

NGHS



# Quarterly

September 2012



Concrete Works in Riverside Park area, c. 1905

The Journal of the  
North Grenville Historical Society

Vol. 5 No. 1

## NOTES AND REPORTS

This new issue of the *Quarterly* comes quite some time after our last appearance. The past year has been very much taken up with developments at the North Grenville Archives and the many fast and drastic changes that have powered the NGHS along to our current position. Since we last published the *Quarterly*, we have successfully campaigned for rent-free status for the Archives, published a very successful book, launched a new permanent display case at the Municipal Centre, presented our annual Heritage Awards, worked closely with the NG Heritage Advisory Committee in erecting a number of historical plaques around the Municipality, collaborated with the North Grenville Photography Club on a photographic history of the old school houses in North Grenville, and responded to more inquiries to the Archives than I can remember.

The Society has also worked on a project with the United Counties in connection with the War of 1812 bi-centennial, researching and analysing settlement in Leeds & Grenville following the end of that war. We have had another Annual General Meeting, where we elected a new Executive and heard reports on the past year from the President, Treasurer and Archivist. The Executive names and contact information are listed in the box to the right.

A more complete report on some of these developments will be found in this issue. For now, we look forward to another new season of speakers, events, awards and a continuing growth of the NGHS as we continue to raise the profile of history and heritage for the people of our community. Given the rapid growth taking place in North Grenville, this responsibility has never been greater.

Dr. David Shanahan, President, NGHS.

## The North Grenville Historical Society

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Membership fee is \$20.00 per household or \$15 per person per year and is renewable in January of each year. Our meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Old Town Hall, 15 Water Street, Kemptville, beginning at 7.30 p.m. except for the months of July, August and December. The annual meeting for the election of officers and the presentation of the annual report is in January of each year. The North Grenville Archives is open by appointment. Call: 613-258-4401.

# NORTH GRENVILLE'S PAST

## POST-WAR SETTLEMENT IN NORTH GRENVILLE

### 1814-1820

#### 1. The War of 1812

When war broke out between the United States and Britain in 1812, there were assumptions made, on both sides, concerning what the conflict would bring. The Americans believed the war would inevitably lead to the absorption of at least Upper Canada into the United States, with the future addition of the lands west of the Great Lakes in years to come. In many ways, the British Government shared that belief. The initial strategy of the Crown was to withdraw all military forces from Upper Canada for the protection of Quebec and Montreal. Without the initiative of General Isaac Brock, and the essential aid of First Nations allies, this would have been done and Upper Canada would have been left to the American occupation forces.

The facts on which this assumption were based were clear. Upper Canada had a population of about 75,000 spread over a thin strip of land stretching from Cornwall to the Niagara Peninsula. New York State alone had about one million inhabitants. What's more, it was estimated that about 60% of the people of Upper Canada were American-born. Although some of these were Loyalists who had fled the revolutionary wars before 1784, these only accounted for about 8,000 people. The majority of the Upper Canadian population were settlers who had taken advantage of the free land policies in Upper Canada after the end of the American Revolution, the loyalty of whom was unclear at the very least. This led the American authorities to believe that an invading American army would meet with a warm welcome, leading to a short campaign to "liberate" Upper Canada. The British feared that this was quite likely; hence the plan to retreat behind the Ottawa River.

But the impressive defense of the Niagara Peninsula by British, First Nations and militia forces, stemming from Brock's decision to keep his troops in the province, meant that most of the fighting took place in that region, where the population on the American side of the border was not nearly as overwhelming as it was further east. The supremacy of the British naval forces in Lake Ontario also preserved the province from more dangerous incursions by the Americans.

#### 2. Post-War Planning

As the war was coming to an end in late-1814, the British authorities began to turn their minds to potential future conflicts and to learn what lessons they could from the events of the previous two years. Encouraged, no doubt, by the fact that Upper Canada had not become easy prey to the Americans, yet aware also that this was due to circumstances that might not be repeated, the Government drew up a three-point plan for the future.

The vulnerability of the St. Lawrence corridor to enemy attack was recognised. The solution arrived at was that an alternate supply route between Lower Canada and Lake Ontario had to be found. This, it was hoped, would be far enough away from the frontier as to be safe from American raids or even a full-scale invasion. The next step in the plan was to ensure the safety of the new route. To guarantee this, the Government decided to offer free land around the route to discharged soldiers who had served in Canada during the war.

The third point of the Government's plan was one which recognised the fact that, while discharged soldiers would be good defenders of the new supply route in time of conflict, there was also an urgent need for civilian

settlers to fill in the empty land of Upper Canada. However, the large American-born population of 1812 was not something that the Government wished to maintain, so the new settlers would be found in Britain and Ireland. The balance between Americans and British would be adjusted in favour of those deemed more loyal and less “democratically tainted” than Americans.

