

PIONEER SETTLEMENT

NORTH YARMOUTH TOWNSHIP

1831

The twin houses were designed only from the family memory of the architecture of the home in Devon, but they had a close resemblance in all the principal features. The dressed and carved stone for the beautiful round-headed arches with carved keystones and corbels over the windows and main doors was brought from Kingston, and the stained glass, engraved with the date of construction, for the fan lights was imported. Brick from St. Marys went into the solid walls. While they differed in some practical respects, the Gilberts had learned from their experiences in the houses of before 1840 and 1857 of the impracticality of fire-places for heating in the harsh Ontario climate. No matter how beautiful the carved and molded mantels, they planned to be warm in the new houses with practical Canadian stoves. However the chimneys were built with the proper handsome panelling and with coping stones of a weight of 800 pounds!

Due to the foresight of Richard Gilbert, and because of the wealth of seasoned woods which the family had accumulated from their own farms, the interiors were probably more richly done than the original Devon home. The countryside was scoured for the finest craftsmen to convert the choice walnut, oak, birdseye maple, pine, etc. into beautiful wainscots, handsome heavily panelled doors, intricately turned balustrades and ornately molded door and window casings combining light and dark woods, for the embellishment of the interior of the house.

Unique features of the houses which imitated "Rhude in Devon" were the circular stairways of walnut and the round arched doors of the hall, the carved medallions showing lion's heads above the doors, and elaborately carved walnut lambrequins over the windows. The Devon home could not have had the birdseye maple in which the twin "Rhude" parlors were finished; but it undoubtedly had the upstairs drawing-room daintily done in white for "the ladies."

Finally when the twin houses had been brought to structural completion, the Gilberts engaged an expert cabinet maker and his apprentices for many weeks to create on the spot from their own timber the appropriate furniture for all the many rooms. Guided by their pattern books from England (and probably Germany) these men applied their skills to create a huge ornate walnut sideboard, side and serving tables, an extension dining table, huge in itself and capable of expansion to seat twenty persons, handsome chairs, cabinets, chests, bureaux, commodes, bedsteads, dressers, center tables, all of them reminiscent of the Devon ancestor. It is unfortunate that the names of these craftsmen have been forgotten. They were in the tradition of such craftsmen in that along with the fancy pieces, they also turned out complete equipment of wooden kitchen utensils. (A wooden rolling pin is still in use in the Gilbert family.) They also turned out a full complement of kitchen tables, stools, cupboards, and sturdy rush bottom chairs for use in the enormous kitchen.

Although these furnishings have now been scattered among the various descendant families, thus depriving the twin houses of the feeling of unity and completion which they had in the 19th century, the houses themselves stand as fine examples of the crafts of old Ontario and exemplify the continuity of the traditional cultures brought from Devonshire to Yarmouth. This was effected by the transplantation in one decade of the middle nineteenth century by adventurous representatives of a single little English market town to a new and formidably strange township in Ontario.

Taken from an article written by Mrs. W. S. Davidson, of Victoria, B. C. (formerly Miss Ethel Heydon, of St. Thomas) and published in the St. Thomas Times-Journal, Oct. 1951.

"The Scotch Settlement" was taken from an article (Kilmartin News) published in the St. Thomas Times about 1904 and loaned by Mr. Robert Elliott, R. R. 1, Glanworth, a grandson of Duncan McColl, who died in December 1965.

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Richard and Martha Gilbert and their two eldest sons and their families sleep in the family plot in old St. Thomas Church Cemetery on Walnut Street. The other three sons William, Matthew and Marwood lie in adjoining lots in St. Thomas Cemetery.

1967.

The 400 acres on the Edgeware Road settled on in 1831 by Richard Gilbert is now owned by: John VanPatter's sons, Robert on the south-west and Ray on the south-east corners. Julian Martin lives on the north-east corner, while the 100 acres on the north-west corner, owned by Jack Gilbert (a great-grandson of William), who passed away in 1961, was sold to Charles Goodhe in 1965. The only direct descendant living on these farms now is William Gilbert's great-granddaughter Betty, and her husband George Elms and their family, living on a corner lot of the Ray VanPatter farm.

PIONEER ACTIVITIES

Back in the early 1830s and 1840s if a man proposed to marry and settle down, the first thing he did was buy a farm, which of course was covered with woods. The only land available in those days was covered with timber, Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec) being very much the same.

A one-room log house of Canadian rustic design was built along with a log stable. To such a home, many a pioneer bride came to battle with the hardships of early Canadian life.

Their outfit on his part would consist of a colt, a yoke of oxen, a pig, a couple of sheep, a gun and an axe. The bride's lot usually comprised a cow, bed and bedding, a table and chairs, a chest of linen, a few dishes and a few other articles with which to begin housekeeping.

This did not seem like a very lavish set out on the part of the parents, who usually liked to let the young folk try their hand at making a living before they gave them of their abundance. To quote an old Scotchman, "If they succeeded they would not need much and if they did not, it would come in better after a while".

The head of such a home would take his axe and chop his way into the stubborn bush, and by having logging bees or such help as he could get, would burn or otherwise get rid of the timber. He would add field after field to his clearing until he had a fine farm cleared.

