

PIONEER LIFE

IN PERTH COUNTY.

Written for The Bee Pioneer Number by Thomas Smith, of Atwood, Ontario.

ABOUT the end of October in the year 1859 a friend and I left the Township of Markham, north of Toronto, where we had been residing, to come to the township of Logan, in the County of Perth.

STRONG DESIRE TO SEE THE PRIMEVAL FOREST

with the process of clearing it, I was easily induced to accompany him. We came to Mitchell by railway, arriving there about ten o'clock, p. m. We took lodgings for the night in the Hicks' hotel, which was the best in the village, although only a second or third class house, if compared with the one afterwards built by the same proprietor. Next morning we started on foot for our destination which was twelve or thirteen miles distant. Seven and a half miles were along the recently made gravel road and the remainder along tracks which were in some places on and at other places off what was in the future to be the road. There were swales and swamps and at least one barver meadow to be crossed and these necessitated a winding and devious track to be made through the woods. There had been a fall of snow during the night which ominously reminded me of the rigors of the preceding winter which was the only Canadian one I had then experienced. It was rather discouraging to be going I scarce knew whether except that it was to live on an unbroken bush lot without a house of any kind on it and with no knowledge of any friend or acquaintance, except him whom I accompanied. He had previously been to see the place and had made the acquaintance of some of the earlier settlers. To one of their shanties he conducted us. There we were welcomed, and kindly and hospitably lodged and boarded for a number of weeks, until we got a shanty built on his lot for ourselves. Our new found friends, lived about a mile from the lot on which we were to settle, and there was a swamp between them. This swamp was popularly credited with

RESEMBLING THE PIT CALLED PANDEMONTUM

which is bottomless. If the swamp had a bottom it was so far down that neither man nor beast cared to discover it by going into the watery and mire abyss. When we had occasion to cross this swamp, as we had every morning and evening, we had to make a detour from that straight line of what was to be the concession road, and cross on some trees, that had been felled to make a path for travellers. To cross on these required the sure foot, clear head and balancing pole of a rope walker. Timid women had been known to get down on hands and knees to cross the worst part. Travelling this road after dark was seldom tried, and certainly never by me. It made the short days of fall shorter for work, than they otherwise would have been.

HOW WE BUILT OUR SHANTY.

The building of even a shanty required the exercise of some planning and care. The selection of a site involves several considerations; and the first of these is, to be sure it is on the right lot, then that it be on dry land, and conveniently located for the work afterwards to be done on the lot, and with good access to the road that is or is to be, also that it be near to where there are a good number of trees of suitable size and kind to make logs for the structure to be erected. Especially was this last consideration important in our case, as we had no team of our own with which to draw them. In course of time the trees were chopped down and cut into log lengths for the walls. Then came the "raising bee," which was a sufficient number of the surrounding settlers gathered together to raise the logs onto the walls, by the aid of the very simple mechanical contrivances of hand spikes, skids and long poles with a crotch on the end of them. These last were used when the walls were up too high for the men effectively to apply their strength in lifting the logs without them. They corresponded with the pike poles at a frame raising. There were also four corner men with good sharp axes to make the corner joints. In this shanty the joints were of the kind that resembles a horseman's legs astride a horse's back. I don't know whether it was from the inexperience of the corner men or that they thought it was easier made, or that they thought any kind of corner was good enough for a bachelor's hall, that they made this kind of joining. I saw many log raisings after this first one, and generally they were dovetailed at the corners, and often with great neatness and consummate skill, and all done with axes. The walls having been put up by "bee,"

there still remained much work to be done by ourselves. There was the roofing, flooring, chinking, chimney building, holes to cut out of the logs on one side for door and window, with jamps for the sides of these to make and put in. Although timber (that is trees) was near at hand, of various kinds and in great abundance, lumber or boards was only to be got by making it with an axe, maul and wedges. The roof of our shanty was made as follows: Basswood trees were felled, cut into logs thirteen or fourteen feet long, and then split up the middle. Notches were made on the heart side from sixteen to twenty-four inches apart, according as the timber was easy or difficult to split, and then, by a w-h-i-s-h-i-n-g and somewhat twisted blow of the axe blocks rather than chips were made to fly out of the heart of the stick. This formed a hollow spout or trough. The last word was the name given to the finished article. When a sufficient number of troughs were made they were laid across the building side by side with the hollow side up. They rested upon the upper logs of the side walls. Then another row of troughs with the round or bark side up were made to cover the joints of the first row. One of the side walls, which we may call the front wall, was made of bigger logs than those of the back wall, which made the top log higher in the front than the top log of the back wall. This gave the troughs a slant or incline lengthwise, so that the water of rain or snow could run down them. The appearance of the troughs inside the shanty, was that of an inclined ceiling of corrugated basswood bark. The weight of them was sufficient, without nail or pin, to keep them from moving or blowing away.

