

HISTORICAL GLIMPSE OF NORTH DUNDAS TOWNSHIP

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Settlement began along the South Nation River with the first settlers arriving by water, or by overland trails from the St Lawrence River. Settler farmers cut a forced road along the banks of the South Nation River from Spencerville to Armstrong Mills, (Chesterville) to supplement river transport and facilitate the movement of goods and people especially in winter. The river flood plain was wet clay, often peat covered bogs. Consequently many surveyed roads could not be opened so the settlers built numerous “forced” roads along gravel ridges to access homes and markets.

Settlement began in Mountain and Winchester Townships about 1800, following surveys of the townships. The number of settlers only became significant after the War of 1812-1815. Early settlers included second generation United Empire Loyalist families from the St. Lawrence Front, such as the Armstrong’s who took up land in the first and second concessions of Mountain, while the Van Camps settled in the 3rd concession near South Mountain and the 5th and 6th concessions the site of Van Camps` Mills.

A second group of settlers were individuals such as Benjamin Bigford and George Hummell who purchased their lots from Loyalist grantees. Other groups followed from England, Ireland and Scotland, such as the Hyndman, Monteith and Baldwin families.

Lots were cleared for farming and an economy based on resource exploitation developed. Brush and timber not used for homes and farm buildings nor shipped to a mill, were burned, the ash collected and sold for processing into potash. Hides from slaughtered sheep, cattle and hogs formed the basis for tannery businesses. Mills were built to saw lumber and to grind grain. Farmers cleared about 50 acres: half was used for crops, the balance for hay and pasture. The remaining 50 acres were left in bush.

Farm life was very basic, with homes and buildings built of logs and squared timbers with a fireplace and chimney for heat and cooking. Initially most of the farm produce was processed by the farm family for their own use. Wool was

washed, carded, spun and woven by the women who then made the family clothing. They also processed milk producing butter and cheese. Cattle, sheep, hogs and fowl were eaten fresh or salted for winter use. Root vegetables would be stored in root cellars, or salted for long term storage. Fruits were dried. Grain was ground and baked for bread and pastries or used to make beverages if not used for fowl and animal feed. Fish, fowl and game were harvested to provide variety to the diet or as staples during crop failures.

With a growing farm base, tradesmen such as blacksmiths, tinsmiths, coopers (barrel makers), carpenters, cabinet makers, shoemakers, tailors, wheelwrights, waggon makers, harness makers and saddlers set up business in conjunction with general merchants and the resource processors such as millers, tanners and potash processors. Following them teachers, ministers and personal service providers arrived. The economy was preindustrial with most products made locally.

Thomas Armstrong, an Irish immigrant, purchased a mill site in 1828 from farmer George Hummell. Armstrong built the dam to create the reservoir to power his lumber and grist mills. Armstrong's Mills (later Winchester and today Chesterville) quickly became the commercial centre for Winchester Township. It was a community for merchants and crafts people operating a cash and credit economy where staples such as salt, sugar, basic metal tools and pots and pans, lumber and flour, cloth, barrels, windows, basic furniture, shoes, clothes, waggons, and harness could be purchased. Schools, churches and taverns followed. The community grew quickly on both sides of the river, mostly located on lots developed and sold by Hummell.

A similar development occurred at Bishops Mills (later Inkerman) where saw and grist mills were built on the North Branch of the South Nation River. Inkerman like Chesterville in Winchester Township quickly became the leading community in Mountain Township.

Smaller saw mills were built by farmers such as the Grahams west of South Mountain; the Van Camps north of Inkerman and the Woolagans west of Chesterville. The smaller mills located on river subsidiaries, had limited water supply storage, so only operated about 4 months of the year. They provided a market for local timber, and manufactured lumber for homes and buildings in the town sites and for farm homes and barns of prospering farmers. Both the Grahams and Van Camps would prosper and build stone homes.

The population increased through arrival of migrants such as John Baldwin, who settled at the original site of South Mountain, located at the Brinston Road and County Road 3, 2 miles east of the current site of South Mountain. Following the completion of the Rideau Canal, and the St. Lawrence River Canals, there was a further influx of Irish labourers adding to the size and diversity of the population.

