

LOOKING BACK OVER THE CENTURY

1815 — by C. T. S. Evans, Q.C.
(Continued from March 29)

For the health and welfare of its citizens the council are very zealous and West Gwillimbury was the first and is the only township in the province as yet to organize and sign us as a group under the Blue Cross Hospital Care Plan, which has certainly been a marvelous boon for many of the citizens.

Along educational lines the township has continued to progress since the first grammar school at Bond Head.

Ultimately there were 16 Public School Sections in the township and recently the township was one of the first in Simcoe County to establish a Public School Area and set up one Board for the operation and management of all Public Schools.

The township co-operated in the forming of a High School District comprising Bradford and all of the township excepting a small part in the north-west corner which was included in the Aliston High School District.

It would appear that West Gwillimbury has all the advantages of the surrounding town-
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ships and its citizens have every reason to be proud of their municipality.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding developments since the first settlers came to Simcoe County was the reclamation of the Holland Marsh and West Gwillimbury was fortunate that a very substantial acreage of this area lies within its borders.

The story of the development of the Marsh from a great expanse of waste land into one of the richest and most valuable garden tracts in the Dominion of Canada is more romantic than many fairy tales and to deal with it thoroughly would fill a big book.

In the space at our disposal we can only scratch the surface. The Holland Marsh is the river valley of the Holland and Schomberg Rivers and takes its name from Major S. Holland, the first Surveyor-General of Upper Canada. In 1825 the Marsh was described by John Galt of the Canada Company as a "mere ditch swarming with bull frogs and water snakes."

Until the present development the land was generally considered practically worthless and, except for some marsh

hay or grass which was harvested and used at one time for mattresses and latterly for packing, no benefit was derived from the marsh land. By way of contrast, in 1949 the Department of Planning and Development estimated that this former waste land would now be valued at from \$600.00 to \$800.00 an acre and in 1948 would produce a crop with an estimated sales value of \$5,500,000.00, which is greater than the 1948 production value of either the Lakeshore, Wright-Hargreaves or Kerr-Addison mines. As a matter of fact many sales of marsh land have been made at \$1,000.00 per acre and some higher.

The late W. D. Watson, who operated a grocery store on the site of The Village Inn in Bradford was an enthusiastic supporter of the drainage project and the late Professor Day was the prime mover in the development.

In 1924 a petition was presented to the council of which J. F. Hambly was Reeve and L. A. Neilly, Percy Selby, W. J. Dales and the late Herman Lennox were Councillors.

This Council deserves a very great deal of credit for the subsequent development as there was a very great difference of opinion at that time as to the wisdom of the project which would involve very considerable expenditure. However, the Council proceeded and carried the matter through to completion. We are informed by one of the members of that council that a motion was prepared by T. W. W. Evans, Township Solicitor, moved by L. A. Neilly and seconded by W. J. Dales, for the letting of the contract. The motion was carried and it is perhaps one of the most important and far-reaching of many thousands of motions appearing in the township records.

The story of the construction of the work and the development from 1925 until the present time with its problems and its difficulties and how these were overcome with enterprise, imagination and vision but more than all these was good honest toil, is a most remarkable one.

Apart altogether from the benefit by way of increased land values and returns from the land the township has gained tremendously in the addition to its population of a large group of market gardeners, chiefly new Canadians. These citizens have come to West Gwillimbury from many parts of Canada and from many different countries outside Canada and by their vision and industry are making a tremendous contribution to the life and welfare

of the community. They are most welcome and worthwhile additions.

West Gwillimbury has many other advantages but we seem to have used up the space allotted to us. We do hope that from time to time the history of the township may be recorded and preserved. We are satisfied that those persons living in West Gwillimbury are very fortunate and that the affairs of the township are in good hands.

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