

MRS. MARY A. SMITH, (AGED 94) ONLY A GENERATION REMOVED  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLERS OF SOUTH YARMOUTH.

-----

(This item was taken from the issue  
of the Times-Journal, St. Thomas,  
dated Nov. 28th, 1942.)

From old diaries and from a personal memory that has remained remarkably acute, despite her ninety-four years, Mrs. Mary Smith of Union, recounts one of the most graphic and interesting stories of pioneer South Yarmouth, yet told. A daughter of Jacob Zavitz, one of Yarmouth's first settlers, Mrs. Smith was born in the backwoods when the Township was traversed only by Indian trails and when wolves and bears were among the biggest nuisances with which the settlers had to contend. Hers is a remarkable story of pioneer hardships and perseverance against odds, which often threatened defeat to the aims of the early settlers.

Mrs. Smith's 94th birthday falls on next Thursday. She retains her home at Union, located on the former Haight farm. She claims it to be the first house erected in the village. Much of the time for the past three years, she has resided at the Gagen Nursing Home at St. Thomas, returning home at intervals, usually during the summer. She is the last of a family of twelve children.

Her father, Jacob Zavitz, was a United Empire Loyalist who came to Yarmouth from Pennsylvania during it's first days of settlement. He took up one hundred acres of timberland on the Ist. Concession of Yarmouth, buying it from the Government, through Colonel Talbot's land settlement scheme, at fifty cents an acre. He had left his wife and two small children at Niagara, on the American side, while he came ahead alone to prepare a home for them to come to. After a few weeks, he had cleared a



small space in the bush and erected a one-room log shanty, to which he brought his family. All travel had to be done along the lakefront by boat or along Indian trails through the bush by foot or by horseback. In finishing his cabin, Jacob Zavitz had to go by horseback to London where he secured a window glass and a door and he had to return with his precious burden on horseback. He went to London one day and returned on the day following. While he was away, Mrs. Zavitz is reported to have tacked a quilt over the door and window and remained awake all night, as wolves howled about her cabin. Mrs. Zavitz kept a bright fire burning in the cabin's fireplace during the night to frighten off the animals. These incidents occurred before Mrs. Smith was born, but she can recall her parents talking of them while she was a child at home.

For flour during the first year or so, Mr. Zavitz had to either go by boat from Port Stanley to the mill at Long Point or by horseback to London. The Long Point trip usually required several days. In his first clearing he raised corn and potatoes and the corn crop made fewer flour trips necessary, because from then on, the Zavitzes were able to grind their own cornmeal. The cornmeal was ground in a hollowed out section of soft rock which Mr. Zavitz fashioned for the purpose. A tin pan punched full of holes, served as a flour sifter to sift out the coarse bits of corn hulls and the result was a fine cornmeal flour that made excellent johnny cake. Bread and cornmeal cake were baked before the open flames of the fireplace in a large iron kettle which was turned at intervals to bake all sides alike.

#### FIRST ROADS

Deer were very plentiful in South Yarmouth at that time and on numerous occasions Mr. Zavitz was able to walk out to a deerlick close to his cabin and shoot a deer by musket before breakfast. About three years after the Zavitz family arrived, the first roads were surveyed



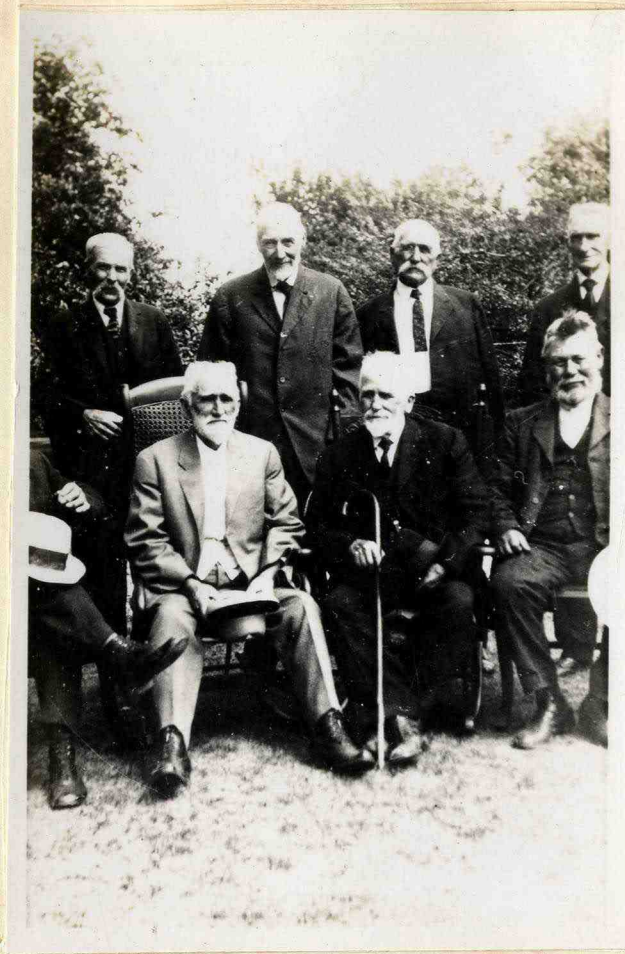
through and a commencement made at clearing them out. For a great many years there were nothing but corduroy roadways of pine logs. Mr. Zavitz was a millwright and carpenter by trade and as settlement of South Yarmouth continued, he devoted more and more of his time to this, his original vocation. The first mills of the district were erected by Mr. Zavitz. He worked on the Samuel Minor mill on the Sparta Road, on the erection of the Abraham Zavitz mill near Union and also raised a mill for his twin brother, Thomas Zavitz, in Malahide Township.

