

THOS. BOUCKLEY COLLECTION

THE HISTORY OF COLUMBUS VILLAGE

1835 to 1931

By William Richardson

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(This article has been specially written for The Times by William Richardson, of Columbus, one of the pioneer residents of the village, who has spent practically all of the 72 years of his life in that community. Mr. Richardson has a great fund of knowledge of the days when Columbus was a thriving and busy rural centre, before the onward march of progress deprived it of its industries and places of business. Mr. Richardson writes of the village as it was in these days.)

From ninety to one hundred years ago, Columbus was called "English Corners", because of the large number of its pioneer residents who came from England. The name was changed from "English Corners" to Columbus about the year 1850, when a post office was established there with Robert Skirving as the first postmaster. At his death in 1855, he was succeeded by Robert Ashton, who was succeeded, in turn, by C. S. Tabback, William Armour, and at the present time, by Mrs. R. Cook.

In these early days it was some thing of a sight to see the mail coach come driving up, drawn by a four horse team, driven by a splendid horseman, the late W. H. Thomas, who carried a long tin horn with which he announced his coming.

#### COURAGEOUS PEOPLE

These old pioneers were wonderfully courageous people. They left their homes in the old land, and spent from eleven to fifteen weeks on the old-time sailing vessels, battling storms, winds and waves, and in some instances, were shipwrecked when in sight of land and were brought to shore in small boats. Some of them were the forefathers of S. Roberts and of the writer's mother, Mrs. William Richardson, Sr.

After landing on this side of the Atlantic, and finding their weary way up through the country, they reached Oshawa, then a small village. There were no regular roads then, only blazed trees to mark the way. But they made their way northward to English Corners, and settled half a mile west, on the farm now occupied and owned by S. Roberts, which farm has come down from one generation to another. These old pioneers had no fine houses and barns, but they had buildings of logs set up in the midst of the woods, with huge fire places in the house for general use and warmth. They had no electric lights, but spent many long winter's evening with only the flickering light from the fireplace.

When they wanted a little better light, they used tallow candles which they had themselves manufactured. After a time came the coal oil lamp and in the year 1919 there came electricity, with street lights added in 1928.

### ENGLISH SETTLERS

The country around Columbus was settled mostly by English settlers about the year 1830. The surnames of some families being Adams, Ashton, Roberts, Clark, Grass, Power, Perreman, Wilcoxson and others; of Irish descent were the Howden brothers and others.

In 1853, the first council for the township of East Whitby was formed, the first reeve being John Ratcliffe, Esq. The deputy-reeve was William Bartlett, the councillors Messrs. R. Doolittle, John Smith-Fowke, and the clerk William Beall. There have been twenty-two reeves in all from 1854 to 1931. There have been five clerks, William Beall being succeeded by his son, James Beall, who was in turn, succeeded by George Doidge. Mr. Doidge was followed by William Purvis, who was succeeded by his son, P. G. Purvis, the present clerk.

In the years between 1850 and 1870 the village grew, and had a population of 400 to 500 people. There were four churches, --

Presbyterian, Bible Christian, Methodist and one mile west, the Anglican, each being filled, as a rule, on the Sabbath. The township hall was built about the year 1859 for township work and public meetings. Later the Orange Hall was built, directly opposite on the south side of the road, where the Orangemen of the community met and held their lodge meetings.

### MANY BUSINESS PLACES

There were many places of business in the village in these days. There were four stores, each doing a good business, and three blacksmith shops, each employing two ~~and three men~~. There were two carpenter shops, with two or three men each, and three or four shoe shops, also employing two or three men each, kept busy making boots and shoes for the people of the community. Other places of business in the village included the following: two tailor shops, carried on by the Hugo Brothers, two dressmaking shops, one harness shop, with three men at work, two copper shops, one tannery a quarter of a mile north, one flour mill half a mile west, one woollen mill, one mile west, employing 45 hands, two asheries in the village and four well-patronized inns.

### THE EARLY VILLAGE

Let us now look at the manner in which Columbus was laid out in these early days. Starting a quarter of a mile east of the four

corners, on the north side, was a house known for many years as T. Perreman's, then occupied by a Mr. Salter, who carried on the shoemaking business, which in these days called for a great deal of work, as all boots and shoes were made by hand. When a person wanted a pair of boots, he would go to one of these shops, get his feet measured and the boots were made to order.

