

RIDGETOWN.



Ridgetown, a town of 2,500 inhabitants, is prettily situated on the "dividing ridge" (so called) in the township of Howard, some 4 miles north of the village of Morpeth, 11 south of Thamesville, and 20 miles east of Chatham. A station on the Michigan Central Railway, the objective point of the Morpeth and Thamesville stages, it is the most important town in the line of the Lake Erie townships. It first aspired to a village existence about 1850, when C. Colby laid off part of the original farm lot into some score of village lots on what is now Main street, and on James and Ebenezer streets. Ridgetown was incorporated a village in 1877; a town in 1882.

The history of Ridgetown is uneventful and comparatively modern. Prior to 1830 the site was a solid bush, full of raccoons which the incoming settlers hunted to provide the cash to pay the fiddler at their social dances. The settlers of the original farm lots which here cornered were: A. Marsh, E. Colby, Ed. Mitton and E. Watson. Beyond their log farm houses there were none other for a decade. Until 1846 the place was known as the dividing ridge, and according to the Canadian Gazetteer, of 1846, Jos. Newcomb, axe and wagon maker, one and a half miles east of the Harwich line, the only business person there. Mr. Dodge however, soon after put in an appearance as wagon maker, locating himself near the site of James Rushton's residence; as did about same time Mr. Mitton, blacksmith, whose shop stood between Main street and Gunter's mill—a location which will also answer for the old Mitton burying ground. Mr. Marsh had erected a log store at the N. E. corner of the Porter House block, where he sold groceries and truck, and raffled candies with the "boys," as subsequently did Dodge in the erection of the original part of his well known hotel, on the S. W. corner, opposite. The school house had already been erected, occupying a position now located by the rear of Hagaman & Julls Store. An amusing incident is connected with Colby's original town plat. Colby was somewhat of a character, and when the Presbyterian church had obtained a building lot of him, the Methodists made application for another—that now occupied by Mr. Hancock. No! says he, Presbyterians are a quiet people; you are a noisy lot; you would annoy the Presbyterians.

Amongst the chief early settlers, were: R. Marsh, Mr. Dodge, Mr. Mitton, John Moody, Dr. Smith and Messrs. Brash, Britton, Hancock, Kitson, McLean, Wilson, Westland &c.

Ridgetown, is a compact, well-built town, the chief business street containing some fine blocks of brick buildings and the residential streets and suburbs many handsome dwellings. The streets are lighted with the electric light. It possesses a good brick graded common school and a fine Collegiate Institute. There are Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, Baptist, Catholic and Disciple Churches—some of them very fine buildings. There are also two fine public halls—one the opera house with a seating capacity of 1000, a Mechanics Institute and a public library with 2500 volumes and two spirited weekly newspapers—the East Kent Plaindealer, E. McKay proprietor, and the Ridgetown Standard, Philip H. Bowyer, proprietor. All the secret and benevolent societies are well represented. There are two branches of chartered banks, Customs house and express, telegraph and telephone offices. The mail is a daily one each way. There is a Town Hall and steam engine fire brigade. Here are headquarters and grounds of the Howard Agricultural Society, also Division Court No. 2. Of industries, it contains: 3 planing mills, a large burying casket factory, 2 foundries, 2 flouring mills—one a roller mill of large capacity, woolen and knitting factory, organ factory, carriage shops, etc.

Ridgetown is the centre of a fine farm country, the trade of which is large and generally tributary to the town. It ships largely of flour, grain, beans, clover seed, live stock, hogs, etc. The assessed value of Ridgetown is \$660,000.