

The Patriarch of Kent County

Long and Busy Life of Stalwart James Houston, Now of Dresden—The Early Days of the Pioneers—Still Hale and Hearty He Chats to The Planet of Auld Lang Syne.

"Yes, I am James Houston, still alive and enjoying all of the pleasures of this life to the very fullest extent," was the cheerful reply made to a Planet representative on one of the streets of Dresden, by a man who, probably more than any other, has played a very prominent part in the early history of Kent County.

And indeed he looked the part. He is a man of 81 years of age, active in body and mind and, to all appearances, in the best of health and humor. As the two proceeded down the street they met one of Dresden's most prominent citizens who greeted and was greeted in the most affable manner.

"There is a fine man," said Mr. Houston, when the gentleman in question had passed. "He is perfect in every respect, except the most important one."

"How is that?" questioned the reporter.

"He is a double dyed Grit," replied Mr. Houston with a sly twinkle in his expressive eyes.

This incident gives a very broad glimpse into Mr. Houston's character. He is a staunch Conservative and yet he is a broad minded one.

"I have been a conscientious Conservative ever since I was old enough to understand politics," said he, "and I feel justified in standing by everything which has been done in this country by the Conservative party. I also feel assured that that party will never do anything which will cause me to change my views."

During a very interesting conversation which ensued Mr. Houston told many interesting stories concerning the early life of the pioneers of Kent County.

Mr. Houston, whose father was the third man to settle down in Chatham Township, was born in the County of Down, Ireland, and came to this country with his parents in 1831, settling down on a farm near Louisville. Although Mr. Houston was but a small boy at that time, yet his memory of the early life and the extreme privations endured by the pioneers is very clear and distinct indeed. He was one of a family of six boys and one daughter. The family all came out to this country at the same time and James is the only survivor.

The family when they first came out from Ireland settled down in Rochester, New York State. They remained there for one year and then came to Canada and took up a temporary residence in Little York, now better known as the city of Toronto. From there they went to Halton County, Township of Nelson, and in the fall of '35 came to Kent County and settled down near Louisville in Chatham Township.

Mr. Houston himself lived there until 1871, when he moved to Camden Township, one mile north of Dresden, where he is at present residing and following up his occupation—farming.

Mr. Houston was married in 1853 to the second daughter of the late Captain John Shaw of Chatham Township. His wife died in 1897 and he was subsequently married to Mrs. Emaline Warfield, a well known and highly respected school teacher of Wallaceburg, and widow of the late James William Warfield. He had four children by his first wife, William John, deceased in 1891; Clarence, who resides on a farm adjoining the homestead; Mrs. James Cooper, of the Township of Dawn, and Mrs. Charles Babcock, also of the Township of Dawn.

"I take a certain amount of pride in saying that I brought them all up right. The proof of this is they are Conservatives every one of them," and here he again indulged in one of his satisfied smiles.

"When I first came to this country," said he, "there were but three log huts between the River Thames and the Big Bear Creek, now known as the Sydenham River, and from Dresden to Wallaceburg there were only three huts. The postoffice was held at Kent Bridge and was known as the White Hall. The mail came once a week from Sarnia either on a man's back or carried by a man on horseback. A man named George Long was the mail carrier and he was kept busy all the time walking between Chatham and Sarnia. Sometimes we could only receive our mail once a fortnight. James Reed was the postmaster in Chatham then and he kept his office just below where the Fifth street bridge is now."

"Chatham, I can tell you, was a very small place in those days. There were two dry goods stores kept by a man named Jacobs and another by a man named Weir. Grocery stores were also small in number and limited in supply. There were four groceries owned by W. and W. Eberts, John Dege, Thomas Clark, and a man named Wilson. Of course all of these men are long since deceased. William Doleen, commonly called Billy Doleen, kept a hotel, or rather a saloon, on the present Garner House site, and another man named Palmer kept a saloon in North Chatham. Another man named Miles, an Englishman, also kept a saloon where The Planet office now stands."