On December 6, 1814, a General Order was issued proclaiming the Crown’s intention of settling discharged soldiers on lands in Upper Canada. The difficulty was knowing where these soldiers could be placed. On February 9, 1815 Surveyor General Thomas Ridout was informed of the proposed scheme and ordered to launch an investigation to identify possible locations for settlements. The original idea was to find a location where the soldiers could be settled in close proximity to each other. A Military Depot would be established at a central site, from which provisions, tools and other necessities could be issued to the settlers for the first year of the project. Ridout’s report was not very welcome to the Government. Their intention was to locate the soldiers close to the new route, which they had already tentatively sited along the Rideau and down to Gananoque. The Surveyor General gave as his opinion that:

“...The Townships in the Eastern, Johnstown and Midland Districts will afford but little or small portions of Land for new settlements, the whole being nearly located; nor is the Soil or Climate so fine as in the South Western part of the Province....”

Ridout’s criteria were different from those of the Government. He looked for a location “most eligible for good settlement”, whereas the British Government was not interested in the welfare of the settlers, but the protection of the Rideau route. That meant finding land in the east - precisely where Ridout said there was “little or small portions of Land for new settlements”.

Ridout was instructed to look again at the eastern end of the province, and was told that no-one would be settled in the west until the east was filled up with

settlers. By 1812, the lands bordering either side of the Rideau had been surveyed into townships and lands granted there to Loyalists after 1802. Not all of this land had been settled, but it was taken, leaving only the Crown and Clergy Reserves vacant in many townships. These were lots, amounting to two-sevenths of all the lots in a township, which had been set aside for the benefit of the Crown and the Anglican Church. The idea was that these lots would be rented or sold and the proceeds would finance Government and Church operations. They were almost all still vacant by the end of the War, owing to the plentiful free or cheap land remaining on the province. But the Upper Canadian authorities, dominated by Loyalists, did not accept that the Crown Reserves should be used for discharged soldiers, or poor immigrants, as long as many Loyalists had still not been granted their full allowance of free land. This led to serious complications in the allocating of lands to the soldiers and arriving immigrants.

Nevertheless, in Oxford-on-Rideau Township, almost all the lots other than the Crown and Clergy Reserves had been patented by 1802. Yet the actual population of the entire township in 1809 was 41. The problem in the interior townships was access: until the Rideau Canal was finished, access to the interior townships depended on the very few roads that existed, and whatever navigable waters went through the townships. And these same factors were to have an enormous impact on the future direction of settlement after the end of the War of 1812.

### 3. Settling the Newcomers

The British Government had always been determined not to encourage emigration from the British Isles. The post-war scheme they were now proposing was meant instead to redirect those already planning to emigrate. Instead of going to the United States, these migrants would be supported by the Crown in moving to the Canadas. The level of support was quite significant, as

advertised in local newspapers in February, 1814:

“A passage and provisions during the voyage will be furnished by government, and on their arrival in the colony, a grant of 100 acres of land will be secured to each family, of which they will be put immediately in possession, and all their male children actually residing in the province will be entitled, on attaining the age of 21 years, to a similar grant of 100 acres each.”

In addition, food, supplies and equipment would be provided at low cost for at least a year after departure from Europe. These emigrants were men and women who had the drive and ambition, not to mention the money, to make this bold move across the Atlantic. In fact, in spite of the generous terms offered by the Government, migrants were required to put up significant deposits of money in order to qualify for the scheme:

“Every male person above sixteen years of age, £16 sterling; every woman, being the wife of any person so embarking, £2.2s; children under sixteen years of age will be conveyed free of expense; and whatever sums may be so paid by them will be repaid to them or their representatives in Canada, at the end of two years from the date of their embarkation, upon its being ascertained that they are settled on the grant of land allotted to them...”

The War of 1812 had greatly expanded trade between the Canadas and Great Britain. The war with Napoleon had cut Britain off from her traditional sources of lumber in the Baltic region, and her North American colonies had supplied the urgent need for wood for ship building in the Royal Navy. After the war, these ships were returning empty from Europe and could easily accommodate emigrating settlers.

Military personnel were not required to put up any deposit: it was felt that their contribution, as potential defenders of the lines of communications, was sufficient. Initially, only discharged soldiers from the regular army regiments who had served in Upper Canada during the war were offered free land under the scheme. But the

offer was gradually extended to other units of the British Forces, whether they had served in the Canadas or not, and to the Fencible Militia Regiments. These were militia who were recruited to serve outside their county boundaries.

#### 4. The Project Moves North

On July 17, 1815, a Military Order was issued at Kingston regarding the allocation of land to discharged soldiers. Each soldier was to get 100 acres free of charge, but could not dispose of it for at least 3 years. Officers were to get 200 acres or more, with the same three year occupancy condition. Settlers were to receive provisions and implements for one year.