As the family grew up and the farmer continued to prosper, better buildings took the place of the small log structures. Large frame stables and a good sized frame house were built. In the roomy kitchen would be a large fire place and on one side of the fireplace there would be a large brick oven where bread and pies were baked. Within the fireplace would be an iron crane, securely fastened and made to swing in and out. It had rows of pot hooks on which to hang pots used in cooking. Cooking was a difficult chore since there were no cook stoves.

The sitting room with its rag carpet and braided rugs was used only when there was company. More attention was given to the durability of furniture than to ornament or style. The rooms were heated by very thick and heavy box-stoves next to which was a box of maple or beech wood for burning. Books and pictures were scarce, however the family Bible was always on its shelf along with perhaps a history book. Then there were the bedrooms with their high post beds. It must have been an arduous undertaking to put up one of the old wooden beds with their rope bottoms and straw ticks and feather beds on top so high up that it almost took a step ladder to get into it.

Each season of the year brought its own particular work. First in the spring came the sugar making. The housewife would muster all the pots and kettles she could command and when they were properly suspended over a fire on wooden hooks, she stood by and watched them. The men would be busy gathering the sap in pails suspended on wooden yokes slung across their shoulders. A year's supply of sugar would be made up to be used later for sweetening. Following this came the seeding and planting. The grain had to be sown by hand.

About June came the sheep washing. The sheep would be secured in a pen near the stream, then taken into the water one by one and washed thoroughly. A few days after they were taken to the barn and sheared. The fleeces would then be sorted and some kept at home to be carded by hand. The rest would be sent to the mill to be made into rolls. When it was brought home, the hum of the spinning wheel would be heard day after day for weeks; also the tread of feet as the mother or daughters walked back and forth, drawing out and twisting the thread and taking great pains to have it fine and even. When the yarn was finished, it was sent to the weaver to be converted into cloth although many families had looms of their own and wove their own cloth.

PIONEER ACTIVITIES

During the harvest the women helped all they could and usually followed the cradler and bound the grain for him.

In the fall, preparations would be made for the coming winter. Plenty of eggs and butter would be packed away. Eggs and butter were almost valueless in those days except on the farmer's own table. Butter was worth about five cents a pound. Fruit would be stored away in large quantities in stone jars.

Apples were most plentiful. The best would be picked and put in the cellar and the rest were sent to the cider mill. Cider mills in those days were somewhat crude contrivances and were quite numerous. It was a universal custom to set out a dish of apples and a pitcher of cider if company were in. Sweet cider was boiled down to a syrup and with apples quartered and cooked in it was equal to a preserve and usually found its way to the table three times a day. Many apples were dried for use in the winter, the women holding peeling bees.

Potatoes and roots were gathered and put in cellars. Corn and pumpkins would be put in the barn. It was common to have husking bees; the neighbours would be invited in and amid jokes and laughter, flying husks and ears, the job would soon be finished.

Then came the hog killing. It was not unusual to kill six or eight or even more large hogs. The hams and shoulders would be nicely cut and cured and the rest packed in barrels. There was always plenty of lard for pies and doughnuts.

Next came the threshing. Those who did not wish to spend the winter flailing out the grain used a tread mill and the job was done more easily. When a farmer took his grain to the mill he brought back his flour and bran and only paid the miller for the grinding. The women had their quilting bees and had a jolly time of it if all accounts are true.

Lamps and coal oil were just coming into use about the 1850s. Those who did not have them still used candles set in brass candlesticks. The housewife had a great deal to be thankful for when candle moulds were invented as it took a lot of time and patience to make a smooth candle and especially one that did not sputter.

As winter approached thought was given to more comfortable clothing. A roll of cloth just home from the mill would be made into suits and dresses. The sewing was done mostly by hand. The first sewing machine was a little contrivance which screwed on to a table or board and was turned by a crank.

Many a girl, if she could be spared from home, went out to work for her neighbours. Going to work did not affect her position any, in fact it was in her favor and showed that she had some ambition about her.

SOFT SOAP MAKING

by

Mrs. Ina Gilbert Gloin

Making soft soap is an almost forgotten craft. It played a very important roll in the life of the pioneer. With no super-markets or discount drug stores, but with lots of very soiled clothes, grandmother needed wash-day help.

There were three main ingredients in the making of soap--fat, lye and water--each of these being obtained right at home. It was a kind of "Do it yourself job."

Each year mother had a large stone crock--five gallons--maybe more, down cellar and into it went all bacon and ham rinds, fat from the quarter of beef or lamb eaten, --in fact all fats. We always killed our own pork and cured it.

With the coming of spring, the lye leach was readied for use. The leach was two apple barrels on a platform, maybe five feet by six feet: The platform was set up on four blocks so that it slanted one way. The platform was covered by a sheet of zinc. Under the lower side of the platform there was a trough through which the lye emptied into an iron kettle. This was kept covered to prevent fowl or birds taking a sip.

Hardwood ashes from the furnace and stove were placed in the apple barrels and soft water from the rain barrel or cistern added. Water was added regularly until enough lye had been gathered. The process of soap making was under way.