Mrs. Mary A. Smith is probably about the only Elgin resident left who is but one generation removed from the pioneers who came to Yarmouth when the Township was still an area of virgin bush, cut only by the century-old Indian trails. Her husband was Oscar Smith, a son of Hiram Smith. Hiram Smith was the first tailor at Sparta and when he came first to the Quaker village, shortly after it was established, all he had was five dollars and his pressing iron. He was taken in by James Mills, who helped him erect a small shop and found his tailoring trade. After two years, Hiram Smith married Sarah Jane Mills, a daughter of James Mills. There were three children, Oscar, Isaac and Byron.

#### MILLS SETTLEMENT.

John Mills, father of James Mills, was one of the first Yarmouth settlers, like Mrs. Smith's father, Jacob Zavitz. John Mills bought up 1,400 acres of land from the Crown at three dollars per acre. For several years it was known as the Mills Settlement, and it was a part of this land on which the village of Sparta was later built. Through marriage and through birth, Mrs. Mary A. Smith is linked very closely with the first days of Yarmouth Township. Her father was a first settler, and her husband's father was a first settler. Truly, she belongs to the race of pioneers.





A group of old friends-  
Back row, left to right- Thos. Gliddon, Thos. Olde,  
David Whyte, John Collins. Seated. O. Fordyce,  
Rock Bailey and John Pearce. (Picture taken about 1911)  
Oliver Burgess was at left.



Three Good Friends- David Whyte, John Edkins and Eli Green.  
(Picture taken about 1912)



The Union Brass Band.



From left to right

Wellington Taylor  
(Band Leader)  
Robert Bailey  
James Haight  
John Ellman  
Lee Bailey  
Alex Mc.Cullough  
Jas. Henry Armstrong V.S.  
Arthur Graham  
Herbert Doan  
Robert Waite  
Vern Montgomery  
Robert Whaley  
Harry Kipp  
Chas. Wiggins

Zack Hathaway standing beside verandah post.

Mr. Palmer, Prop. Yarmouth Centre Hotel,  
at left of Mr. Hathaway.

Mr. Penwarden (with dog)

Isaac Ryckman, in carriage.

Cook Newcombe standing in foreground.

(Jas.C.Ingram, one of Union's oldest  
residents at the present time, was a  
former member of the band but was not  
present on this occasion.)

(over)



The Union Brass Band was organized in 1889 under the leadership of Wellington Taylor, a carpenter by trade, who lived in the house directly north of the present Womens' Institute Hall, this building formerly known as the Sons of Temperance Hall and later, the Foresters Hall, being used by the bandmen for holding practises. For many years the band was much in demand for social gatherings, Zack Hathaway of Union, driving the bandmen over to Yarmouth Centre to supply the music for a garden party, the occasion on which the picture on the preceding page, was taken.

We are indebted to Mrs. Stella Waite and Mrs. Zella Kipp for the picture and information regarding the Union Brass Band, their husbands having been members of this band.

.....

GRAND  
Entertainment  
UNION BRASS BAND  
ADMIT ONE



## PIONEER DAYS OF SEMINARY SCHOOL, S.S. NO8

Sketches of the different school sections in each Township of Elgin County were submitted to the Historical Institute at St. Thomas in the years 1895-6, the executive of this Society, acting as judges to decide the awards. The essay of Jessie Bailey of Union, was chosen as the best, her sketch, describing the early history and pioneer settlers of S.S. No. 8, Yarmouth. An outline map shows the names of the first settlers and is included at the finish of this article.

" One of the first settlements in the county was made in this section by an American named Jesse Page, who arrived from New Jersey as early as the year 1810. He settled on Lot 12, con, 3 and soon after built a tannery on Beaver Creek. His patrons came for many miles, as this was the only tannery in the district. In the following year a number of families came in a company from Long Point. They originally came from the United States, but not being satisfied with the Long Point country, they came to Yarmouth in search of a more promising locality for settlement. Among the prominent members of this colony were Jacob Preffer, Isaac Minor and Isaac Moore.

### Privations Endured

The early settlers endured many hardships and privations, sometimes being on the verge of starvation. Instances are related where seed potatoes were planted and afterward dug up for food. Owing to the extremely high price of leather, and the poverty of the people, very few of the children were able to wear shoes either in summer or winter until they were twelve or fourteen years of age. Scarcely any money was in circulation, the only commodity for which cash was received, being a product from the lye of wood ashes, known as "black salts" which was afterwards refined down to potash.