

A SHORT HISTORY OF BELMONT

The following is a paper given at a meeting of the Women's Institute in 1932 by Mrs. E.E. George, convenor of Historical Research Department, and printed by request of the Women's Institute members.

For much of the information contained in this paper, I am indebted to Mr. & Mrs. A.A. Taylor, who kindly spent several hours reviving old memories for our benefit.

If we go back perhaps almost a century, we should find a prosperous little colony in its infancy. A name must be given it especially since a Post Office was being established. The mail carrier, perhaps wearying just a little for the Homeland, named it after his birthplace in England. So Plymouth comes into being. You may ask, "What has this to do with the early history of Belmont?" The sites of the two places, Plymouth and Belmont, are not identical but nevertheless any early history of Belmont must include Plymouth since the former developed out of the latter.

The Post Office was situated at the corner of the 6th concession of North Dorchester, in the place now occupied by Mr. Weaver. The owner was Squire Manning and Mr. Prouse formerly of Plymouth, England, carrier of the mail from London. This was later done by Mr. Olmstead in a stage. This then was the center of activities of the colony. There was no place of business between this and the place now occupied by Dr. Beattie, but the village extended farther with a blacksmith shop to the north where Mr. Wm. Henry now lives (across from Ernest George's) and at our farm (Ern George's) was a cooperate which did a thriving business, chiefly in sap buckets. This was established by Mr. Shaw from whom my grandfather bought the farm. A harness maker lived where Mr. J.W. Cornish lives and this seems to be the farthest point of business north.

Did you ever wonder how Kettle Creek got its name? It is only that at one time a man south of the creek had an urgent errand over it. The water was high and could not be forded so in some manner he managed to get into a large kettle and rowed himself across. Another story which seems to have more foundation is that a large kettle was found on the bank of the creek. No one seemed to know its origin so the creek was named Kettle.

Some time long enough ago that the date is a vague memory, the Post Office was moved from Squire Manning's House to Belmont and W. H. Odell became the first postmaster at the new site.

Belmont was really a thriving place for some time. If we take a glance at the industries and stores we must see how much business was transacted when there was scanty provision made for transportation to the larger centres. Some fifteen or sixteen stores and shops did a thriving trade and most of them sold intoxicants. One store owned by Dougald and Peter McKellar was on the hill where Mr. Knott now lives. A carding mill was situated on the bank of the creek near where the blacksmith shop is, which dyed, carded and manufactured wool. A butcher was in Mrs. McNiven's house and the bakeshop has always been on the same site.

A German, Jacob House, was a cabinet maker where the Enterprize Office now is and did the finest of work in walnut and other valuable woods. Some of his work may be found today as treasured heirlooms in local families.

At the time of the Civil War, Mr. Seaman came over to Canada and established a carriage shop where R.A. Taylor's store, south of the drug store, now is. Another, now occupied by Mr. Colin Campbell, (Elmer Proconier's House), made a coffin for himself and one for a friend of his and had them stored in the attic for years until they were needed.

The first school was in North Dorchester township, being where Mr. Hambly lives. His house is a part of the school and the remainder was converted into a barn and garage. The Medical requirements of the community were attended to by three doctors--Cline, Campbell, and Spencer. All three were not here at the same time for a very long period.

In the late 70's excitement ran high. Belmont was to have a railway. Many surveys were made, some north, some south. At last in 1881 the Credit Valley Railway came through with a station on the north side of the track. This was burned and replaced by the present station. Later the Canadian Pacific bought the road and the C.V.R. became the C.P.R. The fare to St. Thomas and return was twenty-five cents and this sounded the doom for Belmont. The train was crowded with people taking eggs and butter to St. Thomas and returning, the money all spent in the city stores. Belmont had voted 1,500 for the railway, but when business was being ruined the people petitioned and had the cheap fares taken off.

An interesting story is told of the new railway running an excursion to Streetsville for 40¢. So many took advantage that freight cars, cattle cars, anything that would hold the people were brought into use, but it proved disappointing, for on reaching their destination, the picnic grounds the people expected were not there, neither were any refreshments, so cheap rate excursions were not popular.

In the meantime a good gravel road had been laid from Nilestown to Squire Manning's corner and then indeed, Belmont felt on the map since it had connection with the two cities, London and St. Thomas.

A look at Belmont through the years

John George Carter who has resided in the village for the past 65 years, and during the span of years lived in the same home, quietly observed his 72nd birthday on Feb. 12, 1978.

He was invited to a birthday dinner held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Taylor, RR 1, Belmont. Mrs. Gertrude Taylor also of Belmont, was present.

Mr. Carter was born near the hamlet of Mapleton on the farm of his father, the late W. J. Carter. The family moved to the village on Dec. 21, 1912. He has seen the village grow from a population of less than 300 to the present of nearly 800.

