

Number 4 of the King's Highway

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As we travel at an easy sixty miles an hour over the broad, smooth road between Port Stanley and London, which is now known as part of No. 4 Highway, we are covering practically the same ground as have travellers between these two points since the days of the pioneers. And in those days the road was just as important as it is to-day.

Early Roads

The earliest roads were merely blazed trails through the woods, taking the line of least resistance to reach a definite place. As settlers began to populate this area, however, more attention was given by the Commissioners of Roads in the old London District, to the building of surveyed roads.

Col. Thomas Talbot laid great stress on road building as a means of opening up his settlement. Settlers receiving grants of land from him were obliged to clear a "right of way" in front of their own property. They were required, also, to spend a stated number of days each year on its upkeep. Later, this was known as "Statute Labour".

The Old Kettle Creek Road is Surveyed

Two very important lots had been granted by Col. Talbot to Col. John Bostwick. This grant contained a considerable acreage, as it began at the mouth of Kettle Creek and stretched along Lake Erie to the east and north through ~~Yarmouth~~. In 1817, having

No.4 of the King's Highway

built his home and brought his family to Kettle Creek Harbour, Col. Bostwick was anxious to have his land opened up for settlement. Lake Erie and Kettle Creek had always been an important water-highway and both the Indian's and white man's paddles had dipped in its marshy waters on their journeys north to the Grand River. Now in 1817 there was renewed activity. James Hamilton brought in by tender merchandise for his store in St. Thomas, and Col. Bostwick shipped out a quantity of pearl ash. A road which was a primary need came in 1822.

According to the Talbot Papers, this road was among the first registrations in the first "Road Register" of the District of London, and was dated January 12th, 1822. The previous year, under the Court of Quarter Sessions, the surveying of the road had been approved. Louis (sometimes spelled Lewis) Burwell, deputy for Col. John Bostwick, surveyor, laid out the road from the mouth of Kettle Creek to the Talbot Road. (The Talbot Road, in the Talbot Settlement, had already been surveyed by Col. Bostwick and had been in use since 1807.)

The new road, Kettle Creek Road, as it was called, began at Lake Erie, near Col. Bostwick's home and went through his property along Main Street. It branched off on Joseph Street which follows up the Schoolhouse Hill. Here, at the top of the hill, it was joined by a survey from Orchard Beach and followed along East Street until it joined Hill Street. (*) At the foot of that hill it

* (This part of the survey was entirely through Col. Bostwick's property.)

No.4 of the King's Highway

^{north} travelled through the Village of Union to the western confines of St.Thomas to Farley's Hill, following along Stanley Street (Port Stanley Road) to Talbot Street.

From the harbour and out of the old sailing vessels came the English, Irish, Scottish and German settlers making their way over this new road by ox-cart or perhaps trudging on foot all the way to their new Canadian homes.

On this road, they travelled through virgin forest and unbroken bushland. On either side stood maple, ash, walnut, butternut, hickory, oak and elm, and when these deciduous trees stood leafless in the forest, still standing green were spruce, pine, hemlock and ~~tamarac~~. In Spring and Summer wild flowers showed brightly among the bracken, low raspberry bushes and wild grape. Many kinds of birds nested in the deep forest, as well as wild turkeys, ducks and pigeons, Wildcats, bears and wolves were free in their movements and the owl joined his echoing hoot with the other weird calls of the night prowlers.

The Rush-Bagot Treaty between Canada and the United States of America for peace along the Great Lakes was signed in 1817. It was not until after this that settlers came to this district in any numbers. The Plains, Col. Baby's land in Yarmouth, and the Talbot Settlement in Southwold, especially where there was water power, proved popular with the immigrants. Mills were soon erected under the skilled hands of such artisans as Mr. John Meek of Southwold and Mr. Jesse Zavitz of Yarmouth.

No.4 of the King's Highway

A Government Harbour Increases Immigration and Trade

In 1826, London was surveyed as the County Town of Middlesex and with a more confined area and a more confined population, there was more influence to approach the Government of Upper Canada for a good harbour at Kettle Creek. There must be roads, bridges and harbours if a settlement is to grow and prosper. To prove that a good harbour was needed and would be a paying proposition, a report of exports and imports from 1817 to 1826 was sent to the Government.

This showed how much duty could have been collected.

Years	EXPORTS									
	Bbbs. of Ashes	Bbbs. of Pork	Bbbs. of Whiskey	Kegs of Butter	Kegs of Lard	Bbbs. of Sugar	Bush. of Wheat	Hogs-heads of Tobacco	Packs of Furs	Bbbs. of Flour
1819	18									653
1820	83									
1821	250									
1822	274									653
1823	262	17	15			2	686			657
1824	369	14	2		6	2			12	553
1825	483			1		7		2	2	585
1826	638			30		7				1386

The above does not include exports from the Townships of London, Westminster, West Oxford and Malahide.

Years	IMPORTS		
	Merchandise	Salt	Hollow Ware
1817	100 barrels bulk	---	---
1818	60 " "	30 Barrels	---
1819	238 " "	64 "	---
1820	233 " "	142 "	---
1821	87 " "	175 "	---
1822	126 " "	59 "	---
1823	236 " "	345 "	3 tons-- 7casks hempseed
1824	462 " "	290 "	---
1825	252 " "	188 "	---
1826	124 " "	412 "	6 tons

This does not include any imports for the Townships of London, Westminster, W. Oxford and Malahide viz. -Messrs. Goodhue, Hunt, Ingersol, Harrison, Lawrence and Davis.