The size of the project required a great deal of organisation. Feeding and equipping so many families and individuals was going to take a great deal of material, especially given the delays in surveying and granting the lands. It was therefore decided to establish Depots from which provisions and equipment could be easily distributed to the new arrivals. One was to be set up between the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers to cater to those settlers on land from the mouth of the Rideau as far upstream as was navigable. This Depot later became the village of Richmond.

But to reach the townships further upstream it was necessary to establish a Depot somewhere that could be reached from the Saint Lawrence. Reuben Sherwood, a surveyor, of an influential Loyalist pioneer family, and with grants of land south of the Rideau, reported to Alexander McDonnell in July, 1815:

“...there is no way of getting to Rideau from Cornwall except you go up the Ottawa, or return to Fort Wellington where the 1<sup>st</sup> Road leads out, being a very good one, on which part of the public monies have been expended, distant 18 miles - waggon plenty to be hired - and at Merrick's Mills - will be the proper place to build some small craft to run down the river with, forming your depot in Oxford - which will be about the centre of your

Townships on the Rideau.”

McDonnell reported to his superior, arguing that Oxford should be the location of the Depot:

“A sufficiency of waggons can be procured to carry out a load in a day and Return the next, and a depot fixed at Oxford would supply 15 Townships watered by the Rideau. From Cornwall to that river the transport of Provisions is almost impossible & the distance more than double through a swampy country...Oxford which is situated on the Rideau & well situated for a Depot. This Depot to Receive its supplies for this year from Fort Wellington but hereafter from Montreal...”

With the decision to establish the Depot in Oxford, it became important to locate soldiers there as quickly as possible. A survey of the Township was conducted to identify the lots required and sub-divide them into 100-acre lots “agreeable to instructions from the Superintendent to run all the Crown Reserves into 100 acre lots for the disbanded soldiers”. McDonnell wrote to the Military Secretary in August to inform him of the steps being taken to locate the discharged military:

“...On the 10<sup>th</sup> Mr. Reuben Sherwood met me & informed me that it was His Excellency’s pleasure that the first Locations for Settlement should be in the Townships of Oxford, Wolford, Montague & Marlborough. I made Tickets out accordingly for Lots in those Townships for which the Settlers now here drew yesterday, as per inclosed List ...I purpose going to the Rideau tomorrow with Mr. Sherwood to fix on a spot for the Depot, & when I return will submit the site to His Excellency’s determination...”

Everything seemed to be on course for Oxford-on-Rideau to become the centre of the new settlement.

But when McDonnell actually arrived in Oxford, he found that things were not as positive as Sherwood had led him to believe. There were many obstacles in the river between Burritt’s Rapids and Merrickville [then called Merrick’s Mills]. At first, McDonnell considered moving the Depot to Merrick’s Mills, but even that seemed

unwise:

“Before I went to the Rideau, I conceived from the information which I had received, that spot to be the best for a Depot - ocular demonstration has convinced me of the contrary - from the crossing of the South Branch of the Rideaux by the Lower Road, to the Middle Branch the Road is bad, & often crossing the Middle Branch for a great distance much worse - from Burritt’s in Marlboro, to Merrick’s Mill there are four shoals with hardly a sufficiency of water in many parts for an empty canoe & at Merricks the Mill Dam crosses the River from side to side - thus the communication by water with the Townships above Merricks is prevented until the obstruction is removed.”

McDonnell then moved on to Easton’s Corners, where he rented a store as a temporary Depot, as even by then it was becoming apparent that there would not be room enough in the old Townships for the number of settlers expected to arrive looking for land. In August, 1815, McDonnell reported to Robinson that:

“The Surveyed Lots in Montague, Marlboro, Oxford & Wolford are all taken up & as the next Locations will be in the Upper Townships, Easton’s is the most eligible place for the Depot at present, but I think that in the vicinity of Smiths Falls in Elmsley the best situation for a final Depot will be found. To ascertain which I yesterday sent a Surveyor from Brockville ....”

But after visiting the area around Smith’s Falls in person, and receiving the report of the surveyor sent to examine the location, McDonnell was forced to rethink his plans yet again:

“I am strengthened in the opinion I already gave, that in the neighbourhood of Smith’s Falls, the best place for a final Depot would be found, but unfortunately the Lots in the vicinity of the Falls have all been granted as appears from the Schedules with which I have been furnished by the Surveyor General, yet I think a favourable spot may be procured.”

But ultimately the new Depot would follow the

majority of settlers across the Rideau and grow up to become the Town of Perth. The very name of the Settlement would change from the Oxford Military Settlement to the Perth Military Settlement and the focus of attention and development would shift away from Leeds & Grenville.

In some ways, the cart had been put before the horse. The Military Settlement Depot bypassed Leeds & Grenville because the Rideau was not sufficiently navigable to allow supplies to be transported along its full length. Had the Rideau Canal been built before the settlement of the land around it was begun, then the River would have allowed McDonnell's original plans to be implemented and the area of Oxford and Wolford would have been at the centre of the project.

