

## **Wallaceburg: The Glass Capitol of Canada**

One can only hope that the shrinking of many decades of History to a few pages of type will not offend those who lived that History. Wallaceburg was originally settled by Scottish immigrants in 1804. Problems forced the relocation of the settlement to its present location at the forks of the North and East branches of the Sydenham River.

Early growth was due to a thriving Lumber Industry and where trees fell, agricultural crops were planted realizing a shift in prime industry to Agricultural trade and produce.

The settlement became a Village in 1875 and later a Town in 1890. Early industry included glass manufacture and wood products, but today industrial concerns span a wide variety of products in fields that demand a high degree of expertise and technology.

Present developments in the industrial, commercial and residential sectors bode well for the Community and a prosperous future is certain.

To appreciate Wallaceburg's history, the reader is directed to Chapter 37 of Romantic Kent "The Story of a County" written by Victor Lauriston and to " A History of Wallaceburg and Vicinity, 1804 to the Present", written by Frank Mann. A later edition entitled "Gathering at the Forks" by Alan and Frank Mann and a soon to be published book entitled "Settlement on the Sydenham" by Alan and Frank Mann are excellent preservations of an exciting History.

The Community continues to grow and History continues to be written.

### **Wallaceburg**

Wallaceburg is the second largest urban centre in the County. This is, no doubt, due to its advantageous position on the Sydenham, an ideal spot for a townsite from the point of view of boat traffic. Situated but a short distance inland from Lake St. Clair, it has, therefore, facilities for transportation by water second to no other town or village in the County.

Wallaceburg was founded by Selkirk settlers.

The inception of the town may be said to be a by-product of the Selkirk Settlement. Its history cannot be disassociated from that well meant but unfortunate venture. It was a Baldoon settler who built the first log houses and started the first clearance in its neighborhood. The first store and hotel were opened out by Laughlin McDougall, one of the original 'one hundred and eleven', where soon after him was located his two brothers, Archibald and Hector. It was a Baldoon schoolteacher, Hugh MacCallum that became its first postmaster and gave to the town its name, which he called after Scotland's patriot and soldier, Sir William Wallace. It was a Baldoon settler, Hector McLean, who settled on the lot where now stands the major portion of the town and it was a Baldoon settler, Lionel H. Johnson, who opened out the first blacksmith shop and store in the Northwest angle formed by the junction of the two rivers.

**Pioneer stores established on the South side of the river.**

The south bank of the river was the first to take upon itself the aspect of a village. On four adjacent lots, Twelve and Thirteen in the First Concession, and Twelve and Thirteen in the first Concession, and Twelve and thirteen in the Second Concession of the Township, then called Sombra but now Chatham Gore, four families had settled and established on their farms, three of them, stores, and the fourth a post office and school. These were the McGregors, a family of grown up sons of John McGregor who distinguished himself in the War of 1812 and to whom was given by the government eight hundred and fifty acres of land for the services he then rendered; James Baby who was a descendant of that honorable and prominent French family of Detroit, one of whom was appointed by governor Simcoe and Executive councilor for the Western district in the first parliament of Upper Canada; and Laughlin McDougall and Hugh McCallum, the above mentioned pioneers from the Baldoon Settlement. On the North bank of the river, there was erected in 1833 a frame building by one James Henderson in which he too kept a school. This building passed into the hands of Hector McDonald which he turned into a tavern or boarding house and kept there a place of entertainment for many years. This place, called then the 'Gore', has since become the principal business section of Wallaceburg and that which was last chosen as a business site has now become the first in importance and the chief centre for trade in the town.

### **Noticeable development did not begin until 1850.**

Although the Post Office was established as early as 1834 and the first survey of town lots made in 1837, it was not until about 1850 that the place gave any indications of developing into a centre of trade and industry such as it has since become. Like all other centres within the bounds of the County, the first and most important influence impelling a noticeably forward movement in its progress was that of the lumbering industry. The district round about was covered with the best of timber, especially oak and elm, and its good location as a vessel port gave to it an opportunity for advance when the timber became marketable, which its enterprising inhabitants were not slow to seize. For the next ten years the lumbering industry was at its height, and, save for the lull in the year 1857, when, owing to the financial hard times then existing, there was considerable unemployment among its inhabitants, Wallaceburg went forward with rapid strides. The lumber industry in this decade brought much business and settlers to the town. As it was with the Thames River, so also with the Sydenham, its banks were lined every winter with timber sticks and staves and in the spring of the year its waters were made hardly discernible because of the numerous quantities of these floating down on its surface to find a market at Detroit and elsewhere. But the prosperity came through the development of the surrounding farmlands and the establishment of industries. The next decade, 1860 to 1870, was a period of transition. As a source of employment every year in this period the timber business was getting more precarious. Every increase in the production and exportation of square timber, staves, lumber and cordwood, lessened the quantity of its agricultural productions increased, the village grew proportionately. It was not so rapid a progress as the lumber industry brought to it but it was permanent. Wallaceburg was saved from the fate of many other equally thriving lumber centres by its position on a navigable river and the rapid increase of settlement on the surrounding lands of the district. In the transition from one source of dependence to the other, progress lagged but did not entirely cease.

