

LOOKING BACK OVER THE CENTURY

At last week's township of West Gwillimbury council meeting enquiry was made in regard to obtaining more historical information relating to the township, in this Centennial year, and the booklet, published for the official opening of the township's municipal building, was produced, in which a review of the years in the township, up to that time, written by C. T. S. Evans, Q.C., was published.

It may require more than one issue to cover that very excellent record of the township, therefore our Looking Back Over The Century will be from Mr. Evans' writings during the next few weeks.

SINCE 1815 . . .

By C. T. S. EVANS, Q.C.

Having been given the privilege of gathering some data about the Township of West Gwillimbury for inclusion in this booklet, we are going to grasp the opportunity, on behalf of all the citizens of West Gwillimbury, of congratulating the officials, both elected and appointed, on the very excellent service they are rendering.

And as this booklet is being issued upon the occasion of the official opening of the new Township Municipal Building in the village of Bradford, we would like to especially congratulate Reeve Herbert J. Hughes and Councillors Edwin Fennell, Melburn Law, William Melbourne and Robert Westlake on their good judgment in arranging for the erection of the building and their excellent business ability in carrying through their plans to completion with such eminently satisfactory results.

It has been our privilege to be in a good many township offices and we know of no other rural municipality with as sat-

isfactory a set-up of offices for its council, school board and officials, and garage and workshop for machinery; and we heard a senior Inspector of the Ontario Provincial Police say that there was no finer police office in the province than the upstairs of the municipal building which is occupied by the detachment of Provincial Police headed by Corporal David Adair.

We have no hesitation in saying that it is a building of which every citizen of West Gwillimbury, from the oldest, whom we think must surely be Mr. James A. Neilly, of Gilford, perhaps closely followed by Mr. John H. Lee of Bradford, to the youngest (we do not know who the youngest will be when this article goes to press but perhaps the youngest in a semi-official capacity would be William Harry Sparling, newest grandson of Councillor Melbourne and grand-nephew of Reeve Hughes) should be very proud.

West Gwillimbury is situated in the south-eastern corner of the County of Simcoe. It is separated from the townships of King on the south, and East Gwillimbury on the east (both in York County) by the Holland River. The Township of Tecumseth borders it on the west, Innisfil on the north, and Cook's Bay extends several miles down along its eastern border.

The area within these limits is 44,700 acres, 1,700 acres of which is included within the Corporate bounds of Bradford which formed a part of West Gwillimbury until its incorporation by Act of Parliament assented to 27th May, 1957, incorporating it as a Village as of and from 1st January, 1958.

West Gwillimbury was larger until by Act of Parliament in 1851 the lots on Yonge Street in the Township of West Gwillimbury as then constituted

were detached from West Gwillimbury and annexed to East Gwillimbury; and the residue of that part of West Gwillimbury which lay on the south-east side of the west branch of the Holland River was detached from West Gwillimbury and annexed to the Township of King.

According to a historical sketch of Simcoe County contained in an illustrated atlas of the Dominion of Canada, West Gwillimbury enjoys the distinction of having been the township in which the pioneer location of Simcoe County was effected. The event occurred in 1815, when a party of Scotch Highlanders, who a few years previously had accompanied Lord Selkirk to the site of his settlement in what is now Manitoba, returned to Upper Canada to select permanent locations. After great privations and suffering the settlers succeeded in traversing the 500 miles of rocky wilderness from Fort Gary to Fort William and by boat from there to Penetanguishene and across Lake Simcoe and down the Holland River, finally forming a settlement known since that time as The Scotch Settlement. Some of the settlers were Sutherlands, McKays, McBeths, Ross, Campbells and Bannermans, names still very familiar in the township and many descendants of the Sutherlands still reside in the neighbourhood.

Following closely on the arrival of the Scotch settlers came a number of settlers mostly from the north of Ireland and they settled to the

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north of the Scotch residents and at one time, as a result of the settling of Orangemen from the north of Ireland in the north and west centre of the township, these portions were known as "Irish Town" and the "Orange Quarter". One of these early settlers was John Lee, who settled near Newton Robinson and it seems appropriate that his descendant, John H. Lee of Bradford, took part in his 72nd consecutive 12th of July parade in 1951.

One of the first settlers north of Bradford was William Robinson, who bought Lot 15, Concession 8, a mile north of Bradford. Mrs. Lawson, wife of the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, is a direct descendant of William Robinson and her mother was born and brought up on that farm and is still very interested in West Gwillimbury.

The first grist mill in the township was started in 1824 or 1825 by two early settlers, John Thorpe and Mark Scanlon, and it is said that a millstone from this mill is now located in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

Another early settler was Prince Belfry on Lot 16, Concession 8, in 1830, and this farm is still in the Belfry family.

(continued next week)

Bradford Witness, Microfilm Reel # 83

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