

History of South Dorchester & Lyons

South Dorchester may be the smallest of Elgin County's Townships, but it was the first to be surveyed, according to the History records. Augustus Jones surveyed South Dorchester in 1792 and from the surveys appear to have extended westward. This snug ~~and healthy~~ little township is the only one of the County that is not bounded on the south by Lake Erie, it is situated north of Malshide and a small portion of Malshide Yarmouth and contains 30,600 acres of good land, equalized in 1876 at \$43.00 per acre. The soil is clay and gravelly loam, and the timber, beech and maple, with a sprinkling of pine. It is free from swamps and ravines, gently rolling - well adapted to the growth of grain, and contains many fine farms. Its settlement is of far more modern origin than that of the other townships. It had an existence as the Municipality of South Dorchester, in the year 1852, on the separation of Elgin from the County of Middlesex. The first settlers in its territory were Isaac Willis and Archibald MacLachlan, who located on the 10th Concession in the year 1826. The next settlement was upon the road leading east ^{from} Mapleton. As late as the year 1840 the concessions of South Dorchester were a wilderness and the whole township numbered not more than thirty or forty settlers. Some of the men who came from 1840 to 1850 were John and Archibald Clunas, Henry & George Woolley, the Cline brothers, John Luton and Matthew Fullerton.

On Monday 9th January 1852 the first Council met at the store of T. W. Waugh, on the Centre Road, (now Lyons) Councillors Jacob Cline, John McArthur, Edwin McCredy, John Duron, and John Luton.

Jacob Cline was appointed reeve and Edmund Shepherd Municipal Clerk. Previous to this the town meetings were held at Edwardsburg, and three days were required to attend them, although the meeting lasted but one day. The Village of Lyons, the present place of meeting, is near the centre of the township and until about the year 1860 was called Hales Corners from William Hale who built there a wayside inn. In 1877 it contained one general store, one tavern, one pump factory, wagon shop, blacksmith shop, and besides Springfield on the Melshide and Dorchester line, ^{was} the only village in the township.

compiled by Ada MacVicar



Silas Wilson T.G. Winder Harry Grimsted Harry Lyons.
 Charles Luton Duncan Taylor James Mitchell
 picture donated by Agnes Ashton

SOUTH DORCHESTER HISTORY

Speaking of the Canadian Pioneer days in the Township of South Dorehester. (To those who would be interested.)

I would draw your attention to our particular family, who were among the first settlers of the above township. The person at the head of the family being Samuel Weir, a Shoe maker by trade. His wife, formerly Janet Campbell, were both natives of Argyleshire, Scotland. Their home town being Kilmun, near the city of Glasgow. This family being favourably impressed by the glowing news from the new country, decided to migrate to America, to seek a home and fortune.

On the 15th day of June, 1847, with their family of six children, two boys and four girls, set sail for Canada, in one of the old fashioned sailing vessels called, "The Happy Land".

They were booked to sail on another vessel, but for some unknown reason they did not sail on it. This seemed lucky for them as this vessel was never heard of again.

An unfortunate incident occurred, (I might mention here) of which, when out on the water only a few days, one of the passengers was taken ill, passed away, and was buried at sea. The corpse was wrapped and sewed up in canvass with a piece of heavy coal fastened at the foot. It was then slid down a plank to be swallowed up by the waters of the Atlantic. Another similiar occurrence happened before reaching the other side. After being tossed about on the billows of the Atlantic for eight weeks, the wind blew them into the city of Quebec. Here they unloaded their belongings and reloaded on another boat to come up as far as Hamilton. There they unloaded again and reloaded on wagons drawn by oxen.

They came up the Hamilton Road to the West Town-line of South Dorchester, then South to Mapleton. What a change from the present time!

After arriving at Mapleton, they rented a house from a man named William Charleton, another of the pioneers living on the South Townline.

To add to the sorrows and discomforts of this family (in those early days), nine days after their arrival, they suffered the loss of the husband and father. Being seized with a stroke, he suddenly passed away and lies buried in the Mapleton Cemetary. Other members of the family and descendants have been buried there ever since.

Now to buy a farm and make a home. The two boys, Donald and Duncan by name, came East to the middle of South Dorchester township, now called the centre road (No. 73 Highway), bought the South half of Lot 12. One hundred acres at three Dollars an acre. This farm, at that time, was a Solid Block of Woods, not a tree being cut. (Harold Charlton and Henry Dohnt now live on the property.)

They bought the farm from a man named Jacob Cline, well known to the people of the Township. These people afterwards had every confidence in dealing with him several times as they passed on down the line.

Well, the first thing to do then was to clear a spot on which to build a log house. The logs in this house being nearly all Rock Elm, if not all, and each as straight as a line.