In September, 1815, McDonnell made another report and acknowledged that there simply was not enough land available in Leeds & Grenville to support the kind of compact settlement that had been planned by the Government. He believed it would be urgently necessary to survey completely new townships north of Montague and Elmsley:

"In the Lower Townships, viz. North & South Gower & Nepean, there appear to be vacant 86 lots of 200 acres each, & 18 of from 180 to 10 acres each...The last mentioned Locations added to those already made in the Townships of Oxford, Marlboro, Montague, Wolford, Kitley & Bastard, give a decided superiority of population..."

The "decided superiority of population" to which McDonnell refers meant that the new arrivals would outnumber the existing "disloyal" American settlers in those Townships - one of the main aims of the settlement project.

The Government had been forced to use the Crown Reserves, much to the anger and dismay of the Loyalist population. But even that had not been enough, and, in March 1816, Drummond ordered the survey of new Townships north of the Rideau.

## 5. Settling Leeds & Grenville

For now, the information presented here is simply an initial report on research to date. The numbers in bold indicate the total number of settlers, civilian and military, who received grants in that township.

South Gower: 14

It is thought that the reason no military settlers were assigned lands in South Gower was because the location of the Township did not require military defense of the Rideau corridor. Hence, the Township was assigned only emigrants, fourteen in all, who arrived in 1817 and 1818.

Four of these did not receive Patents before 1839, and of these James Eager, another settler, bought three of the lots involved. Six other settlers were gone by 1860. Lot 11 in Concession 5 seems to have remained in the same family until 1914. James Eager's property remained in his family until the 1970's, and the family remains in the area today.

Oxford: 38

Oxford Township was resurveyed in 1815-1816 in order to find land for soldier settlers, as that Township was being considered as a location for the Military depot to service the entire Rideau Military Settlement. Very little unpatented land remained in the township, however, aside from the Crown Reserves, and this, along with difficulties of navigating the Rideau between Merrick's Mills and Burritt's Rapids, led to the proposed Depot being located at Perth. Nevertheless, Oxford Township received the third-largest number of settlers under the Military Settlement project, and retains a number of the original families to this day.

Fourteen migrants were assigned land in Oxford-on-Rideau Township, all but two Irish and ten of whom arrived in 1817. The earliest patents were issued in 1824, one to Thomas Webster for a lot originally granted to

Edward Elson. According to his patent, Webster had taken up the land very early as an "Emigrant settler", and Elson probably never came to Oxford. The Hobbs brothers shared a lot, but their location was cancelled in 1839. James O'Hara had 200 acres patented to him instead of the original 100 he had been assigned. He sold the land in 1830. I other sold in 1824, another two in the 1860's. John Howay lost his land through a Power of Sale to the Incorporated Synod of Ontario in 1895. The family remained in Oxford until at least 1900.

A number of the original families still reside in Oxford, or did until recently. These include the Tompkins, Bolton, Christie (of Christie's Corners) and Main families.

Twenty-four discharged soldiers were also assigned land in Oxford. Of these, sixteen were located in 1815, and, as in Kitley and Wolford, there were fifteen privates and one sergeant. The eight who were located in 1817 and 1818 were all sergeants, except for one private, one ensign and an adjutant. Ten soldiers failed to receive patents, and the land went to others. Four others sold up in the 1820's, and another six in the 1830's. Another two lasted until the 1850's before selling. One lot, shared by two soldiers, went to the Finlay family who were related to one of the original settlers, James Quigley. The other original owner was Michael Kennan. Part of lot 3, concession 2, patented to Isaac Brown in 1820, was sold by the Brown's in 1900 to the Haskins family, who retained it until around 1977.

The immediate effect of this influx of settlers can be seen when comparing the population of pre- and post-war North Grenville.

Pop of Oxford	1801: 14	1822: 268
Pop of South Gower	1805: 170	1821: 348

South Gower had a head start on Oxford in terms of settlement, owing to the major road that ran through the township linking Prescott and Bytown. Oxford, on the other hand, had to wait for the Military Settlement and then the Rideau Canal before taking off. But when it did, it quickly outgrew South Gower and at a faster rate.

## 6. Opening the Floodgates

The Military Settlement scheme of 1815-1820 was the start of the great immigration flood into Canada that lasted for another hundred years. Ruth McKenzie, in her "Leeds and Grenville: Their First Two Hundred Years", states that most of the immigrants of the Military Settlement years were Scottish. While that may have been true north of the Rideau, it was the Irish who dominated settlement in Leeds & Grenville. Probably about 65% of these were Protestant and helped to define the society and culture of North Grenville for the rest of its history. These families brought new ideas and societies like the Orange Order to North Grenville and were the start of a flood of Irish immigration to Canada that ended around 1855, by which time they were the largest ethnic group in the country.

