

S. S. NO 1 COCKBURN ISLAND, TOLSMVILLE

From the earliest days Indians have lived on Cockburn Island. Plentiful game, abundance of fish, and a long coast line together have made this island a hunter's paradise, first for the Indians and in later days for both Indians and Whites.

The Indian population has always been a small one, fewer than one hundred at any time. Finally, the Indians thought that the island was large enough to make a home for the winter man also. So they entered into a treaty with the government, and the white man came in the seventies.

According to our oldest inhabitants, Mr. Tolsma, an American, was the first white man. He was a fisherman and Tolsmaville, the village to-day, was named after him.

By 1880, we find a number of others had arrived. In fact by this time, the Goodmurphy family from Prince Edward County was definitely established. The farm know as the "OLD HOMESTEAD" at the Block is still occupied by a grandson. Other early farmers were Malcolm McCaig, Malcolm Clarke, Mr. Brown and John Street. In passing, it is worthy of note that a grandson of Malcolm McCaig still occupies the farm his grandfather carved from the wilderness.

Donald Hall was the first to clear a farm on the "Twelfth" other farmers moved in and cleared farms, built cabins, then houses. They converted Indian Trails into roads. Step by step civilization moved on, and to-day we find modern farms, homes and roads whose foundations were firmly laid by those pioneers.

In 1880 there were no schools or churches here. Donald Hall conducted Sunday School in his own home.

William Pateman was another pioneer who came to Cockburn from near Toronto. Formerly his home had been in England. Here he took up farming and timbering.

Always Cockburn has been without a doctor. William Pateman was the first who turned his services that way. He also was local bone-setter, dentist and veterinary. John Street also served in the same capacity. His wife was the local nurse. Another lady, remembered for her dealings with the sick was Mrs. Robert Reid.

In 1881, a Mr. Brancombe came to Cockburn. He was interested in Cockburn's future. His advertising of the Island elsewhere in Ontario brought an added trade. We are told that at times the Bay was alive with sailing vessels whose captains were interested in the timber and fishing wealth.

Cockburn has its tales of pioneer hardships too, In 1882 came Mr. Rombough and family. Mr. Rombough tells of a trip on a jumper into the wilderness to the location of his home to be. Oxen pulled the conveyance, and water bogged them down once, wetting their bundles and boxes. Much of the lumber that went into building his home was carried on his shoulders for miles.

To-day we have two mails a week, though storms occasionally narrow it down to once a week. In the winter, weeks may go by without mail. But in the 1880's, mail came hardly twice a month. Always it meant a hazardous journey in a small boat over uncertain water.

Cockburn grew steadily in population. Once the Island boasted over 600 residents. The "tenth" was opened up. More farms were hewed from the forests at the "Block". The 12th had more than ten farms.

In 1910 a large American Company, Ross and Wentworth, purchased more than half the timber lots on Cockburn. Needless to say, industry boomed. Such modern machines as bull-dozers, tractors and trucks were used by the company in later years. A mill was erected at the Bay to manufacture some of the raw material cut.

By this time a general store, an United Church and Orange Hall had come into being. Tolsmaville contained a population of more than one hundred, the mill employing a number of outside workers. Flood's Boarding house was built to accommodate the mill-hands and the comers and goers.

To-day finds Cockburn Island much smaller in population. Many of the farms and homes have been deserted for greener fields, especially since the advent of the present war. The unrest which will follow the peace will likely see many of the former residents of the Island back in their homes. Almost, as of first, food can be obtained cheaply and easily from the field and the nearby woods, and the remembrance of this will have a "come home" effect on the wanderers.

Sources of information:

Miss Jane McDowel, Mrs. J. Mogg, Mr. E.J. Smith, Mrs. L. Flood Miss McDowel, a former teacher, had partial information collected at the school, and I obtained this. The other willingly supplied information when asked about the subject.

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Teacher.