

History Of Gilford

(Contributed by Mrs. Robert Boyes)

In the year 1855, Squire Thos. Maconchy of Bradford bought 200 acres of land in the township of West Gwillimbury, lots 21 and 23. This was some twenty years after the settlers arrived in the district. There were acres of virgin pine and a railway running through when the first official train passed on October 4th, 1853. On the corner of lot 21, a mile from the water of Cook's Bay, a mill was built to saw the felled trees into lumber for which there was a demand, both at home and abroad. The nucleus of a village grew. The lumber business brought carpenters. Abraham Rankin brought a planer from Aurora in 1860 and established a shingle, lath and cooper shop. Dwellings, stores and three hotels were built. A private school was conducted for a while. The first public school was built in 1868.

Religious services were conducted at the home of Mrs. Jas. Short, formerly of County Antrim, Ireland. The Anglican minister, Rev. Ruttan of Bradford, held religious service in a home. The first services held by the Methodists were in the mill in 1861, with a stump for a pulpit, and new lumber for seats. Later the present edifice was erected in 1864. Mr. Jos. Robinson, head sawyer at the mill and very active in church work, was largely responsible for this building. He used to go to Victoria (later Stroud) on a hand car on the railroad to bring a minister to preach.

Miss Margaret Richardson, sister-in-law of Mr. John Lennox, presented the large Bible and hymn book to the church.

Rev. R. Langford was the first minister and Mr. John Lennox the first Sunday School superintendent. J. C. Neilly organized the first choir, using a tuning fork.

Squire Thos. Maconchy gave the land for a site and cut the lumber free at the mill. He and Wm. Neilly collected money to build the church. It was built by hand labour.

In 1867, Mr. Creswick of Barrie surveyed the hamlet into lots and streets. The streets were named as follows: Main, Front, John, Thomas and Breard. The village was named by Mrs. Thos. Maconchy, who came from near Gilford, Ireland. Her native place was Cookstown, Ireland, but there already was a Cookstown, a few miles away. In 1870 the railway station was built.

The eastern shore line of the waters of Cook's Bay and a bit of the Holland River marsh remained in their natural condition until a few years ago.

To see the many fine cars going to and fro to Gilford Beach is arresting. A few years ago, Mr. L. A. Neilly reclaimed the shore line of the Broken Front, (the short concession and the one bordering on the Town Line between West Gwillimbury and Innisfil townships). Mr. Neilly's fifty-six rods of frontage is now taken up with summer cottages. This is a delightful beauty spot.

The late Thos. Nesbitt had lake shore property on the shore between the Gilford line and the 14th and held the hope it could be dredged and turned into value. His son, George, is carrying out the idea and already has a number of attractive cottages and a boat harbour in the making. Mr. L. Neilly Jr. has a very fine boat harbour, well equipped.

H. Douglas Rothwell, who served the Hydro Power Commission of Ontario for forty-two years and liaison officer of the St. Lawrence Seaway, began an orchard some years ago and now has some 6,000 fruit trees, with a building for sorting, cold storage, etc. The apple picking season is a very lively one with men, women and youths picking apples.

The hamlet of Gilford grew very fast for a time and folks thought it would be a place of considerable size, but the new railway passing through Cookstown changed things. Grain from the areas of Rosemont, Cookstown and other places were formerly marketed at Gilford. A common sight to see wagon loads of grain in line as far as the sideroad from the station.

At one time a station agent and other railroad men lived in Gilford. A general store and sometimes an additional one, two hotels (another hotel was just west of the Maconchy and Blain store). It was burned and the others later went out of business. A tailor shop, a skilled gardener, a blacksmith shop, a cobbler shop, as well as a thriving cheese factory, formed a part of the industrial life.

Five saw mills were operated in the neighbourhood, one near the railway station in Ross Neilly's field, another at Sampson West's (now Porritt property), another at Eagle Hill (Andrew Bell's). The grand-

father of the late Balmer Neilly, once owned the MacBeth farm and another managed by Thos. Maconchy near Fennell's Corner. This was unfortunately burned at a heavy loss to the owner.

An industry of earlier years was lumbering and five saw mills were operated in the locality—two by Squire Thos. Maconchy; one in Gilford in Ross Neilly's field not far from the railway station; one at Fennells on the property of Mr. Robert Bateman, Innisfil side. This was unfortunately burned at a great loss to the owner. A mill was on the Sampson West property (now the Porritt farm). At Eagle Hill, a mill was run by Mr. Andrew Neilly, grandfather of the late Balmer Neilly. Another, a short distance away, was run by the MacBeths. So the beautiful pine and other timbers went to build houses, barns and supply foreign markets.

We are proud to mention Rev. Wm. Neilly, Rev. Andrew Neilly, Rev. Ernest Bennett, Rev. George Tindall and Rev. Robert Sturgeon, all raised on the farms adjoining Gilford Section or very near to it.

We would like to mention others, who have helped to make Gilford and its surroundings a pleasant and profitable place to live. Such would be impossible to estimate because there have been so many fine and courteous things.

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The following is the standing of the best pupils in the various classes of Bond Head School for September:

4th Class.—Laura Richardson, 598; Ida Skinner, 581; Katie Carswell, 554.

3rd Class.—Sadie McCarthy 474; Bertha McNaught, 464; Annie Carswell, 432.

2nd Class.—Clara Atcheson, 298; Lillie Skinner, 278; Willie Donnelly, 205; Elcy Atcheson, 186.

2nd Part 1st.—Amy McKay, 160; Minnie Donnelly, 157; Maud Gilkinson, 101.

Sr. 1st.—Arthur Phillips, 103; Lillie Gilkinson, 84.

Jr. 1st.—Laura Burling, 111; Louisa Hall, 95; Bert Hall, 93; Mercedes Manning 73.

Jas. G. Rogers, Teacher.