one building that has stood the test of time is that at present used as a general store. It was built about 1835 and has always been used for the one purpose.

The Village Flower Gardens

We always had a few beautiful flower gardens in the Port. That of James Hooker, in front of the white house on the hill, was very fine. Aunt Patty, the wife of Major Ryerse, had a choice collection in her garden on the west side of her residence. Mrs. Walter Holmwood kept pace with the others, and always had a large display of them about, her home on Rolph Street. Other ladies in the village cultivated them also, but these were the leaders. Another flower garden that was very much admired in the early days was that of Mrs. Donald Fisher Sr., in the old homestead garden at Fisher's Glen. It was situated on the banks of the beautiful little stream that ran through their garden. When the Glen was approached by the steep hill on the north side it presented a particularly charming appearance. This kindly, genial and highly esteemed lady was very generous with her flowers, for she always gave every one who visited or called on her a fine bouquet to take home with them.

Visit of Prince Arthur

Among the historical items of interest in connection with the Port is this: In the early seventies our village was honored with a visit by a member of the Royal Family, namely Prince Arthur. After spending a few very pleasant days at Long Point shooting ducks he crossed the bay and landed at Port Ryerse from the steamer Argyle. When the boat drew up to the dock he was greeted by our first citizen of that time, Mr. Walter Holmwood, with three cheers for the Prince of Wales. This came very near spoiling our cheering for the crowd had a very hearty laugh at the mistake.

Port Ryerse Home Guards

At the time of the Fenian Raid of 1866, loyal Port Ryerse had its quota of volunteers called Home Guards, who were drilled by Capt. Machon of Vittoria. We watched the shore at

night in the vicinity of Port Ryerse during the anxious days of that excitement, using the pier as our place of parade.

Past Industries

Whatever activities of the past there have been in the village, the one that stands out far ahead of all others is the shipping industry, including as it did all incoming goods and outgoing raw products of the forest, such as lumber, square and round, timber, spars, ties, staves, pailwood, and other products of a like nature; grain of various kinds from the farms of a large portion of the county. The aggregate was very large. The shipping industry was the foundation and superstructure of nearly all the prosperity the Port ever had. The manufacture of flour, grinding of land plaster and general milling business would come next. Hopes were frequently entertained that all this trade would result in a large growth of the village, but for some reason it did not, and population remained quite stationary through all of it. Any further growth that may come to the village will in all probability be in connection with the summer resort business. It seems a misfortune that such a fine water power as it has should go to waste for so many years.

Of the many boats that traded at the Port, herewith follows a list of the various craft that were most frequently there and the names of the captains who were best known to the shipping interests. Among them were many competent, upright, moral men, who adorned their occupation:

Schooner Rebecca Foster, Captain Edward Raymond.

Schooner Ada, Capt. Henry Avlchouser.

Schooner Britannia, Captain Samuel Baker.

Schooner E. P. Ryerse, Captain D. M. Foster.

Schooner N. C. Ford, Captain Jack Shaw.

Schooner Kate Kelley, Capt. Wesley Hazen.

Three-master J. S. Hustin, Captain Lewis Ryerse.

Schooner Rebecca Foster, Capt. Edward Newkirk.

Schooner Maria Shaw, Capt. Abram Leask.

Schooner Three Friends, Captain Spencer Phipps.

Schooner Bay Queen, Capt. William Allan.

Schooner David Sharp, Capt. Joseph McFell.

Schooner Eliza Allan, Capt. John Allan.

Schooner Erie Stewart, Capt. John S. Allan.

Schooner Snowdrop, Capt. Geo. Allan.

Schooner D. W. McCall, Capt. Alex. Begg.

Schooner E. Hall, Capt. Sutherland Simpson.

Schooner Saucy Jack, Capt. Orrin Ryerse; later Capt. Geo. Gillies.

Schooner Dauntless, Captain James Allan.

Schooner Persia.

Steamer Argyle, Captain Walter Hunter.

Schooner Enterprise, Capt. George Spain.

Steamer Georgian, Capt. John Burgess.

In writing this list many pleasant memories come to the surface of associations with and knowledge on the work of these men. Of this list of Lake Captains one only remains, viz., Captain John Allan, now living retired in Port Dover.