In Leeds & Grenville, 73.8% of the immigrants were Irish and only 15% Scottish and 11.5% from England. There is, unfortunately, no sure way of knowing the ethnicity of the soldiers who settled. North Grenville had a mixed settlement pattern. Of the 14 immigrants who settled in South Gower, 3 were Irish, 5 Scottish and 6 English. Of the 14 who settled in Oxford, 12 were Irish, and one each was from Scotland and England. South Gower had a different ethnic make-up than Oxford, and it will be interesting to see what the long-term results of that may have been.

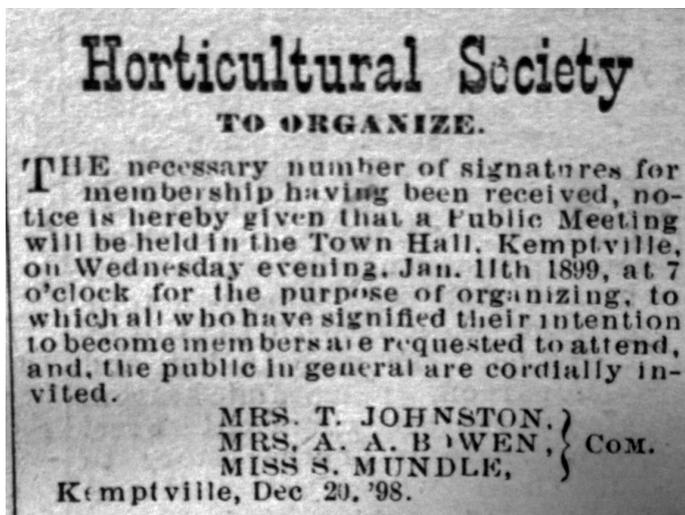
The Military Settlement certainly had a huge influence on British North America. In 1815, before the immigration began, about 680 individuals left the British Isles for British North America. In 1816, that number leaped to 3,370. In the following years, it continued to grow, with 23,534 leaving in 1819. The War of 1812 was a relatively minor event in the military history of Canada and the British Empire, but the resulting flood of settlement to Canada changed that country forever.

Dr. David Shanahan

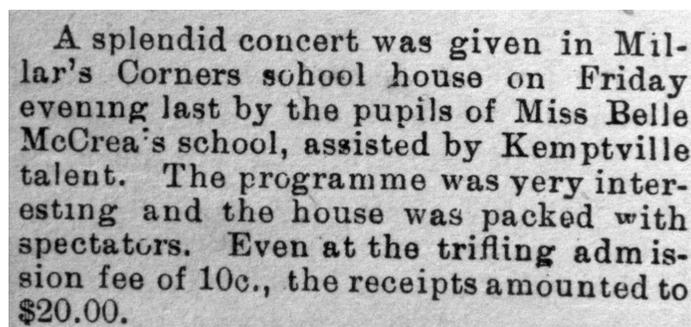
# The Kemptville Centurion

Annotated excerpts from the Kemptville Advance for December, 1898 for the edification and amusement of our loyal readers.

attending that night remain from Miss Belle McCrea's school.



The beginning of the Horticultural Society, "the necessary number of signatures for membership having been received".



## Ghosts of the Past 1:

Millar's Corners School saw a great deal of activity in its day, and the concert in December, 1898 was clearly a great success. The school is long gone now and only the ghosts of those 200 people

## Kemptville In A Muddle

The present Council being determined that the latter part of their term of office be as much occupied in permanent improvements of the corporation...accepted John Flannigan's tender for the "building of stone piers or abutments and approaches thereto for a bridge" near Clothier's mill...the work was begun early last week with a staff of 8 or 10 men. The old structure and butments at either end were torn down and the gang of workmen were getting along well with the excavation when Bailiff Sweeney put in an appearance about 11 o'clock and served the contractor with an injunction. He had also served Reeve Taylor with a similar document. The workmen ceased and as a consequence there will be no crossing there for some time.

The signatures attached to the injunction are those of W. H. Mundle, W.H. Anderson (merchant), Dr. Jones, Dr. Hanna, A. Buchanan, J. G. Pelton, T. Conley, John Patterson, Samuel Patterson and A. D. Mc Lennan. The grounds of their complaint are that there are no funds on hand for the erection of the bridge, also that one of the present councillors was not legally elected.

The case will be heard at Brockville next

Tuesday.

*[This early attempt at revitalising Kemptville was part of a long-running political feud that led to the establishment of a second newspaper in the town and furthered the career of G. Howard Ferguson. The bridge in question was the swing bridge on Bridge Street.]*

### **Local News**

Since the beginning of skating several persons have broken through the ice but thus far no fatalities have occurred. *[Thus far!!??]*

The people at St. James' Church are making all the necessary preparations for a grand New Year Festival. No pains will be spared to maintain its former reputation for excellence.

On Tuesday forenoon, Mrs. E. Gilmour of Oxford Mills had the misfortune to fall down stairs, causing a fractured shoulder. Medical aid was quickly summoned and the patient is now doing as well as could be expected.