The building of the house completed, then there was the furnishing of it. And well I remember the table that Uncle Donald made himself, also the chairs, made by splitting the timber that they were made out of a log. One of these chairs I now have in my possession.

In those days, flour was not so convenient to get as now. My father, then a boy of eighteen years, and Uncle Donald, twenty eight, walked to Rogers Corners, three miles west of Aylmer, a distance of ten miles. My father carried an eighty pounds of flour and Uncle Donald 100 pounds on their backs through the woods to their new home. How different from the present mode of travelling!

Then to get livestock. I heard my father tell how he chopped wood for a neighbour, for one sheep, a class of livestock that they specialized in for years. Afterwards, Uncle Donald, being one of the first in the township to breed Leicester sheep. He always had a large flock, which proved very profitable. He also bred Galloway Cattle, a breed native to the heather. He always was a great fancier of fowl breeding, pure white Emden Geese, pure white Aylesberry ducks, bronze turkeys and Brahma hens. Uncle Donald also planted seeds and grew his own apple trees and had quite a large orchard.

After twelve years of this family living together on this homestead, two of the girls married. Mary, the eldest, married John McKellar of Belmont, a village on the West Townline. Of this union one child was born, her mother dying when she was a few years old. Then the grandmother (Janet Weir and Uncle Donald and Aunt Ann) took the child into their home. She grew up to twenty years and took sick and died.

Then the youngest girl, Catharine, married a man named John Dolbear. They made their home up in Lambton County, Township of Broöke. To this union four children were born and descendents are still living in that township.

Coming back to my fathers career. After he and his brother worked together for twelve years, they bought another farm of seventy five acres, two miles east of the homestead on the eighth concession of the same township. My father moved to this farm and after living alone for two years, married Phoebe Robson. To this union six children were born, four boys and two girls. Two of the boys now being dead, the rest still living. Myself, being the second boy, and am still living on my father's homestead and, I guess, the only one who can give any statement of these families movements in this country.

Compiled by Donald Weir, Junior

(They are all gone now, but Mrs. John Ferguson of Harrietsville)



When travel was by horse and cutter.

Crooked rail fences were common before posts and wire came into use.

REEVES OF SOUTH DORCHESTER 1852-----

Jacob Cline---1852	John H.Wilson---1893
John Gregory--1854	David F.Moore--1900
Reuben Johnston--1855	Andrew Stokes--1901
Jacob Cline---1857	J.L.Woolley---1903
Edwin McCready--1860	John w.Simpson-1904
J.S.Clunas----1862	W.L.Luton----1905
Edward Hegler--1869	Chrries Luton--1907
John Ballah---1870	James J.Mitchell--1909
W.H.Brown----1871	Silas R.Wilson--1911
M.G.Woodworth-1873	Samuel Dawes---1913
Jacob Cline--1874	Harry b. Lyons--1916
Peter Charlton-1875	Malcolm MacVicar-1918
Andrew Cline--1876	Thomas Farrow--1920
Lewis Simpson-1879	J.Arthur Moore--1922
James Bently--1880	Wm.W.Kiddie---1925
Wm,Luton----1883	H.G.Taylor---1925
J.C.Dance---1884	James C.Jenkins-1946
John R.Charlton-1888	R.K.McNeil---1949
W.S.McCready--1889	John B.Wilson--1953
Duncan Ferguson-1891	

The first County Council of Elgin County convened in the Town Hall in St.Thomas on April 15,1852.

Jacob Cline,Reeve of South Dorchester,was a member of the first County Council.

The following Reeves of South Dorchester became Wardens.

1865--John Clunas	1908--Charles Luton
1878--Edward Hegler	1928--Wm.W. Kiddie
1887--J.C.Dance	1931--H.G.Taylor
1891--Andrew Cline	1948--James C.Jenkins
1900--David F. Moore	1952--Ronald K.McNeil
1906--W.L.Luton	1958--John B.Wilson



RONALD KEITH McNEIL was born in South Dorchester, the son of Hugh Peter McNeil and Mabel Bancroft. His great grandfather came ^{from} Scotland and his mother was of English, United Empire Loyalist stock. They settled on the McNeil farm on Concession 11, South Dorchester.

Ron attended Public School at Lyons, Continuation School at Springfield and High School at Aylmer. After four years at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, he graduated with a B.S.A. Degree, in 1942.

