

THE HOLLAND MARSH

From information I could gather the work on our end of the marsh was not started until about 1929. I am informed the marsh road from the sixth concession to the eighth is not really a continuation of the town-line but is known as Concession 1 of the New Survey.

Wasteland has always presented a challenge to the Hollander. When he heard about this muckland he wanted to explore it. The Government paid passage for the immigrants and guaranteed them free taxes for five years. At this time a man by the name of Professor Day had become very interested in the marsh and wished to experiment with it. He didn't have enough cash to buy it so he formed a syndicate. After he had proved it a worthwhile proposition this group of men saw the possibility of making a lot of money and they worked it so Professor Day went bankrupt. This syndicate bought the land cheap and sold it at a great profit to the settlers.

Thirty years or more ago there were no roads through the marsh. The only means of travel was along the bank of the canal. The canal had been dug to drain the water from all the fields. King Township didn't have tractors and bulldozers so they hired a farmer to level the bank of the canal with his horses. Of course, the marsh wasn't broken then. It was covered with tamarack, trees and bush. The immigrants had to clear all the land by hand. This was very difficult not only for the immigrants but also for the highland farmers. Some of the farmers came to help the immigrants in order to help pay their own taxes.

The marsh farmers had to draw their vegetables to the sixth concession where truck drivers picked them up and took them into Toronto.

Land was much cheaper to buy then than now - 106 acres cost \$150.00. The immigrants had to borrow money from the Government to build their small homes. They soon discovered the land would have to be drained so the Holland River was dredged. This raised the taxes but improved the land. With the river draining well, each farmer dug several smaller ditches on their land that drained into it. At the end of the river at Holland Landing there is a pumphouse pumping day and night. This pumps the surplus water over the dyke over the Holland River at Bradford and into Lake Simcoe. In very dry weather the pump is stopped so the land will not dry out. Actually the pump is a protective device. It serves to carry off the surplus water and permits the farmers to get on the land earlier to get in early crops which bring the top prices.

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Who are these people who have come so far and with so little money? It takes great courage to leave one's native land for a country of different language and customs. But the pressure of taxation in the Lowlands, the threat of still a third world war, and the increasing domination of the labor factions all combined to make Europe a place better in memory than in reality.

Two families are from Belgium, two from Holland. All had known the invasion and occupation, and for some the liberation was almost as bad.

Joe VanDongen had the disheartening experience of having his buildings burnt by the invading Germans. He re-built on a smaller scale, only to have them all burned again by the liberating forces. He decided to bring his family to Canada. He recalls too well a night of horror spent in a ditch half-filled with water, trying to quiet his baby, and keep it from getting wet - or shot.

Louis DeClercq of Belgium was a large landowner over there, owned a couple of farms and a brewery. He was taken prisoner of war in both wars, arriving home so dreadfully then his wife didn't even know him. In both wars Mrs. DeClercq had known the indignities of occupation: "ca n'est pas agreable!" was her understatement.

Marcel Collez was a butcher in Belgium, his pretty wife a farm girl. Kees Stokkermans and his wife were from a well-to-do farm family. They still have difficulty with the language, but the children are already chattering English learned in school. The drawbacks of Canada? Only one - mosquitoes.

We're proud of the type of immigrants we've got on the land", said Gerard Vandenbussche. "These are real farmers, not merely farm hands, the kind that came 20 years ago with me. The farmer of the Old Country is a landed man, one of considerable wealth so to speak, and well-behaved. These people know how to work, and they are not afraid of long hours of back-breaking toil to get themselves settled. At night they will be packaging celery that they lifted during the day, maybe until 10 o'clock. They've got to get themselves established, even though they've got money back in the Old Country.

(Compiled by Doris Cook)