Peter Arcaw of South Gower met with a serious accident a few days ago. When in the act of chopping, the axe struck his knee, cutting the cap almost entirely off. He delayed in getting medical attendance and consequently is now having a serious time with the injured limb.

*[Why would anyone delay getting medical help after almost cutting off your knee cap??]*

### **Don't Want Brother Dissected**

On Saturday afternoon Wm. Eastman of Oxford Station returned from Ottawa where he had

gone to procure the remains of his brother George who died in the Carleton County hospital on 26<sup>th</sup> Nov. George is said to have worked on Eligh's boat during the summer but after leaving that occupation caught a severe cold which led to a serious illness, and having no home he went to Ottawa three weeks ago where he gained admission into the hospital. The medical attendant had advised Wm. Hinton of the young man's illness and in sending word of his death addressed his card to Wm. Milton, hence the delay. On going to the city William was informed that as no friend applied for the body nor paid the necessary burial expenses, the remains had been sent to Queen's College, Kingston. Like most people, William had a tender spot in his heart, and to think of his brother being dissected by a lot of jolly and perhaps reckless students was a thought he could not entertain. He at once communicated with Principal Grant by telegram but received a reply to the effect that no one there knew anything about the body of George Eastman.

Mr. Eastman has since received word that he will be able to get possession of the remains of his brother.

No doubt the remains of many who were solemnly placed in the quiet cemeteries, and supposed to be there still, whose memory is refreshed by plants, flowers and bouquets, have also found a place on the dissecting table.

*[That final sentence is troubling! One other thought: why would he be worried that the students dissecting his brother might be "reckless"??]*

## Ghosts of the Past 2:

The building that once housed the Baptist Church in Kemptville still stands on Clothier Street West, though it is hardly recognisable these days. It is the oldest church building in North Grenville, dating from the 1840's.

### Anniversary Services.

There was a good attendance at the Baptist S. School anniversary in this village. On Sunday Rev. Mr. Cameron of Ottawa delivered excellent sermons morning and evening and good music was furnished by the choir, assisted at the evening service by D. E. Pelton. On Monday evening Rev. Mr. Cameron delivered a splendid lecture entitled, "How to make the most of oneself." The pupils of the Sunday School contributed greatly to the evening's programme by giving several selections of music and recitations. The ever popular Vernon choir was present and gave three fine anthems, while one of its members, Benj. McConnell, sang a bass solo in splendid style. The Misses Allen gave a duett with good taste. Miss Eastman delighted the audience with her rendering of "Mona," and Mr. Emery as usual received hearty applause for his humorous recitations as did also Miss Loio Pelton whose selections were highly appreciated.

The lecturer was heard here some 17 years ago at the re-opening of the church after it had been thoroughly overhauled and improved.

### Christie's Corners

Cupid has again entrapped one of our young men in the person of David McCaughey who has satiated his passions in the bonds of holy matrimony, his choice being Miss Jane Tomkins of Millar's Corners.

*[What an odd way to phrase this: "satiated his passion in the bonds of holy matrimony"?)*

## Our Birthday.

With this issue THE ADVANCE begins its 10th year, notwithstanding the discouraging predictions made by a few when it first made its appearance. Without the aid of any "booming" our subscription list has been steadily and continually increasing so that it now reaches the circles of very nearly one thousand homes every week. During these years its columns have been occasionally darkened with the death notices of many of its readers, and again brightened by the announcements of little ones coming to adorn the homes of our citizens, as well as extending congratulations and best wishes to those who have been joined in heart and hand at the bridal altar and have since been sailing over life's tempestuous ocean. Amid the many changes that have transpired, Kemptville has been moving forward with a steady pace and to-day holds a higher position in the opinion of the business world than ever before. To enumerate the particular lines in which this place surpasses many more pretentious villages, and towns as well, might cause jealousy, so we refrain. The people of Kemptville are determined that this village will keep in the front rank and THE ADVANCE will always take pleasure in letting the world know.

*The Advance, Dec. 8, 1898 celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday.*



# First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville: 1957-2012

## Part One

### Introduction

When First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville was organized in 1957 its mission seemed simple: bring Dutch Reformed immigrants together in a local Reformed church. Two successive Christian Reformed home missionaries worked among the immigrants. They assisted in organizing the worship services, the council meetings, family visits, catechism and profession of faith classes and fellowship events.

The success of church building depended on a sufficient number of families settling in the area. The congregation started out with seventeen families at inauguration. Some families joined from neighbouring Christian Reformed Churches in Williamsburg (1955), Brockville (1952), Athens (1957), Cornwall (1950) and Ottawa (Calvin 1955; Calvary 1958). There was a significant fluctuation in the membership numbers, possibly from seventeen to twenty seven and any number in between. Families moved again when things did not work out or the farm sold well to upgrade to another farm. Sometimes close relatives in another community drew people to move out or in and for some the tie with family in the Netherlands made the trip back the only move. By 1968 the number of families had stabilized at nineteen and by 1982 at thirty six. The numbers are still a concern as they have gone up and down between thirty six and sixty five.