South Mountain (at its present site) soon eclipsed Inkerman. While water was still used to move and store logs, steam power was adapted to drive the saws at several mills. Lewis Grant operated a grist mill there, as early as 1835. Brick making was another early business. By 1851, G. F. Shaver operated both a saw and grist mill, perhaps in collaboration with the Guernsey family. Shortly afterwards Lotan E. Wilson was operating a carding, fulling and weaving business.

By 1871, following a period of intense land speculation, mill ownership was in the hands of the Hyndman family (Joseph, James and David) and they operated saw, stave, grist, and flour mills and perhaps were involved in door or window manufacturing. The Bowen family competed with a saw and shingle mill and there were other smaller mills. Grist mill technology also changed from stones to rollers, increasing quality and quantity of product and lowering costs of production.

Both Chesterville and South Mountain grew with: wool carding, fulling and weaving mills; oatmeal chopping mills; shingle mills and related commerce and manufacturing associated with farming. The Armstrong Mill site (where the buildings had burned) was rebuilt as a steam powered flour and grist mill under the guidance of the Barrie family and continued under their direction for almost a century.

Winchester, (Bates Corners and West Winchester), developed later, as clearance of forest extended north wards from the river towards the Winchester Bog. Like the other towns and villages, it provided goods and services to farm families and processed natural products such as timber, lumber, wool and milk. The Beach family built saw, grist and planing mills and later expanded into furniture manufacture. Wood was manufactured into a wide range of products. Later they built a foundry. At the turn of the century the foundry was moved to Ottawa. As the village prospered, business, services, social, cultural and educational institutions developed.

Like Winchester, Morewood in the north of Winchester Township developed later, based on farm product and resource exploitation. The Carlyle and Moffatt families built steam powered mills, merchants such as the Mckays, Revelers, and Hunters operated stores, the Smirles and Boucks operated blacksmith shops which produced many essential metal goods, repaired machinery as well as shod horses, the heart of business and individual families' transportation system. From its earliest days like most surrounding communities it had a strong commitment to public education.

The American civil war (1861-65) brought an economic boom for agricultural producers as the American Union Army needed massive quantities of food and drink, and prices rose dramatically. For a brief period Mountain farmers grew hops for the American brewing industry and both townships saw a ready market for their grains and livestock.

Agriculture changed after 1865 with growing industrialization. Cheese and butter production moved out of the home and into small factories. Like schools, for ease of access, the plants were located three to five miles apart. This development led to increased demand for milk. Farmers began to clear their bush lots to increase corn production and to plant turnip crops to feed their growing dairy herds. By the turn of the century, deforestation had become a serious problem with less than 10% of the land remaining in forest. It took almost a century to restore adequate forest cover.

Farm machinery, such as mechanical mowers, planters, and later tractors, began to change farming. It reduced the need for animal and human labour and increased productivity. Steam powered equipment such as threshers followed, maintaining the pace of change. Farm drains and tile drainage were introduced to drain the flat, wet, boggy agricultural lands of the South Nation River Valley and its subsidiary the Castor River. Drainage extended the growing season by permitting earlier and much later access to the fields and reduced the possibility of crop failure through inopportune heavy rain falls and floods.

Winchester Springs rose to prominence because of its natural sulphur springs. People were reputed to come in summer and tent while taking "the healing waters". As evidence of the growing wealth of the community and the improvements in roads and travel, a three story brick health sanatorium and spa was built to take advantage of the famous sulphur springs water. About 1870, Dr

W. G. Anderson purchased the property and with medical colleagues treated the weak, dyspeptic, sick and disabled.

Health tourism was a major factor in the economy of “the Springs” for the next 34 years. Guests were met at train stations and bussed in carriages to the San. In addition to medical treatment which included drinking and bathing in the waters, guests would stroll the landscaped grounds; play tennis or croquet; attend concerts and participate in fancy balls. Business men could use the on-site telegraph office to keep track of business interests, while receiving treatment. The belief in the benefits of treatment using sulphur spring water seems to have declined by 1904 when Dr Anderson died, and the Sanatorium was converted to a hotel. It later closed and stood abandoned until demolished.