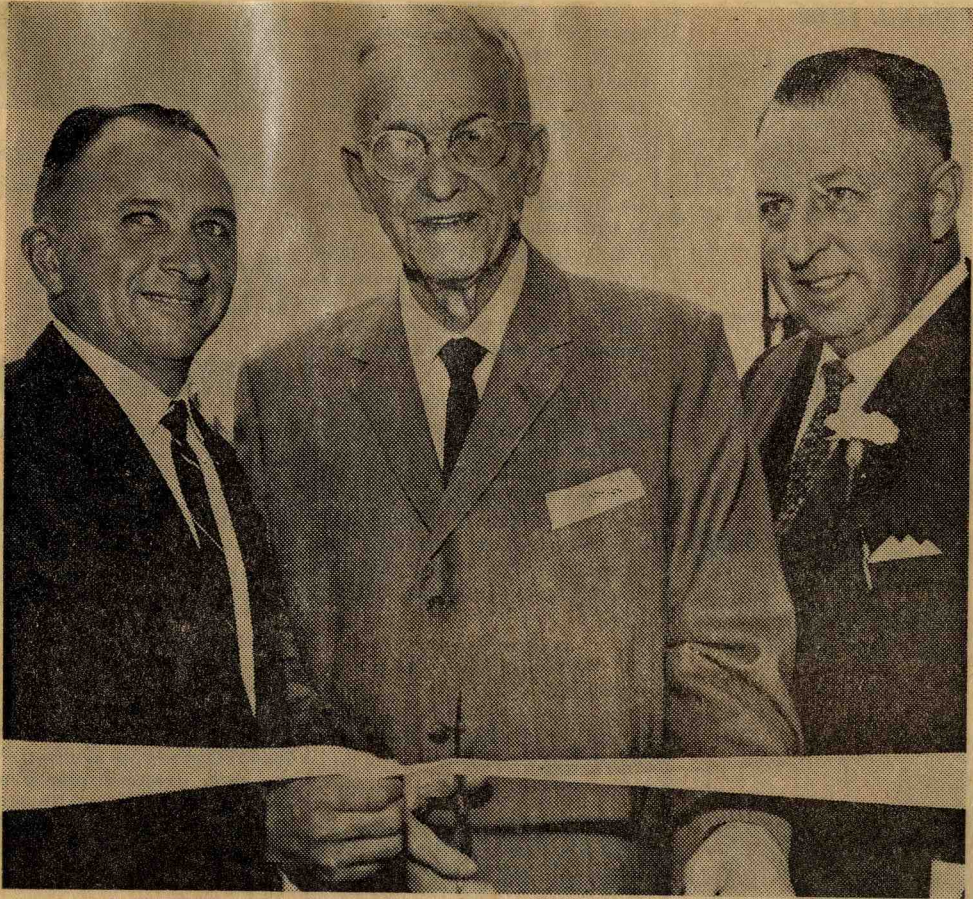
When 26 years of age Ron was elected a member of the Township Council of South Dorchester, serving in that capacity from 1946-1948, and was Reeve in 1949-1952. In 1952, the year of the Elgin Centennial celebration, Ron became the youngest Warden in the County's history and as such served on the St. Thomas-Elgin Hospital Board.

Owing to the death of the late Hon. F.S. Thomas, a provincial by-election was held in Elgin County, in 1958. Ron McNeil was the successful Progressive Conservative candidate elected to complete the legislature term of "Tommy" Thomas. Later he became parliamentary-assistant to the Minister of Agriculture and Food and as such was the Head of a Food Sales Mission to the United Kingdom and Europe. Representatives of seven organizations accompanied him.

In 1975, he was honoured by his friends and colleagues at a dinner given by the Elgin Progressive Conservative Association in the Saxonia Hall, Aylmer, and attended by Ont. Premier, William Davis.

With his father, Hugh, and his brother, Alex, Ron operated the farm at Lyons which was originally the Fullerton Farm. Peter Putnam, grandfather of Lee Putnam purchased it from him and later sold it to Giles Martin who built the house now standing on it. Hugh McNeil was the next owner. It is still Ron's home.

Ron was active in Junior Farmer Organizations, is a member of the Springfield United Church, a member of the IOOF, a 32nd degree Mason and a Shriner.



Two former reeves and the present reeve of South Dorchester Township took part in ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday to officially open the \$12,000 township municipal building at Lyons. From left are: Ronald K. McNeil, MPP (PC—Elgin), reeve from 1949 to 1952; Thomas Farrow, reeve in 1920 and 1921; and J. B. Wilson, reeve since 1953. (Photo by Cowlard).

Mr. Wilson was the third generation of a family of reeves. His grandfather, the late John H. Wilson, was reeve from 1893 to 1899, and his father, the late Silas R. Wilson, was reeve in 1911 and 1912.

John B. Wilson was first elected to council in 1948. He became reeve in 1953 and held that office until his death in 1982.