The Brick Industry

The first brickyard in the Port was located a few yards east of the present farm owned by Mr. Geo. Smith. To Major Ryerse is due the credit for starting this yard. This was about 1835. The substantial brick residence where Mr. Smith lives, and owns, the old home of Major Ryerse, was built of bricks made in this yard. During the year 1854 Mr. Ira M. Wood established a yard on the flat north and adjoining the Port, which was quite successful. Several of the brick buildings in the Port and elsewhere were made of brick manufactured on this yard. Again in 1879 Mr. Wood made brick on the same spot. In 1863, Mr. Benjamin Young of Windham, and his brother, had a yard on the beach adjoining the harbor, and immediately west of it. In the early seventies Mr. Peter Mason, who came out from England, made brick close by Mr. Ira Wood's old yard. Later he and his son Charles moved to Simcoe, where they were engaged for many years in

brick manufacture. In 1871 Mr. Edward Harris of London established a yard on the high ground east of the harbor, employing a big staff of hands and turning out a large product. The expectation was to ship out vessel loads of brick to outside places; but for some reason the enterprise did not succeed.

From 1851 onward the making of flour and other barrels was considerable of an industry. Several parties have engaged in this business, the chief ones being the Cuttings, father and son, Mr. John Long and Mr. W. H. Ryerse.

For some years during the sixties and seventies Mr. Abraham Marlatt conducted a pottery business at Port Ryerse and disposed of a large amount of earthenware of all kinds in the days when it was in general use, and before tinware supplanted it. For a few years in the seventies, Mr. Orrin Ryerse had a potash manufactory at the upper end of Rolph Street.

The Fishing Industry

In the early days fish of all kinds were very abundant in Lake Erie, and large quantities of whitefish and other kinds were caught in the fall of the year. The general price for whitefish was 10c each, and 12½c for the larger ones. A fine large sturgeon could be bought for 75c. When the mill dam was in existence there were large quantities of suckers caught at its foot with dip nets. In short, Ryerse's Creek was about the best place along the short for miles to catch this kind of fish. One afternoon in the space of one hour I saw one thousand of these fish taken out of the creek with dip and sweep nets.

Again one afternoon Mr. Hammond Oakes and myself threw out three hundred from a small pond under the leaky waste weir. In 1876 and 77 an American company from Conneaut, Ohio, were engaged here in fishing on quite a large scale, using pound nets and the steamer Argyle.

Biographical Sketches

First will come my grandfather, Col. Samuel Ryerse. As I have written something of his life and work in the first days of this county's settlement, it is at present only necessary to say that during his seventeen years at the

Port he filled a place that scarce any other person could have filled. His name and lifework will be remembered for many years to come. My misfortune is that I cannot remember of my father mentioning his father's name a half dozen times to me during the first 24 years of my life; and it was just the same in the way of imparting information of their early days by my elder sisters and brothers. Had I been properly inquisitive or my relatives anxious to impart such knowledge, there was a mine of interesting information open to me.

Elder George Joseph Ryerse

I choose to speak of my father as Elder Ryerse, for he was never addressed by any other name during all the time that I knew him, namely, twenty-four years. Born Feb. 1st, 1795, on Long Island, N.Y., when one year old he, with his mother and a half-brother, Samuel, twelve to fifteen years of age, were brought to at that time an unbroken forest, there to spend the while eighty-two years of his life. His early education was probably given in his own home, though I never heard him say anything about it. When eighteen years of age his father died, and he had to take his place as head of the family of four, namely, his mother, his brother Edward, and sister, Mrs. Amella Harris. He spent his younger days like other pioneers, clearing land and making a comfortable home. Married on December 25th, 1816, to Elizabeth Vail, eight children were born to this union, five of whom reached maturity, the others dying when quite young. He succeeded quite well in the way of self-education, and in 1828 was licensed to preach by the Vittoria Baptist Church. Later he was ordained a regular Baptist minister. He also studied medicine on his own account and for the most of his active life spent much of his time preaching and serving sick people. And the peculiar part of it was, no charge was ever made, as far as I know for any services in either of these lines. If any one chose to make him a present of any kind, well and good; though this was not often the case.

He would visit a drug store in Buf-falo in the winter time, purchase a liberal supply of drugs during the

succeeding months give them away to ailing humanity. Many times I have seen him take the team from the plow and drive a goodly distance away to help some sick person. Also he has taken sick folk into our home, boarded and cared for them for no reward excepting what he would receive in the Kingdom of Heaven. He would also mount his horse on a Sunday morning and ride all the way to Norwich or Cheapside to conduct religious services. He would go as far as Lobo, various places in Oxford County, the Township of Townsend, and other places. The work was chiefly that of a pioneer and certainly some of this class of men were very energetic and faithful. He engaged in this work because he wished to do what good he could and leave the world some better than he found it by his having lived in it. Then there is another reason, namely, there have been several individuals named Ryerson and Ryerse who take to preaching as naturally as a young duck takes to the water. It runs in the family. It is said the Vittoria Baptist Church never met with greater prosperity than when under his care and pastorate.

