

## TOWN OF CHATHAM.

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With the publication of the new directory, opportunity may be fitly taken to review the past history of this fair town, and to contrast what it was in the pioneer period with what it is in this busy, bustling age. From the early history of this western district, the Town of Chatham was a notable place. At the time when Governor Simcoe contemplated the removal of the Capital from Newark, and was looking for a new location, it received his favorable consideration. For military reasons, and as the result of a compromise with the Commander of the Forces, who preferred Kingston, the site, was, however, abandoned, as was that of London, the Governor's after choice, for that of Little York, now Toronto. But, as a position of some military importance, it received his earnest attention, and, had he not been recalled to England, would probably have erected fortifications on the Military reserve now known as the "Tecumseh Park." Indeed, as early as the fall of 1794 he had already established there a shipyard for the construction of gun boats, two or three of which, of a 6 lb calibre capacity, were built the following year. The selection of Chatham for this purpose was probably made with the double object in view—proximity to timber, secrecy and freedom from interruptions from an enemy in case of war, which was not beyond a near possibility. For it must be remembered that at this period the English government entertained serious intentions of ignoring the American treaty of 1783, which had been openly and systematically broken by the United States, and, as a consequence, Detroit, which was ceded thereby, yet remained and did remain, until the fall of 1796, in possession of the British. Be this as it may, the Government at the time stated, erected the necessary buildings for a shipyard and commenced operations under the superintendence of William Baker, of the government shipyard at Detroit, and the grandfather of William Baker. The position chosen for the shipyard was the river flat on the military reserve, at a point nearly opposite what is now the foot of Victoria avenue, and between the two old trees still standing. The buildings stood on the high bank immediately above or between the river and the site of the old barracks, and consisted of a block house built of logs, used as a storeroom, sleeping apartments and fort, if occasion required it; one or two guns being mounted thereon, and with which on one occasion, Governor Simcoe was saluted as he sailed into view by way of the river. It is said a stockade surrounded the block house, and included also a low log house used by the workmen, which stood between the former and the creek; but on referring to Iredell's map of Chatham of 1795, the block house alone is shown. The saw-pits were also erected on the flats, doubtless with the object of facilitating the skidding from the level. In 1795, 23 workmen were employed in the yard, the original pay rolls being yet in existence. At this time the establishment of a dry dock was also under consideration of the Governor; and more surprising still, the navigation scheme of Messrs. Carling, Stephenson and others, was anticipated 85 years ago, surveyor McNiff having already made a survey of the river and reported (20 May, 1793) that the navigation to the upper forks (London) "was quite practicable with the erection of one or two locks." And probably in anticipation of the future importance of the place there was run by surveyor Iredell, in 1797, a line of military road (Communication Road) as straight as "possible between Chatham and the Point Aux