A portion of some of the logs of the front wall had to be cut out for a door, and also for a one sash window. This was done with a cross-cut saw, and wedges were driven in between the logs to keep them from sagging, either during the sawing or until the jamps were put in. The jamps of both door and window were made out of split sticks roughly hewn with the axe and then finished with the jack plane. When these were put in place, auger holes were bored through them, and into the middle of the end of each log, and pins driven through them to keep both jamps and logs in their proper places.

A batten door was made of three or four boards wide, all split too, and dressed with axe and jack plane and tongued and grooved with match planes. Bars made with the same tools as all the rest of our lumber were nailed on behind them to keep them together. Even the hinges and latch were made of wood. The sash was imported from Mitchell and the glass put in after arrival. The floor was made of split basswood slabs or planks laid on mud sleepers as the poles on the ground were called. The largest part of the floor, was not intended to be removed, when two short planks intended for removal, as they formed a trap door to a hole dug in the ground, which served for a root cellar to keep our potatoes from freezing.

The thickness and atomic structure of a log is well adapted to keep out both cold and heat, but the spaces between the logs, have no such adaptation. On this account split pieces had to be fitted and driven in tight between the logs. These pieces were called chinks and the process chinking. However well this might be done daylight would be seen coming through in many places, and of course the wind in these places could find access too. To obviate this a quantity of moss was gathered from the trees, and stuffed into all the crevices and holes visible, in much the same way as a boat builder caulk in between the planks of a boat.

The chimney was such a rare work of art that I have seldom or never seen its equal. The material used in building it was neither stone, brick nor iron, but only wood and puddled clay. The latter was dug out of a hole near by. The flue, which was commodious enough to allow a free exit for the smoke, was made of split laths laid one level to the logs of a house without a dovetail or other prepared joint at the corner. They were then daubed over with the clay, and plastered with it, to render them fire proof. The fire place was sufficiently large to have a good big blazing fire in it, with a back log that did not need much splitting, and would burn a long time before being reduced to ashes. The lintel, which supported the front part of the flue, was split out of a piece of twisted beech, which, as I looked at it, was a constant eyesore to me in that it was so far from being "out of wind." Conspicuous as a maulpiece and yet so warped!

I must now let my reader into the secret why we went to the trouble of building a fire place and chimney. It was because we had no stove and we needed a fire to heat the one apartment

which was to answer for parlor, kitchen, and bedroom. On that fire the potatoes were to boil, the pork to fry, and the water for the tea to boil. Some fair reader may be ready to enquire: "How did you bake the bread?" I answer: "I didn't bake it at all. What! eat it raw?" Nay, but we were indebted (and I feel grateful to this day) to first one and then another kind, motherly woman who made our bread and did our laundrying for us.

THE SHANTY FURNITURE.

Having described the building of the shanty, I must now briefly speak of its furniture. The wooden part of it, had to be manufactured where we were, and out of the material growing around us. The bedstead was made with four posts cut from one or more maple saplings about four inches through. These were planed and made octagonal, or eight sided, about the height of a common bedstead. Other saplings did for the rails to hold the posts together, and to form a receptacle for a straw mattress. Auger holes bored into the posts received the ends of the rails. This was the frame of the bedstead. Smaller saplings with some spring in them stretched from head to foot did for the bottom. Our table was made similar to any small common kitchen table without turned legs, but it had to be made out of a tree or trees growing in the bush. One or two rustic chairs made with crooked sticks for the hind legs and back, and one bench, were our seats. If visitors came to see us, which was not often, one or both of us had to accommodate the strangers with the chairs, and seat ourselves on the chest lid. There were three or four Old Country made chests in our establishment, and one of these was used for a pantry.

CUTTING DOWN AND PILING THE BRUSH.

When the shanty was finished or made habitable, our next work was cutting down and piling the brush, which means the saplings and small trees. These were cut close to the ground, so that their stumps would not obstruct the plow or harrow, when these implements came to be used. The brush was or should have been thrown into big compact heaps to make it burn better than when left scattered. So much time was taken up with the shanty building, that we did not get as much under-brushing done as was intended, for the snow got to be deep, and it was impracticable then to cut close to the ground. We then began to chop down and cut up the big trees. It was slow and laborious work, but perseverance changed the aspect somewhat. At different times when we went to our work we saw two or three deer quietly in the tops of the trees we had cut down. On one occasion, a year or two after this, I was walking along the 12th con. of Elma, toward the gravel road, and I saw a streak of blood extending along the ground for perhaps a mile. At length I came to a crossway through a narrow neck of swamp. On the crossway were a deer and two dogs trying to attack it, but it was successfully keeping them at bay. For a time I could not get past them, and could easily have hit it with a stick if there had been one in my hand. However, I was not then in quest of venison, besides I had heard that an enraged deer could with a swift, powerful stroke of its hoof, tear a permanent ugly gash in his flesh in addition. So I considered discretion the better part of valor and let it alone. In a short time it made a bound into the swamp and the dogs after it. It had been wounded and that explained the streak of blood on the road.