“The Springs”, which had an elegant school, three churches and other facilities, then reverted to an agricultural service centre. It had a small saw mill, a cheese and butter factory, a pump manufacturer, plus general merchants, a grocer, carriage maker, blacksmith, tinsmith etc. Most of these businesses gradually faded away as the general economy and technology changed.

The construction of the railway in the 1880’s impacted both townships and Winchester and Chesterville. First it led to establishment of new communities such as, Mountain Station and Inkerman Station as the rail line bypassed older communities. The box cars moved liquid milk, butter, cheese and livestock to dynamic urban markets. It also provided easy access to the urban centres for economic, personal, educational, medical and related purposes. In return, it brought cheap manufactures: clothing, furniture, hardware and tools. This gradually displaced many local tradesmen such as carpenters, cabinet makers, tailors, shoemakers, tinsmiths and blacksmiths.

Significantly, the railway changed business and personal communication. Mail and the newspapers were delivered more efficiently. More importantly the telegraph speeded up communications. World events news was instantly available to the press and the public, and helped break down rural isolation. Soon the telephone was introduced into the villages and used first by businesses and the affluent.

By 1900, many older businesses such as the water and steam powered mills had closed, as the local wood supply was largely exhausted, and technology had

changed. The saw mills in South Mountain appear to have closed by 1914 and were not replaced.

New industries generally replaced the old. At Chesterville a food collection and processing business, the “Refrigerator” was established. Its agents purchased farm produce: butter, chickens, produce etc., throughout Eastern Ontario for processing and exportation to urban and international markets.

This was followed by establishment of a milk Condensory which subsequently grew into a large food processing business, later operated by Nestlé. This required that a sewer system be installed in Chesterville to keep waste from polluting the river, the source of the water needed for plant operations. The factory provided good industrial jobs which ensured the growth and prosperity of Chesterville for almost a century.

The Ault cheese factory relocated from its Cass Bridge river site into Winchester. It expanded its list of dairy based products and became a major force in the long term growth of Winchester. In time, control passed from the Ault family to Labatt Industries and later to Parmalat. It became the dominant business in the village.

By the end of the century, Chesterville, Winchester, South Mountain and Mountain Station were the predominant urban centres and several had separate municipal governance status, independent from the Township Councils. Each had schools, churches, libraries, parks, recreation facilities, moderate sized retail stores, professional health care: medical, dental and veterinarian, legal services, fraternal societies and most had a weekly newspaper.

Electrification arrived with the introduction of village street lighting as an adjunct to business uses. Local generators of electrical power were soon displaced by a provincial Crown corporation. However with more efficient and reliable energy and mechanization, labour demand contracted and population growth began to stagnate and then decline.

The turn of the 19th century was a positive time for local governments. With a growing Canadian economy, bolstered by high levels of immigration directed to settlement of the Canadian west, came rising prices, incomes and taxes. The county and townships carried out many initiatives: promoted farm land drainage programs; constructed many roads on previously boggy, unopened road allowances

and rebuilt many forced roads to support the growth of farm production and the local economy. These improvements promoted development for much of the next century.

Volunteers from the townships served with the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and other regiments and participated in many Canadian Expeditionary Force battalions which fought in Europe during the First World War. Development and manufacturing of mechanized war weapons, communications and transport laid the groundwork for major changes in the post war economy.

Farm mechanization continued to drive change within the townships. Constant improvements to tractors and harvesting equipment complimented by the development of cars and trucks, displaced horses and much human labour.

Electrification of farms began, introducing electrical motors which changed milking from laborious hand to mechanical systems. It brought similar changes to the farm home where washing machines, electrical stoves and appliances simplified work for the farm wife. At the same time, the economic depression of the 1930s placed rural families under great pressures and stresses as commodity prices fell, income dropped and financial independence was threatened. Reformers called for income support and social services to stabilize and support families and communities.

The Second World War like the First was the source of much development and change. Farmers were urged to maximize production with a minimum use of labour in order to help feed besieged Britain and Europe. Technological innovations developed during the war were rapidly disseminated when factories converted to peace time production. This greatly increased the pace of change. Many traditional business activities including retail were consolidated into larger stores in urban centres. This undermined small town retail businesses. Migrants from the Netherlands entered the agricultural sector and enriched and enlivened the already complex society.

