

James C Henderson 1800-1879

by Patsy Henderson Mayer

When I first started looking into my family History, I could not figure out why people would leave a "civilized" land, and travel ACROSS the ocean to an "uncivilized" land, then, in an article that a distant cousin had written, it all made sense.

At the close of war of 1812, the British government was faced with two major problems, unemployment & industrial depression at home and an uneasy peace with the Americans abroad. Upper Canada was still vulnerable to invasion and it was thought the interior should be settled as a strong line of defense against further hostilities.

An immigration scheme was put into effect to settle the great wilderness north and west of the Rideau River which flowed into the Ottawa.

The land which was purchased from the Chippewa and Missagissuga tribes included the present townships of Bathurst, Trummond, Beckwith and Goulbourn. It was part of the "Precambrian Shield" (the oldest rock in the world) and only some of the land was fit for agriculture, the remainder grew timber and much of it was swamp and rocky hillock.

To obtain the necessary settlers the British government offered special incentives to the people in England & Ireland. Besides free or low cost transportation, each head of family received an axe, shovel, hoe, scythe, knife, hammer, saw, kettle, nails, putty, 12 panes of glass, 2 files and a sharpening stone. Each man was allotted one hundred acres of land which he had to prove up.

And so, my great, great grandfather, James C Henderson, 18 years old, from Ballymina Ireland took up the challenge, and in 1819 he received title to his 100 acre strip, in Goulbourn township, Concession #11, Lot 12, where he spent his whole life.

Jane Neelin was born in Swanlimber, Cavin County, Ireland, in 1806, and came with her parents, Gregg and Margaret Neelin. They settled on a 100 acre strip close to James and on October 15, 1827, James Henderson and Jane Neelin were married at Munster, Ontario.

The Goodwood River and Kings Creek merged together a few miles North of their farm and the tributary came right through James's land. For the early pioneers, life was difficult, with the settlements being buried deep in the forest and far away from any large towns. The home, itself, was usually a crude cabin of thick logs, earthen floors, and stone fireplaces. Land clearing was a laborious process of dragging out the huge stumps with oxen, and later by a stump puller. The hoe was used to plant potatoes, which among the stumps, was the first food crop to survive. After the land was cleared, a wooden drag covered the handstrewn seeds, which was harvested with a scythe & collected into "stooks"

by the women, after which the grain was threshed with a "flail" on the barn floor.

The settlers made most of their own clothes, shoes, furniture, and cooking utensils. Their main foods were: maple syrup, honey, berries, wheat, oats, turnips and potatoes, plus such wild fowls & animals as they were able to shoot, trap, or raise themselves.

Ten children were born into this family from 1829-1847. The children were all baptized & received their schooling in North Gower, Ontario (which is now Ottawa, Ontario). James Henderson was an avid farmer all his life, he died at age 79, his wife Jane, age 86 and are both buried in Munster Cemetery, Goulbourne Township, Carleton County, Ontario.

John Henderson, their 2nd son, born November 22, 1830 is my great grandfather and found his way to Renville County in 1901 and you guessed it - they were opening up a quarter of land in Renville County to each of the brave souls who would come & prove it up.