When the end of March arrived, my mate left me, and went away to Markham whence we came, to hire out for the summer months. I was thus left to keep bachelor's hall alone, and might almost say: "I was monarch of all I surveyed." But the "survey" was not very extensive when in the woods. The tasks left me to perform, were to under-brush some for preparation for the next winter's campaign of "bush-whacking," and when it got sufficiently dry to burn some of the brush heaps in the vicinity of the shanty, and with the assistance of some of the neighbor settlers and a yoke of oxen, to log a piece of ground for a potato patch. By the time all this was done and the potatoes planted with the hoe and a fence made around the patch it was on in the month of June. Once when I was underbrushing away toward the back end of the lot, several days, and not expecting to see anyone there, or then, I was greatly frightened by hearing human voices. At first I saw no one, but after a short time two men made their appearance who turned out to be two neighbors who in coming home from Mitchell had made for the woods. I never was what is called "home sick," but my sense of loneliness on that occasion gave me vividly to realize the meaning of the poet's question:

"Oh solitude where are the charms
Which sages have seen in thy face?"

But my experience would not prompt me to endorse the following couplet:

"Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place."

When the time for doing stautute labor arrived, along with the whole of the adult male settlers, I was summoned out by the pathmaster to do road

work. The work to be done was to under brush, and chop or grub, a road about twenty feet wide, along a line marked by a surveyor's blaze, which had become faint, along the concession road. It began at the corner of our lot and extended across it and other lots for a distance of two miles. Everybody worked as well as they could, for it was not only the Queen's highway, but it was particularly to be their own highway in coming years. However, when the work for the year was all done, there was not more than from one half to three quarters of a mile opened out. Most of the way was swamp, and many of the trees had to be cut level with the ground to make a bed for crossway logs afterwards to be cut and laid, which in turn had to be covered with earth, and that again with gravel before there could be a decently good road. Truly it required undaunted courage and a buoyant hope to enable settlers to attempt overcoming such mountainous difficulties. One day, while the statute labor was in progress, we had arrived at a ridge of dry land, and during the dinner hour I thought I would go across it, see how wide it was, and how it looked. I intended to keep in sight the newly made blaze which some one in our gang had made for a guide in the work. But either from heedlessness or from the trees only being newly blazed on the one side, I soon lost sight of it and wandered on. At first I thought I could easily return to where my companions were resting, but on making trial found I could not do so. I shouted and they answered me with simultaneous shoutings. The sound told me I was much farther from them than I expected, and would soon have been, if I was not already lost in the woods. By the help of their shouting I reached them in time for work. One day, some time after this, I decided to go to Mitchell to make some purchases, and I thought I would go out our own concession to the gravel road. Accordingly I set out on the newly chopped road and then began to follow the blazes on the trees. These blazes are chips taken out of the trees growing near the middle of the road and forming a white spot the color of which contrasts with the dark color of the surrounding bark. A centre tree has three notches instead of one. After having gone on with these for my guide for some time, I came to a halt, for I could not see another blazed tree. About this time it began to drizzle and rain and I thought it was a long way to go to Mitchell in a rainy day so I resolved to turn back and go home. I supposed I had made the necessary "right about face" to take me home. But after following the blaze for some time I began to think, I did not see these trees, turn-ups, etc, when coming out. Then I began to think that instead of having turned right around and gone westward as I intended, I had only turned half round, and was going southward along a side road. Bye and bye an opening appeared and I thought now I am coming to a big beaver meadow, which I had heard about. Soon I came to the clearing and to my surprise saw a man whom I had seen before and learned that his clearing. From him I learned that I had gone out the concession, just as I had at first intended, and had never turned at all. My knowledge of the topography of the district very deceiving to me. I wended my way out the remainder of the concession which was cleared on both sides of the road to the gravel and thence proceeded to Mitchell.

Shortly after our arrival in the "bush" T—E— undertook to show one or two men, who were hunting land to settle on, a lot adjoining his own. After wandering about with the strangers for a while and night coming on neither of them could find their way out. Mrs. E was of course anxious about her husband. She blew the dinner horn with her might, and a neighbor, whose lot lay alongside of the one being explored, fired a gun in order to guide them home, but notwithstanding these efforts, it was not till midnight or on in the wee small hours of the morning when they arrived father both cold and hungry. It was said that in their attempt to get out, they had circled about on a space not much bigger than an acre. Mr. E was somewhat short-sighted, but who would be anything else in these circumstances? The strangers did not take up that lot. Perhaps that afternoon and night's experience was a sufficient deterrent. The lot was taken up shortly afterwards, however, and is still occupied by the same parties.