To boil the soap, a stout sapling was placed on two stout posts. A heavy logging chain had two iron kettles slung over the fire. In late May, when the weather was nice, the final operation took place. Father had a goodly pile of fire wood handy. Lye from the leach, rain water and the stored fats were added to the big kettles over the fire--and the fire started. Father had a flat skimming ladle attached to the split end of a three or four foot wooden handle. As it boiled the mixture was skimmed. Father was a busy man--he fired and skimmed, and skimmed and fired. Then he would take some of his "makins" in a dipper--add water and stir. If little curds of fat formed, he added more lye to the kettle, and if it smarted the skin it called for more fat.

Father always seemed to judge it just right, for the finished product was of the consistency of half-set jelly, and a beautiful light golden brown in colour. Never has the cleaning capacities of soft soap been equalled, and much less bettered.

The soap--the finished product--was carried in pails and stored in a huge oaken barrel in the basement. The soap in the bottom of the kettles might contain some sediment and was stored in a separate container and used for scrubbing floors. A handful of salt was always added to a kettle-full of soap.

This snap was taken about 1910--and quite to fathers displeasure. He didn't think it proper to have his picture taken without his shirt!



GILBERT HALL
John Gilbert, Lot 13, Edgeware Road
Township of Yarmouth

THE EDGEWARE ROAD

The first recollection that I have of Edgeware Road dates back to when a young teacher who travelled back and forth to her school told me that it was a beautiful drive with its hills and low land through the wooded parts.

The first thoughts when we speak of Edgeware are--where is it? how did it get its name? The families that settled on the road were from Devonshire, England, at least the majority, and Edgeware was the name of a road in England. Edgeware Road lies between the ninth and tenth concessions of Yarmouth, north of Talbot Street (No. 3 Highway). On the map the road begins at the Dunwich and Southwold townline passing through Southwold and Yarmouth to the Malahide boundary line. I do not think that it is called by that name in Southwold. The road is not travelled all the way through but it is surveyed. On account of the number of hills, the road was not used.

Now let us consider the farms bordering on the Edgeware Road through Yarmouth starting at the Wellington Road. The Freeman and Easterbrooks still are in the family for four generations, the Axford farm being part of the Easterbrook farm. Mrs. Axford was formerly a Miss Easterbrook. The Emery farm was known as Barnards. The Carter farm was formerly owned by Mr. Billings. If I were to tell you all the farms in the lots, north and south Edgeware it would take too long for some have been sold three and four times. The farm now owned by Mr. Hill was owned by Mr. Bobier and sold to Daniel Caughlin, at his death was sold to Mr. Fitch, then to Mr. Hill whose father owned the farm across the road which they had taken from the Crown and still own. On the south we have land owned by Mrs. Sarah Casey, mother of the late George E. Casey, West Elgin M.P. for a number of years, now owned by the City of St. Thomas for the Waterworks. The Locke farm on the corner was Clergy Reserve. The Brady farm taken from the Crown still is in the family name. Mann's land taken from the Crown was divided between two sons, John and Johiel, and is now owned by Wm. E. Locke and Gordon Loveday. Albert Campbell's farm, formerly owned by Mr. and Mrs. Jeffreys who were uncle and aunt of Mrs. John Miller--mother of Norman Miller. The next hundred acres were taken by Mr. Cole and sold to Mr. Tibbits, and now owned by Mrs. John A. Campbell. The George Dennis farm was first owned by Gilberts then a Mr. Potticary, was sold to Matthew Penhale then to the present owner George Dennis. The farm now owned by Burton Crosby was owned by Millers and sold to J. Hatch, then Cohoons, Clintons and Crosby. The Dalziel farm was taken from the Crown by Mr. Miller and also the adjoining farm owned by Norman Miller.

The R. A. Penhale farm was originally a Clergy Reserve, the Tisdale farm being the original Penhale home. There was no road in front of R. A. Penhale's but a road or trail went between the Tisdale farm to the ninth concession. The Williams farm was formerly settled by Donald Leach, who emigrated from Scotland in 1831, he having taken up the last available hundred acres on the Edgeware Road.

Next there is the four hundred acres taken from the Crown by Archibald and Daniel Black. The north fifty acres was sold by the Blacks to Thomas Penhale to pay a fine for giving shelter to an army deserter. Archie Black in 1903 sold one hundred and fifty acres to Albert Archibald. John VanPatter owns the lot to the south.

The four corners were taken by the Gilbert family and are still owned by descendants of the family with the exception of the south-west corner which is owned by John VanPatter. The Westlakes had the farms now owned by N.R. Martin, Angus Miller, and William Paddon. Mervyn Paddon's farm was owned by a family named Gloin.

The land on the four corners was owned by Lutons, now William Orris is on one corner and Andrew Paddon opposite. A little frame church stood at one time on Andrew Paddon's farm. It is now a drive barn. Mr. Arthur Luton still has land on one corner. They tell me a family by the name of Deo lived there at one time but I was unable to find any further information and could not finish to the boundary line.

Written by Charles E. Locke

May 25, 1933.