West of that, about twenty rods, was a cooper shop run by McScurrah, Sr., and in those days it was quite a ~~large~~ <sup>business</sup>. Our young people may not know what copperage is. It consisted of making barrels which were in great demand. There being five flour mills within a radius of ~~three miles of the village, all making flour,~~ with the farmers delivering their wheat at these mills, there was a keen demand for barrels, in which the flour was packed for sending away. This cooper shop was afterwards fixed and used as the first Methodist Sunday School.

#### OLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Next to the west, where H. Pascoe now lives, was the home of Mr. Calder, a genuine Scotsman. Next, where the home of L. Ellins now stands, was the lot on which the old Presbyterian Church stood, the late Hon. William Smith being the first to be baptised in it. The Presbyterians afterwards bought the site where the present church now stands, this church being opened in 1873.

Directly across the street from the old Presbyterian Church stood the ~~old Methodist Church, which was replaced by a new one~~ after the union of the Bible Christians and the Methodists in 1884. West from the Presbyterian Church were a number of houses, reaching to the corner, known as Penny Clark's corner -- the reason being that he had the reputation of being very stingy. This corner was afterwards the home of Mrs. H. Hodgson, succeeded by William Richardson. In these early days on the northwest corner of this lot was a shoe shop and a dwelling.

#### FURNITURE FACTORY

Going north across the creek was a furniture factory, operated by Robert Currie, afterwards turned into a cooper shop, operated by the Scurrah brothers. This has since been remodelled into a dwelling, and is now occupied by Mrs. P. Stone. Just north on the hill, is a brick house, with a little attachment at the end, this also having been a shoe shop. There were some other houses to the north before coming to that of Mr. Fred Pike, this being occupied by Nathan Nickerson, a carpenter. Just north were more houses, until coming to one in the hollow, which then was a cottage. ~~Going on north, just across the road from where,~~ Robert Sutherland lived for thirty odd years, known as the Burn's homestead, stood ~~the first schoolhouse built on lot~~ ~~Miss~~ ~~the~~ ~~burn's~~ ~~was~~ ~~the~~ ~~wife~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~Hon.~~ ~~William~~ ~~Smith.~~) The first school teacher was a

Miss Smith, sister of A. G. Smith, who lived where Harold Hayes now lives.

### WEST COUNTRY INN

Coming south from Burns' homestead was the "West Country Inn", conducted by a Mr. Carey, with its stables and sheds on the east side of the road, Mr. Carey was followed by a Mr. Bedford, who carried on farming operations. The Inn was afterwards purchased by the parents of the Hon. William Smith. They remodelled it into the homelike place it is today, and there Mr. Smith was born, raised and spent the most of his life, being succeeded by his son, Major R. B. Smith, who occupies it today.

In the southwest corner of the field stood one of the first blacksmith, carpenter and paint shops. Just behind this shop was a pond of water, used for driving the machinery in the shop, where the woodwork of all kinds of farm implements was made, together with wagons, sleights, cutters, buggies, wheelbarrows, also coffins to bury the dead. On the other side of the fence, on the northeast corner of Fred Glover's field, was another blacksmith shop, these shops then being busy places.

To the south were several houses, the one owned now by Mr. Hugh Ross was then the home of Mr. MacLaren, a splendid house carpenter. His daughters, the Misses MacLaren, were the up-to-date

dressmakers, carrying on business in the same house. A little further south was another blacksmith shop operated by Matthew Caskin, who was succeeded by Fred Pike. Back of the blacksmith shop and a little west was a tannery, owned and operated by a Mr. Hepburn, uncle of William and George of the same name. This building was afterwards turned into a carpenter and paint shop with a cider mill at the back, where thousands of gallons of cider were made by James Smallicombe.