During the forties he was for some time customs officer at Port Dover. His own hands procured for him his living, chiefly from the farm on which he lived all his days. He preferred to spend his life preaching and as a physician to that of taking an active part in local government of any kind. However, this kind of life made for him many very warm friends.

There is now, so far as I know, but one individual alive who has heard my father preach, namely, Mrs. John Stickney, of Renton, now upwards of ninety years of age. My father was fifty-seven when I was born, so that when I reached twelve his work was done. The last place where he officiated was in a then new log schoolhouse on Turkey Point, which has long since disappeared. I was then about ten years old and he would take me with him for company. This was in 1861 or 1862. At that age I could not form a proper opinion as to the quality of his preaching. He did much work in connection with the medical part of his life. He related to me one amusing circumstance in his

practice. He had given an ailing Irish girl near Cheapside some pills to be taken at stated times. Her judgment was to take all of them at once, which she did. Asked why she had done so, she replied "she wanted to get well quick."

Major Edward P. Ryerse

Edward Powers Ryerse, the second son of Colonel Samuel Ryerse, was born at Port Ryerse in 1800, and who died on the 22nd March, 1882, spent his whole life on the farm on which he was born. His early education, in all probability, was like my father's, given at their own fireside. Commencing work for himself in his early manhood, he, too, did a lot of pioneer work at clearing land, putting up buildings and other early day work. The fine old brick residence, now the home of Mr. George Smith, is a monument to his taste and ability. He was very active in connection with the militia of bygone days of Norfolk County, and earned the rank of major, by which he was always known. Shortly before his death the Dominion Government conferred on him the title of colonel for his sterling worth and unswerving loyalty through all the days of his life. And it is the loyal inheritance, bred in the descendants of the Bowlbys, Gilberts, McCalls, Ryersons and very many others scattered through this Dominion that is the strength and security of this favored land of ours. During his life Major Ryerse served the public for many years as License Inspector, Inland Revenue Collector, and Magistrate for Norfolk County. He was a fine type of the English gentleman, and it was always a pleasure to meet him at his own fireside. He would make his friends so welcome and so much at home with his cordiality and fine manners. He was the one who first made harbor improvements, built the first pier, and the first four warehouses. His home and all its surroundings were always a very attractive place and he was ever a devoted adherent of the Church of England.

His wife, Martha Underhill, born November 20th, 1806, and who died March 31st, 1879, was a most worthy companion for him. She was an excellent woman and was highly esteem-

ed by everybody. There was but one name by which she was spoken of, namely, Aunt Patty. How pleasant are the memories of such people.

W. H. Ryerse

Born in 1818, the first of my father's family, was about ninety years of age when he passed away. His early education was obtained from the limited means then at command. At twelve years of age he was a student at the Chadwick Academy, located southwest of Vittoria. He was a good writer at that early age, as his then copybooks, which are still in existence, plainly show. At eighteen he was a clerk in perhaps the first general store at Pt. Ryerse, which was opened by my father and a Mr. Gray. This was on the spot where the present one now stands, and it may be the same building. One year later he was given my father's share in the business, and shortly after Mr. Gray's interest was purchased, and this business was continued for sixty-five years by him from its commencement in 1836. In 1844 he was made postmaster at Port Ryerse, which office he held for fifty-eight years. In 1837, at the age of nineteen, with other loyalists, he shouldered his musket and marched out to restore law and order in Canada. His business career embraces the ownership of several vessels, the purchase and shipment of lumber in large quantities, the importation of plaster, the handling of grain and many other activities. For the most of his life from an early age he was a honored member of the Vittoria Baptist Church, and for very many years its clerk and deacon. He was married twice, the first wife being Mary Gilbert, daughter of Col. Isaac Gilbert, and the second one Maria Carrier. He left three children, two of whom, Elizabeth and Ellen, reside in Detroit. Orrin, the only son to reach manhood, passed away at Minneapolis a few years ago. While in bygone days there were so many of our family located in and near Port Ryerse, at the present time there is neither a descendant or relative to be found here. Such are life's changes.

Mr. James Cutting, Sr.

Mr. Cutting was always a prominent citizen of the Port, as well as

an enterprising worker and leader in industry during all the years he lived there. Coming to the Port about 1851 at the solicitation of Mr. James Hooker, he built the hotel that bears his name and engaged in the cooperage and hotel business. From that time until he removed to Simcoe in the seventies, he made good in various kinds of business activity. For years he dealt in square timber, staves and stave bolts, ties, pailwood and anything else that promised profit. He took a very active interest in the gravel road to Simcoe. When in the seventies there was no longer opportunity for a profitable business at Port Ryerse he removed to Simcoe and started a planing mill and lumber yard. Here he spent the rest of his days.

