

UNVEILING OF PLAQUE AT AULD KIRK CEMETERY

On Sunday, August 24th at 2.30 p.m., a plaque erected by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board to commemorate the settlement of West Gwillimbury Township by a group of Scottish immigrants, will be unveiled in front of the Auld Kirk, on the south half of Lot 8, Concession 6, near Bradford.

The ceremony is being sponsored by local residents, and the Chairman will be Mr. Arthur Evans, Warden of Simcoe County and Reeve of Bradford. Others participating will be Dr. Wilfred Jury, representing the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board; Mr. Percy Selby, Reeve of West Gwillimbury Township; Mr. George Johnston, M.P.P., member for Simcoe Centre, and Mr. Murray Faris, who will represent the Church Board of Trustees. Mrs. Angus Campbell (Helen Fraser), who is a descendant of one of the original pioneers, will unveil the marker, and Mr. Williams, minister of the church, will dedicate it.

The Highland settlers to whom the plaque is dedicated, were part of a band brought out from Scotland by the Earl of Selkirk from 1811-1813. His intention was to settle a large tract of land that forms part of the present-day province of Manitoba, with the central community to be situated at Fort Gibraltar, the site of the modern city of Winnipeg. This territory belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company and, in order to be in a position to purchase the land he required, Selkirk and some of his relatives and friends obtained a large portion of the Company's shares. It was thus that he determined to settle the district known as the "Red River District" with impoverished Highland crofters to form a colony of his own people under the British crown.

The first band of immigrants arrived at York Factory on Hudson Bay late in 1811, and after wintering here they journeyed some seven hundred miles south to the site of the new settlement. Until this time the area had been controlled by the North-West Company, the great rival fur-trading organization to the Hudson's Bay Company. It was natural that these fur traders would resent an intrusion that would certainly mean an end to their trapping activities.

The Highlanders suffered greatly from food shortages, poor crops and the violent opposition of the North-West Company's agents, which caused much discontent among them. This feeling was exploited to the utmost by the company agents, who wished to move the settlers away from the Red River district to Upper Canada. The Manager of the North-West Company at Fort Gibraltar, Duncan Cameron, was very determined in his efforts to remove the Highlanders and, after several clashes with their governor, Miles Macdonnell, he ventured so far in his capacity of Justice of the Peace as to arrest Macdonnell. Cameron immediately approached the settlers with an offer of free transportation in North-West Company canoes to Upper Canada, an opportunity doubly attractive since they would still remain under the British flag and would have an opportunity to obtain more fertile land.

Accordingly, in 1815, some 140 Highlanders were transported to Upper Canada and disembarked at Holland Landing in the fall of that year. Some of the families proceeded down Yonge Street to the provincial capital of York, later

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finding employment amongst the settlements adjacent to the road. Others journeyed southwest and took up land in the Talbot settlement in the present Norfolk and Elgin counties. As in all Highland communities, the clan instinct is very strong, a fact that prevented the band from disintegrating completely.

After working at temporary jobs in settlements along Yonge Street, they once again gathered and in 1819 moved in a body to take up land in West Gwillimbury Township. By 1823 the Highlanders were hold-

ing religious services in a building on the site of the present Auld Kirk. This was replaced in 1827 by a frame structure, which, in turn, was succeeded by the present-day brick church in front of which stands the plaque to commemorate the settlement, and today many descendants of the Highland pioneers—the Sutherlands, McBeths, MacDonalds, Campbells, including some Irish families who were amongst them, can still be found in this fertile and prosperous region of Simcoe County.

At the Sunday ceremonies a plaque will also be unveiled to the memory of the late Mr. and Mrs. James McKay by their nephew, Mr. Henry McKay.

Bradford Witness

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