The original community was quite diverse in its religious background. Families had left behind the

Gereformeerde Kerk, the Hervormde Kerk and the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk. Some had no church connection in the Netherlands yet connected with the congregation because of the Dutch language and family ties. The membership also had diverse geographical roots in the Netherlands. A number of Dutch provinces with unique customs and diverse languages were represented among them. It arrived with experiences and memories of Nazi racism and oppression during WWII.

### The Founding Families

The founding families of the church were all Dutch immigrants from various provinces and denominations in the Netherlands. Some knew each other already back home but most were strangers to each other only kin through the emigration experiences and the faith. In interviews held with the surviving members and children it became clear that a closely knit relationship developed quickly.

After a decade, in 1968, the church had only grown marginally to nineteen families. Rev. Smit and Spoelhof, served the small congregation ably and determinedly. After Rev Charles Spoelhof retired the church was vacant for six years. Survival of the small congregation was felt to be critical. One elder commented that he 'read a lot of sermons during those years'. Then in 1968 they were able to attract a young couple that accepted the call to minister in the small church.

The number of families was closely tracked in the new immigrant congregation to the point that a new family remembered their number: "We were family seventeen' and 'Our family was number nineteen." Some of those interviewed even remembered their number in other congregations. In 2012 there are still two members of the founding families attending. Various members of thirteen families from the first decade (1957 to 1968) are still represented in the current membership. Of the second generation fourteen children continued their membership with approximately fifty eight children in the third generation.

However, only nine continued their membership at the Kemptville church while the others moved elsewhere. The nine provided five children into the fourth generation so far. One can conclude that First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville has not been sustainable on the offspring of its founding families.

Two explanation for this may be that the church has immigrant roots and therefore a highly transient membership. The rural location of the church attracts the youth towards the urban centres for education and employment. The church has benefitted from new families choosing a Reformed church as their church family by intermarriage or moving. However, since 2010 the membership has been declining with new families arriving and moving on to other local denominations.

## One Another

Starting a congregation in 1957 took resources and faith. Besides church there were many other commitments: getting a (better) car; starting a business with tools; planning a farm with machinery, buildings, crops and livestock; supplying a young family with food, clothing and schooling; fix up or build the house. Participating in church building was

sacrificial considering money and time. If a couple of families moved away the same commitments were shared by a smaller group. Making one major mistake in judgment as a family or church could mean losing everything and being set back for years. The interviews allude at these being adventurous but also personally demanding years.

No wonder that Sunday services were times of comfort and fellowship. The men would gather regularly around the oil stove after the service while the women found their own places to chat. Sharing their weekly stories, debating suggestions and advice, laughing at funny incidents and crying from homesickness and loneliness on sharing news about relatives back home. In these intimate moments a bond grew between a people of various Reformed denominations and Dutch provinces.

But there were also other underlying feelings: jealousy at someone's better crops, strive in getting ahead faster than other immigrants, arguing about what could and could not be approved in congregational plans and life. Unity has remained a recurring theme in the fellowship of the church till this day.

The church in 1957 was characterized by its Dutch ethnicity and Reformed traditions. Looking back it is intriguing to see how the social make-up of the membership has grown and adapted to the Canadian cultural landscape.

After five years a Baptist Canadian couple did profession of faith and had their six children baptized. However, they were transferred to British Columbia soon after. Then in 1968 another Presbyterian Canadian family arrived from Alberta and stayed. They became an incentive for the church leadership to switch permanently to the English language in worship and meetings. The youth, receiving their

Below is a comparison of the Dutch and the Canadian or other ethnic groups represented in the membership by decades:

Members of Dutch and Canadian or Other Ethnic Origins

Year	Dutch	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	Other	Total
1957	68	19	0	0	0	87
1968	57	29	0	0	9	95
1982	49	85	29	0	7	170
1994	48	70	37	2	19	176
2007	26	53	68	0	37	184
2011	21	55	57	10	35	178

Source: Interviews and Annual Church Directories

schooling in English, were quite approving of switch. Some families protested and carried on in Dutch socially and at home.

In a few of the interviews there were references made to a Christian Reformed Church minister who encouraging new families to settle close to the church building. However, this did not happen. Many of the families came to farm and their place of settlement was based on availability and price of good land rather than closeness to the church building. The record shows that most households lived more than ten, some over thirty, kilometers from the building.