The village has seen many numerous changes, five major fires which occurred, the cheese factory, saw and feed mill, situated in the Kettle Creek area, have been replaced by the Kettle Creek Conservation Authority parks, and also the PUC offices in the Waterworks building, and a short distance down Caesar Road, the liquor store.

The Anglican Church congregation dwindled so badly that the building and property were sold and two new homes will be built. The United Church and Knox Presbyterian Church remain. The Masonic Hall, built over a century ago, has also had a face lifting in the downstairs interior, and is now the home of the Over-Fifty Club.

Land better known as the hotel property, was purchased for a modern post office. In Belmont south, the CPR station and freight sheds have disappeared, and the station, now located south of Mapleton, serves as a dwelling.

The Canadian Milk Products Ltd., built around 1912, later became the Borden Company, and now the Borden's Ice Cream Plant. The W. A. Barons feed mill and coal business purchased by Mr. Barons in 1909, later was sold to the Elgin-Middlesex Farmers Ltd., and is presently owned by the Belmont Farm Supply Ltd.

The late Mr. Barons reserved one feed warehouse, which was moved to a lot across the street where he still conducted a feed business for a few years.

The upper storey of his warehouse was remodelled and served as lodge quarters for the Oddfellows and Rebekah Lodges for some time, until they purchased the residence of Mr. Barons for their lodge.

Some 29 years ago it was decided upon to build a community centre on the Yarmouth and Belmont Agricultural Society property, and during the past year the structure was replaced by a more modern arena hall. The fair began in 1853, and during the year 1957 the Centennial Gateway at the entrance to the community park and ball diamond, now illuminated, was built. The last fair was held in 1965, and the 4-H club now exhibits at the Aylmer Fair.

Some 49 years ago the concrete pavement was laid, and replaced in recent years with asphalt. About 20 years ago the village drilled a well and a modern water system was installed. Since then another well has been added and the pump house and an office built.

A year ago sanitary sewers were begun and completed by last fall.

Over the years a number of men engaged in various walks of life discontinued their occupations such as the funeral home, weekly newspaper and custom printing, bakery, carriage shop, two butcher shops with slaughter house facilities, hotel, three grocery stores, insurance office, blacksmith shop, shoe repair and harness shop, tinsmith shop, and telephone central office. There is still a hardware store, Marlatt Lumber and Hardware Ltd., the Bank of Nova Scotia, public library, drug store and doctor's office, two grocery stores, two service centres, two beauty salons, law office, Belmont Carpet,

sheet metal, tv sales and service, welding shops, garages, also sales and service for all kinds of household appliances, lawn, garden and farm equipment, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and decorators. You name it, and Belmont has the repairman to do the job. Belmont has its own PUC to take care of hydro, water and sanitary sewer services. The volunteer fire department is well managed by Chief Charles L. Dale. The fire hall is situated on the community centre property.

The figure skating club members and the hockey clubs keep the arena very busy for several months.

To accommodate the Catholic children in the community a separate school was built outside the village limits at that time, which is now on the village sanitary sewer system.

The Belmont Public School was closed and torn down and the property is now owned by the Kettle Creek Conservation Authority.

Ronald Lake is the village reeve, and the council members are Robert Buchanan, Russell Thomas, Ian Fleck and Michael Freeman. Mrs. K. Barons is clerk.

United Church Features 106-Year-Old Bell

A bell made 106 years ago for St. George's Anglican Church in Belmont now adorns the Belmont United Church, thanks to the efforts of Harold Jenkins.

The bell was originally made at the Meneely Bell Foundry in West Troy, New York in April 1871 for St. George's Church. It was stolen from the church once but was later found in a district cornfield and recovered.

In 1973 the Anglican Church closed and was torn down by a London wrecking company.

The bell disappeared from the Belmont scene until this spring.

In April, Harold Jenkins, a dairy farmer from RR 1, Belmont, was looking for some used pipe in London and went to the St. Pierre wrecking yards. He noticed a bell in an alley at the yard and close inspection revealed it to be the St. George's bell.

He realized the bell was "part of the history of Belmont" and bought it for \$500.

Mr. Jenkins and fellow members of the Belmont United Church decided at a congregational meeting that the church should buy the bell and install it at the church.

Mr. Jenkins, Kae Barons, Vern Tebby and Charles Baker were appointed committee members to raise money to pay for the bell and its installation. Mr. Baker a former member and bellringer at the Anglican Church has special memories of the bell.

On Wednesday, September 14th, 1977, the belfry, built by Mr. Dave Hamm and painted with 3 coats of paint by Mrs. Hamm was raised onto the roof of the entryway with the hoist on A. & W. Electric's truck; which they donated for the task. The bell was raised in the same manner and was positioned in the belfry. A third hoisting placed the roof of the belfry.

On Sunday, September 18th at 11 a.m. the bell will be dedicated by Rev. Carlyle Husser and the speaker will be H. F. Appleyard, former Bishop of Georgian Bay and retired suffragant, Anglican Bishop of Huron.