I have mentioned some of the difficulties the pioneers in the bush had to encounter. Let me now speak of some others. The nearest village which was also the nearest post office was Monkton or West Monkton. It is now five miles by the road from where our shanty stood. It was then seven and a half or eight miles by a circuitous route which was not fit for a yoke of oxen and wagon to travel. During the whole time from October to July I never was the length of Monkton, and only once, on sight of the gravel road, was I in had not the supplying of the provisions for our establishment or this could not have been said. Our letters came to Monkton P. O. but the newspapers, if I remember rightly, were "like angel visits, few and far between." There was no school and no church nearer than Monkton, and not one of the latter even there. The Methodist circuit preachers came from Mitchell to preach at Monk-

ton on the Sabbath at intervals of two or three weeks, but no one in our settlement ever went to hear them. The task was too arduous, even had the inclination been greater than it was. The Sunday was spent by many in visiting and receiving visits, and of course considerable secular business such as arranging for "bees," "raisings," etc, was transacted. Occasionally the report of a gun was to be heard, caused by some one trying to replenish his larder by hunting on the Lord's Day.

I had been accustomed from earliest years to "the sound of the church-going bell" and attendance at the house and upon the ordinances to which it called. I felt strongly that an effort should be made, and that by me, to counteract my environments in this respect. I first consulted a man who felt as I did and induced him to join with me in forming a Sunday school or Bible class. He consented and we obtained very readily the privilege of meeting in a shanty pretty centrally located of another worthy family. Soon the news spread of the attempt we were about to make and before long nearly all the young people and some of the old came Sunday after Sunday to take part in, or at least, to listen to the services in which we engaged. Our meetings were a sort of union pioneer Sunday school and church combined. The day will declare what good resulted from these efforts. It would be interesting, and perhaps instructive, to review the three decades which have come and gone since those days—to note the progress made—to compare and contrast what is now with what was then, but the limits of time and space forbid. Sufficient to say, that near to the centre of the township of Elma, where were two bush lots with a muddy mud road between, there now exists the thriving commercial and manufacturing village of Atwood, having for a source of literary influence:

"The little busy BEE,"

Improving each shining hour,
In gathering honey all the day,
From every opening flower,
And diffusing weekly its gathered sweets
In the form of news and knowledge to a
wide circle of expectant, eager readers.

Atwood, Oct. 14, 1890.

DONEGAL.

Early History of the Irish Village.

Written for the PIONEER NUMBER.

DONEGAL is the pioneer settlement of Elma. Early in the forties its first settlers erected their log shanties on the banks of the then considerable creek which crosses the 10th concession, near the site of the Methodist church. The first man to break into the unbroken forest in search of a permanent home was still in the person of Wm. Thompson. He is still hale and hearty and can portray in a vivid manner the stirring scenes of pioneer life. In the fall of '47 the settlement was reinforced by the arrival of the Buchanans, a family group consisting of seven brothers, all hardy and active young men, who also squatted on the banks of the creek and at once commenced to hew their way to fortune. Of this family Andrew Buchanan, our genial mail carrier, so well known and greatly esteemed by the readers of The Bee, is still residing in the village. This part of the township then became known as the Buchanan settlement—a name that spread far and wide. After the survey of the township of Elma in the fifties settlers came rapidly in and a postoffice was granted—the first in Elma. John R. Foster was the first postmaster, and the office was situated on lot 20, 10th con. The mail was lotted through the woods by way of Milverton to Troubridge. The present location of the office, after numerous changes, is about half a mile east of the original one. The first school house was erected on the present site in the early fifties, and was presided over by a Miss Dextater, who was succeeded in her onerous duties by a gentleman who is known only to posterity by the sobriquet of "Pat." Wm. Rothwell then took the youngsters in hand, and in turn gave place to Wm. Hammond, (dately deceased) who held his position for seven years. George McGill then wielded the birch for two years and gave way to Thos. Fullarton, the present Clerk of Elma, who soon pushed the school into a foremost place in the county, a position ably maintained by his successors, Geo. Poole, D. D. Ellis, W. Knox, John Waigh and A. Graham. During the seven years that Mr. Fullarton had charge the present edifice was erected to take the place of the old log school house which had become too small for the wants of the section. The first blacksmith shop was erected in the village in 1874, and the cheese factory in 1875. The early meetings of the religious denominations were held in the old school house, the present Methodist church being erected in 1864, followed shortly after by the erection of an English church on the 12th con. Elma. The Presbyterians, Baptists, etc., at present attend worship in the neighboring villages. Among the oldest settlers still living in the vicinity might be mentioned the names of Wm. Little, Charles Mason, Andrew Hemphill, John Wilson, Alex. Wilson, Robt. Henry and John Irvine.