Contrary to Canadian mainline churches whose members generally live within a few kilometers of their building, this Reformed church – and possibly others also - experience a greater spread of their membership. As the occupations of the members diversified the choice of living closer to the church became more attainable. However, in Christian Reformed congregations it is known that

living close to the Christian School was a stronger factor in house selection than living close to the church. Since a Christian School did not open in Kemptville that factor has not played a role here. Whether families chose other communities, Ottawa, Metcalfe, Brockville or Williamsburg over Kemptville because of the Christian school there, is beyond the scope of this paper.

The reason of the founders for locating the church in Kemptville may have been strictly geographical, central among the other CRC's. The other reason may have been finding a suitable place to meet for worship. The choice is somewhat surprising since only one family lived in town. The others settled on farms in the vicinity. Of course Kemptville hosted one of the four Ontario Agricultural Colleges but education may not have been on their mind yet. Even though Kemptville was a small rural town in the fifties there was a thriving agricultural community. The land was not of the quality Dutch farmers knew back home but the price was right for

them to make a start.

## Farming

Many of the Dutch immigrants after WWII left the Netherlands with the dream of owning their own farm. Fourteen out of the original seventeen founding families went into farming of one type or another. The price of land in Eastern Ontario was more reasonable than that in South Western Ontario. The better land there was sold and settled sooner. Canadian farmers were keen to make more money in the burgeoning manufacturing trades. They were glad to meet the demand of farms for cash by the Dutch immigrants.

Farming was a family business. Although willingness to work hard and enthusiasm for the opportunity were evident in abundance, there was new knowledge to be gained about the soil, the climate, the animals and the machinery. Some did well and others failed at it. However, they moved on to something else defeated or revived.

There was quite a range of ages among the immigrants. At least three of the founding couples were sixty years of age or in their late fifties. Most other couples were recently married in the Netherlands or in Canada. Some of the young men explored the opportunities in Canada first, went back to Holland to marry and returned together.

Their farm experience differed widely. Some had grown up on the farm and farming had been in the family for generations. Others had no farm experience and literally started with their bare hands clearing yards and fields, cleaning run down homes, fixing used tools and machinery, preparing land with horses and plow. The early younger couples would buy an affordable place, start small and build the business up fast. They were adventurous and enterprising. One of them shared how he purchased the first four-row corn planter in Eastern Ontario.

During the next twenty years the young immigrant farmers were better trained at the Dutch Lower and Middle Agricultural Schools. They compared well with locally trained farmers in working with dairy, cash crops and soil management. It should be noted that the immigrant farmers were immediately involved in one of the primary sources of income in Canada. The church, with other Canadian churches, has participated for many years in supporting the Canadian Food Grains Bank. Feeding the family and the community led to feeding people throughout the world. Recently dairy and cash crop farming have reached new production records thanks to increased application of technology. The treasures of the farm have blessed many around the world.

## Other Occupations

The membership of the church started with farmers and homemakers, but soon expanded to the trades, professionals, government employees and retirees.

Diversification of occupations was caused foremost by a new education law of the Ontario Provincial government. It raised the compulsory school age to sixteen and later eighteen for boys and girls. Soon students continued their education by entering community college for training in the trades and university for a Bachelor's degree. This law significantly expanded the educated workforce. The daughters left the farm for a teaching, social service or administrative job in town or the city.

The early immigrants maintained tightly-knit families which was enforced by the one room schools. The expanded educational opportunities for young people brought personal opportunities and significant changes to the family. The positive and negative effects on the family, and consequently on the church, was only perceived by few immigrants initially. The positive effects were better knowledge

## Occupations Represented Among the Membership

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>1957</b>	<b>1968</b>	<b>1982</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Farming</b>	14	11	14	15	8	11
<b>Trades</b>	2	1	7	11	14	15
<b>Sales</b>	0	1	4	7	2	2
<b>Childcare</b>	0	0	0	1	2	2
<b>Retired</b>	0	0	6	18	25	26
<b>Professional</b>	0	4	12	4	18	18
<b>Government</b>	0	1	3	7	7	6
<b>Homemaker</b>	17	19	32	33	10	15
<b>Services</b>	0	0	7	11	7	8
<b>Management</b>	1	0	1	1	7	6
<b>Retail</b>	0	1	2	2	4	1
<b>Missions</b>	0	0	0	0	2	2
<b>Other</b>	0	0	2	0	0	0

Source: Interviews and Annual Church Directories

of the culture, diverse occupational opportunities and more spending power. The negative effects were a greater influence of material wealth on life's choices and the increasing individualization of members of the family. The church benefitted by increased giving and expansion of programs but suffered from a weakened Reformed World and Life view, a decreasing commitment to Christian discipleship and increasing demands on members' time by busy-ness.

### Entrepreneurs

One interesting factor that shows up in the occupational numbers, is the high number of those

self employed or entrepreneurs. The church membership consists of a significant percentage of business entrepreneurs, although diminished in farming it expanded in the trades and services.

*In the next issue, I'll discuss the various buildings and services used by the congregation and the relationship with the surrounding North Grenville community.*

By Harmen Boersma