Farms also continued to change. Over the past 60 years, 100 & 200 acres farms have gradually been consolidated into much larger operations, usually exceeding 1000 acres. This resulted in a significant decline in the number of farms and coupled with improved mechanization, an incredible reduction of farm population.

Tractors were improved and standardized with massive diesel engines, universal power take off and the three point hitch. They now pull massive ploughs, discs and cultivating units, sophisticated seeders, mowers and haying equipment. Sophisticated equipment such as combines displaced several independent pieces of machinery, further reducing the need for farm labour. Today a few operators can harvest hundreds of acres in a short period. Specialized local businesses developed to sell, service and maintain the very complex farm machinery and equipment as well as to market bulk crops.

Local businesses were developed to service the new generation of home appliances. Increasingly, domestic consumer appliances were designed with limited operating lives, requiring replacement rather than repair. The local repair technicians have passed the way of the tailor and shoemaker. The disposable era also has challenged municipal government to dispose or recycle complex electronic, chemical based and natural materials.

Universal electrification has transformed farming, especially dairy farming: with powered milking equipment and refrigerated milk storage. It has also facilitated large scale fowl, egg and hog operations. Milk transport switched from use of milk cans to bulk shipping in refrigerated trucks.

Concerns with volatile commodity prices and extremely variable farm incomes were addressed by establishment of the supply management/Quota system which regulates milk, egg and fowl production. It guarantees producers a stable income. The Ault dairy factory in Winchester became a central depot where milk was delivered, allocated and processed and this has also helped to stabilize the local economy.

Farming which remains the basis of the regional economy has become very specialized. Producers such as dairy farms are being consolidated into very large businesses, as are egg, fowl and pork production. Mixed farming has generally disappeared and many farmers have become cash croppers, planting corn and beans in rotation and contracting out many operations such as seeding, fertilizing, spraying and combining. Like a century before, bush lots, fence lines and river banks are once again being cleared of trees to maximize production and optimize the use of massive equipment. Once again it is putting at risk a diverse and healthy environment.

Universal electrification has changed the home and led to universal adoption of home heating, refrigeration and appliances. Rapid improvement of clothes washers and driers, refrigerators, freezers, dish washers and electrical stoves continued to revolutionize the home and the role of the housewife, with many women now working outside the home and experiencing the stress of their urban counterpart.

The telephone, followed by computers and smart phones have revolutionized interpersonal relationships. High speed internet has placed North Dundas at the centre of world events.

The petroleum industry has also been a major transformative force on farms, in homes and in the community. Oil, natural gas and propane have displaced wood and coal for farm operations, home heating and personal transportation.

Oil also displaced coal and steam to power railway trains. Powerful diesel engines, upgrades to rails and novel specialized cars, tankers and hoppers, have led to the operation of much larger trains.

The modern highway system has displaced rail from its role of moving people, mail, produce, livestock and individualized parcel goods. In their place, rail has adapted by hauling bulk materials such as the grains shipped from the Parrish & Heimbecker elevators in Winchester, plus coal, oil and chemicals; specialized large items such as automobiles; as well as containerized manufactured goods. Most of these are delivered to large regional warehouses or industrial plants in major urban centres, bypassing the Township. As a result, the need for local rail labour has been centralized and has declined.

Trucking companies such as JED Express now haul a wide range of goods and interlink with railways to provide localized deliveries of containerized goods. Rail oriented communities such as Mountain Station and Inkerman Station have stagnated and declined.

Cars, running on cheap hydrocarbons, have become the transport system of choice for individuals and have displaced rail and local bus service for moving individuals. With greater mobility, individuals regularly access large, big box regional shopping centres, leaving local retailers to develop niche markets.

Multinational companies now manage most of the larger businesses, including farm machinery, milk processing, seed supply, fertilizer sales, grain and feed elevators. Ironically, the Saunders feed mill which was established in Inkerman in the 1940's, and now under multinational ownership has been recently rebuilt and delivers bulk feeds to the large industrial dairy, chicken, livestock and pork farms of Eastern Ontario. Most of the smaller feed mills such as at South Mountain have closed or have been taken over and consolidated by multinationals or regional operators such as Ritchie Feed and Seed.