### **Boat traffic on the Sydenham was One of its first enterprises.**

When the country all around was a forest and the roads impassable owing to the low nature of the surrounding district, the Sydenham River became in the early history of the County the highway for lake sailing vessels and lumber barges. The first of these was built by Laughlin McDougall. To men accustomed to fishing and fishing boats, as were the Highlanders who composed the Baldoon Settlement, it could not be supposed that they would leave so navigable a stream as this unutilized. Hardly had McDougall settled in the neighborhood of 'The Forks' when he began to use the banks of the river for boat building purposes. It was perhaps the remembrances and experiences which he and his forebears went through on his native Island of Null that suggested to him the sailing schooner as the means of obtaining the goods wherewith to start a trading post at this locality. At any rate, two vessels, which he named respectively Wallace and Selkirk were constructed and set a float as early as to do duty for the conveyance of the products of the hunter and trapper of his store to Detroit and the bringing back with them the necessaries required for the hunting and trapping trade, the household need of incoming settlers, and, later, the requirements for the camps of lumbermen. This first attempt at navigation was soon followed by the coming and going of many vessels as soon as the lumber industry created a demand, with the building of necessary docks and warehouses, until made a port of entry and honored with a customs official, an event which is dated in the calendar of the village as having taken place in the early fifties.

### **Captain Steinhoff, a noted shipbuilder and prominent industrialist.**

Next to McDougall, the name which stands out most conspicuously in the shipbuilding enterprises of the past history of the town, is without doubt that of Captain James W. Steinhoff. He was born in 1834 of Pennsylvania Dutch ancestry, a class of settlers prominently associated with the early history of this County. His father moved from St. Thomas, where his son James was born, and settled in Howard Township in 1836. There he remained until 1848, when, moving to the rest of his lifetime. At ten years of age, the boy, who was destined to become so noted a citizen of industrial Wallaceburg, began his life's undertakings employed in carrying the mail between Chatham and Stony Point, a distance of twenty-five miles between them and driving both ways the same day. This was followed by his becoming in turns a stage driver, a cook on a lake vessel, a teamster in the lumber woods, finally ending his career as a laborer, a sawyer in a lumber mill. At twenty, with what money he had up to this time saved, he began business for himself, a purchaser of cordwood, which he transported with his own scow to Detroit. This he found a most profitable undertaking. His business rapidly expanded and his increasing capital enabled him to add other barges which he had constructed at Wallaceburg until he had a fleet of half a dozen employed steadily at this work during the navigation season. To these he added a sailing vessel, the Anna Steinhoff, in which he carried barley between Chatham and Toledo. For a time, he was the master of a steamboat, The Islander, which earned for him the title of "Captain". At Wallaceburg he built the honor of being host to Lord and Lady Dufferin, the Governor General, when on a travelling expedition through the district, he visited Detroit, Sarnia, Goderich, and other lake ports. After long service, it was sold to the 'McKenzie and Mann' interests at Toronto and plied as a passenger vessel between that port and Port Dalhousie under the name of Garden city, an old bottom under a new title, where it rocked the removed off the route for safety's sake. In 1887, Captain Steinhoff retired from business though it was not until 1902 that he sold his last vessel. In the meantime he had been a promoter and a large contributor to the establishment of the town's best and largest industries, banking business and in farming, owning, and operating not less than two thousand five hundred and sixty acres of farm lands in the Counties of Kent and Lambton. He left as monument to his enterprise and ability not only these industries which he helped to call into existence but a

beautiful park or play ground, his gift to the town, and now comprising, with Government and Library Park, and outstanding feature in the scenic attractions of the place.

### **Future enterprises must not overlook the capabilities of the Sydenham.**

In forecasting the future development and industrial enterprises of the town, the capabilities of the Sydenham to supply facilities for transportation should not be overlooked. This same river which was used as the highway for passenger and freight traffic in the days of the incoming of the first settlers to the district, and the capabilities which McDougall and Steinhoff saw in it for the building up of trade, is still looked upon by the present day citizens of the town as one of the resources upon which they build their expectations for additional progress and development in its future entry for all vessels which have to make use of our inland lakes and canals for the river can supply a channel of water eighteen feet in depth and wide enough to provide a turning basin for vessels three hundred and fifty feet long. It but requires the enterprises of trade and industry to develop these capabilities which Nature has supplied the town through the medium of this river. Nor has the town been unmindful of its heritage. Although today no local Navigation Company exists to take the place successfully held by McDougall and Steinhoff, yet as navigation centre it still holds an important place. Its sugar refinery is visited by-weekly during its season by vessels coming in from the tropical south with their freightage of raw sugar and going out with the refined product to its various destined markets. Passenger vessels look after the tourist trade in the summer months and supply facilities for pleasure seekers to pass to and fro between Wallaceburg and Detroit, Buffalo, Sarnia and other lake ports. The prophet of tomorrow doubtless sees a boat traffic, with Wallaceburg as its centre, worthy of the river and the fertility of the district of which it is the medium for drainage.

### **Activities of D.A. Gordon add new industries to Wallaceburg.**

Associated with Captain Steinhoff in some of his industrial enterprises and surpassing him in the benefits conferred through him to the town was his nephew, David Alexander Gordon. He was born in Wallaceburg in 1858 and since 1883 until the time of his death in 1919, one of the most prominent industrialists in the County of Kent. His first venture was in the Cooperage business, which he established in partnership with his uncle, becoming its president and general manager. When the Sydenham Glass works were established, he became the largest and most important enterprise of its kind in the Province. Through his efforts, the Peet Sugar Company also was located at Wallaceburg and he was made its president and general manager. Without doubt the progress of the town during the last forty years of its history, the years in which it has made the largest strides forward in its prosperity and size, was due in large measure to the industrial enterprises which his activities and influence were instrumental in establishing. He took an active part in the municipal affairs of the town and was Mayor for three consecutive terms. He also represented West Kent in the House of Commons for fourteen years, being elected as a Liberal, holding the seat continuously from the time of his first election until his death.

The above is information compiled  
by the late Rev. Hugh Cowan about the year  
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