#### THE POT-ASH INDUSTRY

Farther south, across E. Webber's hollow, was a number of houses. The one formerly occupied by the Hon. William Smith, was at one time the home of Joseph Thompson, one of the first Clydesdale horse breeders of East Whitby, A little farther south, and on the hillside north of the creek was a brewery. Just at the creek may be seen the remains of the one time ashery this being a large business in those days and operated by one John Joyant. He kept a team and wagon continually on the road, gathering wood ashes. Wood being so plentiful those days, everyone burned it, and exchanged the ashes for soap. The ashes, when gathered, were stored in a building near the ashery, built for that purpose. They were then leached, boiled down and manufactured into pot-ash, from which he made his money. Older people tell us that the boiling down of the leached lye, which was done at

night, and finishing into pot-ash made a very pretty sight, The ashery was all alight with the strong fires boiling the lye, so that, in the inside, it looked like a barn on fire.

## OLD CELEBRATIONS

A little south of this and on the corner now owned by P. G. Purvis, the township clerk, was a vacant lot, known as the Beall corner. On this, from a raised platform, fireworks were annually displayed on the night of May 24, the day being celebrated in honour of the birthday of Queen Victoria. In addition to the display of fireworks, the streets were decorated with ~~evergreens~~. A large arch of evergreens hung with Chinese lanterns, was strung across the street, and the day finished up with a huge bonfire on the four corners.

Turning west is the home of Mrs. George Hayes, then known as the Beall home. Next came the old school lot, on which was built a frame building or school house, replacing the old log one at the north. This was afterwards replaced by the old white brick one, which accommodated from 100 to 120 scholars. This has now been ~~rebuilt~~ into Ed. Snudden's home. Immediately west of this lived Mr. Chesterfield, a cranky old shoemaker disliked by the school children. Farther west, and in the hollow, were two farm dwellings. One was

occupied by Mrs. May, a dressmaker, and the other by Mr. Staley, a copper. A little farther on, and near the creek, was the other ashery.

### THE OLD SCHOOL

The little farm on the west hill was then known as the Stabbeck homestead, afterwards the home of William Richardson, Sr., another of the Clydesdale horsebreeders of East Whitby. Then came the school, erected in the year 1878 and opened in December of that year. Hon. William Smith, J. D. Howden and R. D. Power being the trustees. In August, 1930, this school was wrecked and rebuilt into the present school, which was opened on October 25 of the same year. Hon. William Smith was the principal speaker of the evening. The fact that he served as trustee of the former school for 51 years previously, made this a historic occasion. The present trustees are A. E. Grass, C. Hayes and E. Webber.

About a quarter of a mile west was the old red grist mill, with a number of houses, owned and operated by W. H. Gibbs. On his moving to Oshawa he was succeeded by John Bickle, who kept a man and team daily on the road, drawing flour to the Oshawa Grand Trunk Station, making two trips a day with 18 to 20 barrels to the load. This mill was later rebuilt by Fred Plowright.

One mile west of the four corners stood the old Anglican Church, which was burned to the ground in the spring of 1922. Just to the south of the church, was the woollen mills, with a number of houses. The mill employed about 40 men, women, boys and girls. It was known as the Mathewson Woollen Mills. Coming east from the Anglican Church is the farm of S. Roberts, where his grandfather settled upon coming from Cornwall, England, many years ago.

There was a group of houses on east to the Bible Christian burying ground, the church being done away with after union with the Methodists. Next to it was the parsonage, now occupied by John Lawrence. Then came a cottage which has since been remodelled into a more modern home. The store now occupied by A. Murison, has always been a store since the village started.

#### THE CROWN INN

Going south, the first place was a tailor shop, carried on by Richard Hugo, Sr. Next was the hotel, which still stands there, then known as the Crown Inn. In this building, in an upstairs room, was carried on the first harness business. Entrance was gained to it by means of a stairway built on the north side and going up from the street.

The Inn was run by James Clark, then by Walter Hill, who was succeeded by Robert Hodgson and later by Robert Wilcox, all three brothers-in-law. Two stores came next, the first carried on by John Rowes, the other by Robert Ashton, Sr., this being both store and post office.

From here to where the Orange Hall stood was a continuous row of houses, built very close together, some not more than three feet apart. The house next to the Orange Hall was the home of William Patterson, a staunch Orangeman.

To the south of this was another row of houses, some of which stand there to-day. They were the homes of William Rundle, and two Ashton families, Edward Nance Kivell, a stone mason, and Edward Durrant, who did a butchering business.