Mr. James Hooker came to the Port about 1857 and took the lead in a business way. He rented the mill, engaged in the shipment of grain, the manufacture of flour, helped and encouraged anything and everything that made for the prosperity of the Port. Years ago, in conversing with those who knew and had business relations with him, one and all spoke of him in the highest terms as a business and moral man. His untimely death in 1856 was a severe blow to the Port for there was no one to take his place at that time.

Other Leaders in Business

Of the many who have had business connections at the Port and have contributed to its past prosperity, may be mentioned the firm of A. & T. McCall, consisting of Senator McCall and his brother Thomas, who dealt in and shipped immense quantities of lumber and other forest products from the port. They also owned vessels, bought and sold large amounts of grain and probably were the leading shippers at the Port. The schooner David Sharp was one of the lake boats that was owned in partnership with Mr. David Sharp and Capt. Joseph McFell. Other shippers of lumber were John Potts and Dawson, the Gibsons of Windham, William McCall and many others.

Mr. Edward Harris of London, though not a resident of Pt. Ryerse, was a leading spirit there for a number of years. He it was who initiated

improvements about the harbor, the building of the third grist-mill, the establishment of the large brickyard on the east side of the harbor, and many other activities. Credit is also due for the aid of himself and friends in contributing to the building of the Memorial Church. At eighty-seven he was at Long Point duck shooting and could skip around like a young boy.

Another esteemed business man of Port Reyse was Mr. John Shaw, whose residence was Normandale. There never has been a more straightforward miller and grain dealer in Norfolk County than Mr. John Shaw. I knew and dealt with him for many years and never once have I heard a whisper against his integrity or moral character. He conducted a milling business, manufactured and shipped large quantities of flour and bought and sold grain for a period of twelve years or more. He is always highly spoken of.

If I have written considerable about the Ryerse family, it is only because they were the most numerous here in the past, and there are no persons of a different name to write about.

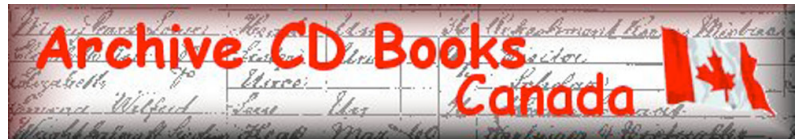
My narrative would not be complete without saying something about the wild pigeons of early days. These fine birds served a most useful purpose for the settlers and pioneers of early times. In the way of a food supply they were invaluable, for they came in such abundance that it was easy to shoot and net large quantities of them. Some of the early settlers would salt down a keg or half barrel of them for future use. Occasionally they would come directly across Lake Erie and having to rise over its bank could be and were knocked down with poles. In the spring of 1865 I saw millions of them fly overhead in a single day. From early morn until evening there was a steady procession of the largest flocks I ever saw, passed high in the air towards the north. My sister, Ida, was governess in a family close by the Mammoth Cave, in Kentucky, the same year. She said that watching them one morning for two hours a steady stream of them passed over the buildings, and no sound of a gun was heard. They furnished lots of sport for trap shooting at various hotels generally. Mr. Archie Scott, who lived near Vittoria, was

perhaps the most successful trapper of these birds with the net. The largest number of pigeons killed at one shot that I heard of was by my brother, William, who with his 1837 flintlock musket obtained fifty in a buckwheat field in the fall.

I have a fine picture of one of these lovely birds that is perfect in every detail. A feeling of sadness always comes over me whenever I look at it, for the thought comes that nevermore will I see one of these beautiful birds that gave me and so many others so much pleasure and enjoyment in early days. About 1867 was the last flight of these birds here, for after that year they could only be found in small quantities in the woodland for a few years. Until the present year I have not known of the time of their final disappearance from this continent. Writing in the Geographic Magazine, Mr. Shiras, the son of a former Chief Justice of the United States, records that up to 1885 flocks came regularly to the south shore of Lake Superior, where his grandfather, and himself, had gone regularly to hunt game of various kinds for many years. In 1886 only one bird made its appearance. Since then there has been no trace of them. For years the Smithsonian Institute offered five hundred dollars for a pair of them. It is a surmise that an epidemic of some kind destroyed them, or that they may have been driven out over the ocean by a high wind and lost.

Conclusion

Before closing I wish to pay my tribute to my ancestors and all others of the noble band of pioneers for the grand work they did in laying the foundation for the present prosperity, comforts, improvements of various kinds and opportunities for getting on in the world this county now possesses. When we think of these pioneers exchanging the comforts of civilization for life in the forests of Norfolk County with its deprivations and hard work, verily their memories should be revered. When a proper history of Norfolk is written, may there be abundant justice done to this noble and self-sacrificing band.



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