Niche markets have developed for specialized production such as organic and non GMO crops, vineyards, non-traditional animal production such as buffalo, deer, goat and elk, and heritage breeds such as the Tamworth hog, as well as vegetable and fruit production. Mike Dean, beginning as a Chesterville butcher has developed into a regional grocery chain.

In contrast with most wood resource based industry which closed by 1914, local initiative in 1948 in Morewood developed sash and door manufacturing. Since 1991, Guildcrest Homes has been a major industry in Morewood. It operates an industrial based home construction factory. The company uses traditional and modern materials but modern industrial processes to build energy efficient modular homes, for delivery to markets across Ontario and parts of Western Quebec.

Personal services remain an important part of the local economy. Financial planning and management, health, cosmetic and communications services have grown quickly, some locally owned, some parts of national corporations.

Local government has also been transformed. North Dundas Township was created by combining all the municipal corporations within the former Mountain and Winchester Townships. The municipal government now has a small, full-time professional administration, based in Winchester, and serving a growing urban oriented population. It continues to operate in collaboration with the Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry county government and neighbouring and other levels of government. Policing, once a village responsibility, has been consolidated, standardized and contracted to the Ontario Provincial Police.

Federal and provincial governments have devolved many responsibilities such as maintenance of major roads, and have enacted standards and imposed responsibilities on the municipality for planning, garbage disposal and recycling,

sewage and septic systems, and safe water delivery. The municipality which once served mainly isolated agricultural oriented families now hosts many growing exurban residential communities, which are linked to the city of Ottawa, but where the families seek rural or community living in a natural environment.

In an increasingly complex, science-based society, specialized agencies such as South Nation Conservation are providing many high level environmental community services on a regional basis. Often in partnership with municipalities it provides septic system approvals and inspections, source water protection, forestry management, woodlot advisory services, flood plain mapping and environment related planning services.

Institutional services such as educational and health have also grown beyond their traditional local basis. Now organized into large corporate structures they provide a professional level of public services and through size and financial capacity impact the economy of the region.

Where in the 19th and early 20th centuries, fraternal Societies such as the Odd fellows, Order of Foresters and Church related groups provided economic, health, social and other forms of support for members in difficulty, many of these supports have moved to government health, income support and social services supported programs and to insurance industries and to private institutionalized services such as residences for the aged and for the chronically ill. Income support remains a problem and the Dundas County Food Bank has developed to mitigate this issue.

Schools have been consolidated under the multi-county Upper Canada District School Board which operates a large centralized complex the North Dundas District (combined) Middle and High School on Maple Ridge in North Dundas. Its size requires that students be bussed in. Elementary schools have also been consolidated into larger buildings and rely on bussing to collect their compliment of students. Teachers are highly trained and appropriately compensated. The decline in the birth rate and so numbers of young people is causing major adjustment problems for the School Board.

Libraries have also been consolidated and are managed on a County-wide basis. The library board has branches in most villages but provides speedy user access to the complete library holdings.

The Eastern Ontario Health unit is organized and provides public health services on a multi-county basis. It collaborates with the provincial Champlain Local Health Integration Network which plans for, allocates resources, and directs the development and delivery of health care, hospital, institutional and community services, health education and individual health care services and support.

The Winchester and District Memorial Hospital is a regional health institution which has a major impact on the economy and on the health and wellbeing of township and county residents. Built after 1945, it has been completely rebuilt and its services reoriented to provide 21st century hospital, outreach services and health education to residents reaching into the suburban fringes of the City of Ottawa. With an aging population, there is a growth in seniors' homes and respite care, served by both public and private sectors and which is increasingly linked with health and hospital service delivery.

The region has changed radically since the forest was cleared and resource exploitation, today primarily monoculture farming, began. Agriculture has been the basis of the economy but has continually evolved and productivity has risen remarkably since the introduction of machinery. Consequently the size of farms has grown and the number of farms and persons employed in the agro-industry has fallen.

The economy has diversified, resting now on resource production, servicing and processing; plus governmental, health, education and other institutional services; retail and services industries. The development of the communications industry now provides additional opportunities and challenges for North Dundas. It remains a rural centre with traditional values and yet is now open and accessible to the world.