Farther south, and on the east side of the road, was another inn, known as "Union Inn" run by Thomas Wilcockson. Coming north, on the same side of the road, was the home of William Wilcockson, later of Frank Garfatt, whose widow is still living at the ripe old age of over ninety, and living with her daughter, Mrs. Alex Browne of Oshawa.

## THE FENIAN RAID

On the northwest corner of the town hall lot stood the drill shed, fifty feet by one hundred feet, with an armory in the front for storing the soldier's rifles, as well as other equipment for the company, -- every rifle in its place and everything kept in order. This was built in 1856 for the purpose of drilling men to protect our homes and country, which in those days were in great danger of being stolen away from the pioneers who had braved the dangers of the seas and hardships of settling in the woods, clearing land, putting up log houses, and getting started to live in their new country.

Our neighbours, the Yankees, wanted to drive them out and have the benefits of their holdings and labor. But this was one of the times that "Uncle Sam" was fooled. For the blood of the old pioneers was aroused, and being ready to fight, fight they did, though it took nerve and strength to prevent capture. All the larger villages had their drill sheds, and each had its company of men. Oshawa, Whitby, Brooklin and Columbus were the ones in this district. The Columbus Company was No. 6 of the 34th Battalion, the men being drilled in our own drill shed by Captain George Prentice, Lieut. Isaac Mooring and Ensign Joe Scurrah. Our roads were patrolled by men on horse back,

keeping watch day and night for these were wild and anxious times.

In a short time our soldiers were called to Niagara and Port Colborne, as the enemy was approaching. They were there waiting when the enemy tried to climb the steps at Niagara and were shot down, some of the bodies being left hanging on the trees along the bank of the river. This was the battle fought at the time of the Fenian Raid. After the return of our soldiers a song of victory was originated. It soon became the popular song of the day, and ran as follows:

~~"Shout, shout, shout, ye loyal Britons,~~

~~Cheer up, let the rebels come.~~

For beneath the Union Jack,

We will drive the Fenians back,

And fight for our beloved Canadian home."

North of the drill shed and town hall stands the Presbyterian Church, which was opened in March 1873, and is now known as the United Church. It is used by the United Presbyterians and Methodist congregations which united in 1925.

#### DESTROYED BY FIRE

Next to the church property was a dwelling and blacksmith shop known in those days as the home and shop of Captain George Prentice,

who was succeeded by Sandy Porteous. ~~The buildings that have~~  
been too numerous to mention. This dwelling and shop where both  
destroyed by fire in 1929. The dwelling occupied by Lorne Cook, and  
destroyed by fire at the sametime, was at one time the home with  
tailor shop attached, of Stephen Hugo, who some years later built the  
house now occupied by P. G. Purvis, and carried on his tailor business  
there. He sold it to William Purvis later, and built the home now owned  
by Eugene Dearborn, where he carried on his tailoring business until  
his death.

North of Lorne Cook's home was the old harness shop,  
carried on by Lew Hockey, who was succeeded by Mick Burton. Just  
north was the hotel, or inn, a large frame building with a shoe shop  
in the northeast corner, run by a Mr. Hawkins. The stables of the  
hotel, large and roomy were at the back. This hotel was torn down and  
replaced by the home of Robert Hodgson, now owned by Thomas Perreman.  
North of this was a swelling, for many years the home of John Penall.  
Next to this, then owned by W. H. Gibbs, was the old yellow store of  
A. Murison. At the time Mr. Gibbs did a lively business, as well as  
running his mill. He sold out the store to John Rowes, who carried on  
the business.

Turning east from the corner we come to the manse property,

the old house being destroyed by fire while occupied by the Rev. J. A. Carmichael in 1884, and the present one built in the same year. Next to the east was a dwelling occupied by John Catto, succeeded by John Roberts, who built a slaughter house adjoining the stables, and carried on a butchering business.

Farther east was the Methodist property. Where Mrs. S. Roberts house now stands, in the early days stood the red brick Sunday School, with the old Methodist Church just east of it. In the year 1884 the Bible Christians and the Methodists united. In 1888 the brick Sunday School was torn down and the Methodist Church erected on the same spot. In 1929 after the union of the Presbyterian and the Methodist bodies, this church was sold to S. Roberts, taken down, and the present dwelling erected.