No.4 of the King's Highway

The agitation for a harbour was fruitful and the Government of Upper Canada in 1827, by Act of Parliament (8th, George IV, Chapter 18), approved a plan which called for a harbour and a west pier of 500 feet and an east pier of 200 feet and the dredging called 10 feet. The east pier was later changed to a length of 300 feet.

It was hard going for the farmer in the 1830's, both in planting and in harvesting the grain with the crude implements at hand. Aided by his wife and family he had worked hard all Summer and now on an Autumn morning, long before daylight, he has hitched his oxen to his rude wagon already loaded with his golden harvest. As he reaches the old Kettle Creek Road he finds many others going in the same direction. They reach Port Stanley (now named), and by the time dark comes down, some are still waiting to have their grain unloaded since only five bags of grain could be drawn up into the elevators at one time. After dark, many of the weary travellers are homeward bound, but those who must wait for unloading might be found at the New American Hotel enjoying a well-earned evening of fun and a crack with their neighbours.

It was in little groups like this that government for the people and by the people was discussed. This 'Old Kettle Creek Road' must have been well-travelled during those unsettled times since McKenzie, Duncombe and Dr. Rolph, clever and well-educated men with the good of their country at heart, held many meetings at St. Thomas. It is said that this cause had 300 followers in Yarmouth and Southwold. Two of them were court martialled and hanged in the County Town of London.

No.4 of the King's Highway

The Old Road becomes a Military Road

In 1838, a garrison of Her Majesty's soldiers was placed in London to help restore order. The whole district began to settle down to peaceful endeavours. London then became a Garrison Town with permanent barracks. It no doubt gave a great lift to all the citizens of Middlesex, when they learned that the Old Kettle Creek Road was to be rejuvenated. Here was work and progress and also improvement in the social life of the people.

It was planned to bring in the soldiers through the harbour, and since the road was in no condition for the soldiers marching to London, the Government took over the construction and maintenance of the Military Road all the way to London. Even though lumber was cheap, the estimated cost was 10,000 pounds sterling. In 1842, the Old Road was str³ightened, graded and planked.

This made a great improvement. It no longer curved up the School-house Hill and down again at Hill Street in Port Stanley, but went straight up Main Street and Colborne Street. In St. Thomas, also, there were changes. The road now continued along the western limits to the foot of the Talbot Hill.

In 1846, the Port Stanley Harbour was put under the 'Board of Public Works' and Kettle Creek, which flows mostly through Elgin County, was made a navigable stream to Selborne (Union Road). There was now a stimulus for money investments and business picked up in every line of endeavour in this 'Garden of Eden'.

Let us picture the scene on that summer day in 1850 when 112 soldiers of Her Majesty's Twenty-third Regiment came into the harbour and were unloaded from the Propeller Steamer Cathcart.

No.4 of the King's Highway

'There is great excitement, both for the soldiers who were setting foot on Canadian soil for the first time, and for the watching onlookers. The day is fine and in the busy harbour sloops, schooners and side-wheelers are moored side by side. Sails, smoke-stacks and chimney-tops are silhouetted on the calm surface of the lake as places of business are built on shore or on piles over the lake at the East pier. There is much hustle and bustle here, at the foot of Main St. as busy stevedores move their wheelbarrows to and fro, hither and yon. The Welsh Fusiliers respond to the clipped commands of their superior officer as they clear the decks after their long voyage. Immigrants and other weary passengers (many an one in his kilt or other native dress) are finding their way across a schooner's gangplank with a few treasured possessions, while the jolly tars in the rigging or on deck, obey the calls of their weather-beaten captain. Lined up near the dock is an old stage-coach waiting to load passengers, baggage and packets of mail for the trip to London.

Everything is in readiness and the procession begins. The horn of the stage-coach echoes from cliff to lake and from lake to cliff as the coach leads the way over the new planked road and under the shade of the forest trees. The passengers listen to many unfamiliar sounds and the galloping feet of the four horses as the coach rocks along from side to side, leaving dust for the red-coated soldiers. And now come the soldiers, with their horse-driven artillery and the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet over this new, but uneven, planked road. Last but no least come the steerage passengers, with little money in their pockets but with youth and plenty of courage in their hearts, they trudge along to their new homes and uncertain futures.'

The Military Road becomes a County Road

The upkeep of this Military Road proved expensive, and as the garrison was soon to be withdrawn from London, the Government decided to turn the road over to the County of Middlesex. It was conveyed under Order-in-Council, dated 13th May, 1851. The cost to the County of Middlesex was the equivalent of \$22,000.

The County of Elgin is Formed

In 1846, five years before Middlesex took over the road, there was agitation by the people living in the southern portion for a division of the county. To arouse interest and gain support for this plan, a meeting was called. The meeting place was St. Thomas and the date was 27th August, 1846. The Amateur Band of St. George's Society played loudly and the Mansion House, the appointed place, was gaily decorated with bunting and flags. At the meeting resolutions were unanimously passed asking the Government for the separation of our county from Middlesex. It was not until 1851 that a Government Act was passed sanctioning this division. The southern portion was to have seven townships (as it has to-day) and Elgin* was the name it was given.

Under a proclamation bearing the sign and seal of James Hamilton, the sheriff of Upper Canada, a provisional council met on April 15, 1852. The notice appeared in the Canada Gazette on 30th September, 1853 and the new County Council met with Thomas Locker acting as the first warden.

One of the details that had to be worked out between the two counties was the price Elgin should pay Middlesex for her share of the road, i.e. her share of the \$22,000, the amount that the Government charged Middlesex for the road. It was finally agreed that \$8,200 was a fair price. Elgin paid this sum to Middlesex.

But the business deal between the two counties was not as Elgin County thought. Elgin County later found out that the

* Named after the Governor General of Upper Canada-Lord Elgin.