KING TOWNSHIP AND THE HOLLAND MARSH

King township has several natural features which give it special notoriety. The rolling hills and ridges which constitute its east-west backbone were formed by the pushing, plowing, squeezing action of great fingers of ice at the close of the last glacial period. These fingers extend from far to the east westward and lie between the bodies of water now known as Georgian Bay and Lake Ontario. When the glacier came to its end some ten or fifteen thousand years ago, the soil drift which it carried settled, or was carried about by the outrushing streams from its core and deposited in strange patterns of sand, gravel and clay. Long ridges composed of sand and gravel such as we now see in fields here and there trace the course of the "bleeding arteries" of the dying "glacial giant". We dig into them to obtain gravel for our roads, or sow our grain on their surfaces without a thought as to their interesting origin. We may think of the great hills that cross King Township as having always been there, yet they were not. These hills provide the very "look" of our township and determine much of its precise character. They indicate the direction of drainage and make Kettleby Creek, for example, flow north to the Holland River, and thence on to Lake Simcoe, Couchiching, Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, Lake St. Clair, Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and on down the St. Lawrence River to the sea. There are many little features of interest in our township if we will but look and see. Many of the little lakes dotted across the middle are situated in dimples in the land and have no outlet. The hollows mark where great chunks of glacier ice, perhaps buried in the debris, finally melted, leaving a pit in the general surface. They were not washed out by action of water.

The great marsh of the Holland River is perhaps the most important physical feature of the region. For the most part the broad valley which contains it was not formed by the carving action of running water. It was a bay of a great glacial lake, named Lake Algonquin, which once included Lakes Simcoe, Georgian Bay and all the upper Great Lakes. Once upon a time, therefore, Kettleby might have been a port from which we could have travelled by boat to Fort William more or less in a straight line - but, of course, there were no people in Kettleby then, in fact no boat and no Kettleby. At one post-glacial period there was a lesser lake in the Schomberg-Pottageville region. It drained down the Holland valley for a time but has long since disappeared. But before it died out it laid down a deposit of fine white clay which one can see here and there in the cut banks of creeks and streams.

After glaciation the country was a long time drying out. (now our fear is that it may get too dry). Eventually the land was covered by primeval forests of "cedar, hemlock and pine, with a little hardwood intermixed". Sound stubs of cedar may still be found some feet below the humus and close to the clay laid down by Lake Schomberg near Pottageville. With the forest came the birds and mammals, etc., which were the original settlers.

Finally there came a time when Indians occupied the region. They travelled much on the Holland River carrying their birch-bark canoes overland to and from the Humber. Their portage trail could not have been far from Kettleby and my guess is it was roughly along the line of the new highway, but, of course, it was not as wide, nor as straight, as the white man's road. Perhaps it was equally dangerous! Then white man too used this route (from 1610 to 1793) to get to Georgian Bay from Lake Ontario. The sound of their muskets surely echoed over Kettleby Ridge and their boats moved slowly up and down the meandering course of the Holland River.

King Township was originally surveyed in 1800 although subsequent alterations in 1851 gave it its present outline. The Township is said to embrace 86,014 acres. Much of it cannot be cultivated. The beauty and flavour of this region is due to its rough irregularity. Its hills, ponds, marshes and particularly its forest can be a source of spiritual profit if nothing else, but there is something else. The rough untilled land, especially if still forested, acts like a sponge and tends to hold back the wash of rains and soaks up the life-giving water for our wells and our streams. Ravish these situations and the top soil will disappear and the wells will go dry. Thus deserts are made. Draining the Holland Marsh was justifiable. By confining the water of the marsh to its present channels we do not desiccate the land, we merely control the position of the water to suit our purpose.

As to the exact history of the "marsh" as we know it to-day, I can give very little. The project was long talked about before it was undertaken. It represents an outstanding piece of engineering and reflects the solid, practical, long view of the people of this community. They have developed a splendid source of prosperity without destroying their environment in the process. So often in exploiting the land we "kill the goose that lays the golden egg". However, we must look to the preservation of our headwaters and uplands. We must preserve the forests, at the source, and along the course of our creeks. We should learn to contour plow. Perhaps we should turn back some poor rough land to mother nature.

This little sketch might be concluded by a few historic bits of local interest:

1. The corduroy ribs of the old winding stage-coach road from Kettleby to Lloydtown can still be seen on the Stephen Munshaw farm between Kettleby and Pottageville.
2. These stage coaches stopped at an inn in Pottageville which stood on the north east of the Lloydtown (Aurora-Schomberg road) and 7th concession corner. Merriman's house rests on the original foundation of this inn and these people occasionally find old English coins in their garden and chicken yard.
3. From the record of 1809 for this general region the regulations stipulated that "fences shall be five feet high" and "hogs shall be commoners".
4. Brass musical instruments were once manufactured at Holland Landing.
5. The great figure in our history, La Salle, once used the trail from the Humber to the Holland and thus past the site of Kettleby.

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Holland Marsh before development. Taken at end of the 6th concession. Car belonging to A.J. Hambleton