#### MEMORABLE OCCASIONS

The first Sunday and Monday of July each year used to be the two outstanding days for Columbus. Beginning in 1840, the Bible Christians held their Sunday School anniversary on those days. This was continued after their union with the Methodists as the Methodist Sunday School anniversary, with Edwin Nance Kivell, superintendent for a number of years, succeeded by W. D. Dyer, who has been superintendent for about 25 years and still holds that position in the

United Church Sunday School. In all, the Bible Christians and the Methodists held eighty-five anniversaries up to 1925. Special services were held on Sunday. On Monday afternoon, beginning at 2:30, the school gave, year after year, a program of drills, songs, dialogues, and recitations, followed by a tea. Later, for many years a concert was held in the evening at 8:30, with a splendid program, usually given by Toronto Entertainers. For over thirty years these were presided over by Hon. William Smith.

The memory of those olden days to those of us who are still here, and who took part in these programs, remains bright, as well as the memory of many of those who took part as children and marched in the first procession with the Union Jack floating over their heads. Dear also is the memory of those who were brought up and lived here, attended and took part in the day, and who are now scattered all over this fair land, as well as in the United States, who still look back to this particular time with sweet memories, just as we do.

Since union with the Presbyterians the anniversary is still being carried on in the garden party with a tea and concert at night.

## VILLAGE WAS PROSPEROUS

Between the years 1850 and 1870 our village was in a prosperous condition, as was all the South Ontario. Farmers had a goodly acreage under cultivation and grew large crops of wheat. By this time, North Ontario was coming into its own also growing plenty of wheat, and delivering it at Prince Albert Manchester and Port Perry while South Ontario's wheat was delivered to the flour mills of South Ontario. As soon as winter set in with good sleighing the farmers drew the wheat from Prince Albert and Manchester to Oshawa and Whitby making it their winter 's business taking from 110 to 120 bushels to a load at four cents a bushel. They made the round trip in a day leaving anywhere between three and five in the morning not getting back again until after dark and often having to eat a frozen dinner. They gave their horses the best of attention and had the best outfits horses, sleights and harness.

## A BUSY ROAD

This was partly what kept our shops going everybody at work and everybody busy. This highway, known in those days as the "Reach Road", was lined with teams, some going and some coming some loaded and some empty. It was a busy thoroughfare, and the four

inns were absolutely necessary. They were supposed to have on hand enough hay and oats and also stabling and sheds to accommodate from eight to ten teams at once, besides abundance of water, with pumps in good order, for these men had no time to waste, and if they could not get their teams watered or fed, as the case might be, withing a reasonable time, they would go on to the next inn. They seldom saw a fire after leaving home, unless they ran into a inn while waiting. These inns were places of accommodation for the travelling public, and not for the loafer, as there was no more room for the loafer than there is now. Our forefathers worked hard and meant business, but anyone wanting accommodation got it whether for man or beast.

#### MAPLE LEAF COMPANY

On August 19, 1895, the Maple Leaf Fire Insurance Company was organized in this village, and this has grown to one of the leading factors of the whole surrounding community. The idea of this company was brought to East Whitby by Sylvester Kerr, who got it while on a visit to relatives in Western Ontario, and brought it to Columbus. Laying the plan, with directions on how to manage it and carry on before the Hon. John Dryden, M. P. P., Hon. William

Smith, M. P., William Purvis, Robert Hodgson and a few others, they decided to organize a company and they did. It has proven a financial success and a benefit to all who hold office as well as to the country round about, and to the originator, Sylvester Kerr, is the credit due.

The following are the first officers who were elected: President, William Smith; vice-president, John Dryden; secretary, William Purvis; treasurer, Robert Hodgson; directors, Arthur Annis, C. W. Disney, J. T. Hancock, Alex Kitchen, John Lander, Alex McKensie, R. J. Mackie, Royal Rogers, William Sadler and John Snaud. They held their meetings monthly and in the same office as now, that of P. G. Purvis.

In the spring of 1931 this company placed a memorial window in the United Church in memory of the late Hon. William Smith, who had been its president from the time of its inception until the time of his death, in all, thirty-six years.

The men mentioned above, together with their fathers, are the men who built and made this community what it has been and is, with all its beautiful old homesteads, which can be seen as one drives through this part of the country, the credit for which belongs to these men and their fathers.