"As you are probably aware this country was all a huge bush when I came here first, and the three farms which were cleared between Dresden and Louisville, only consisted of a couple of hundred acres each. Outside of this there was not so much as a gad cut. A man named Lindsay started into the bush and cut an underbrush roadway through Chatham Township from Louisville to Dresden. This is known as the Lindsay Road. There were no drains or bridges and Mr. Lindsay in building this road had to build up the sides

with brush and mud to keep out of the swamps. Travelling was all done with oxen and carts. I can notice great changes in this country now. I never did expect to see this country what it is. It is truly marvellous."

The country then was literally swarmed with Indians and there were only a few whites. The Indians, I remember, would come to your house and ask for something to eat. We would give them anything we had—a piece of cornmeal or a piece of pork. They were particularly fond of pork. It was no trouble to raise pigs in those days. All we had to do was to turn them loose in the forest and they would soon get fat on beechnuts and oak nuts. The Indians, as I say, liked bread and pork, but they would never eat any butter. It appears that at one time one of their tribes was poisoned by butter and they never forgot it."

"Captain Shaw, my father-in-law, was in the war of 1812. He was a captain in one of General Harrison's companies and he himself saw Tecumseh, the great Indian war chief, fall."

Captain Shaw fought with Tecumseh on many occasions and was with him in the battle of Moraviantown. I have often heard Captain Shaw speak of Tecumseh. He described him much the same as Tecumseh has been described by old residents in The Planet. In this last the Captain Shaw was struck by a bullet in the top of the head and during the rest of his natural life there was always a bald spot on the top of his head showing where the bullet had struck him. His brother was killed in the battle of Moraviantown, being struck in the head by an American bullet. Captain Shaw also fought in Lundy's Lane and was wounded in the leg and walked lame for a number of years afterwards."

"Captain Shaw described with great vividness a quarrell with General Harrison had with Tecumseh. Harrison took occasion to reprimand the great chief and in doing so he drew his sword and said, 'You shall die!' Tecumseh took a step backward, drew his tomahawk, and said with much expression—

"One step more! Tecumseh!"

That settled it. Harrison looked at once for peace.

"No person living to-day has the least conception of the privations endured by the fathers of Kent. The first grain we ever raised in Chatham Township was spring wheat put in with hoes. When it was out it was threshed in a sheep's skin made by my father, and then carried on our backs to a crude hand mill made out of two huge stones from the river, and owned by John Arnold, who lived near Kent Bridge. We brought home that day 40 bushels of flour."

"In 1837 the grocery stores in Chatham ran short of provisions. W. and W. Eberts at that time owned a small boat called the 'Western.' My father sent to Detroit for two barrels of flour and one barrel of pork, and on the return journey the little boat got wind-bound for four days and could not get to Chatham. All we had to eat during that time was 40 pounds of cornmeal. When the little boat finally reached Chatham we paid \$28 for two barrels of flour and \$35 for a barrel of pork, with Irish gold. We brought it home with a yoke of oxen and a cart. The first pair of boots I ever wore I exchanged for wild turkeys, and when I did get them I could hardly walk with them. I would be a big matter to count the number I have worn since. During the first years we were here we were engaged in chopping down trees in the winter and logging in the summer."

"One of the most peculiar things I ever heard of, however, happened in the early days. A man named John Everett, who lived near Thamesville, dug a pit about eight feet deep to catch wolves. He had a platform over it with a deer on it as a bait. An Indian woman came along after night and fell into the trap and shortly afterwards in dropped a big wolf. The Indians hunted all night for the woman and finally gave her up as lost or devoured by wolves. In the morning when Mr. Everett went to his pit he saw both woman and wolf in the pit alive—the wolf had never touched her. She was lifted out and the wolf was killed. No one has ever seen the woman since."

"I take a certain amount of pride in saying that I brought them all up right. The proof of this is they are Conservatives every one of them," and here he again indulged in one of his satisfied smiles.

"When I first came to this country," said he, "there were but three log huts between the River Thames and the Big Bear Creek, now known as the Sydenham River, and from Dresden to Wallaceburg there were only three huts. The postoffice was held at Kent Bridge and was known as the White Hall. The mail came once a week from Sarnia either on a man's back or carried by a man on horseback. A man named George Long was the mail carrier and he was kept busy all the time walking between Chatham and Sarnia. Sometimes we could only receive our mail once a fortnight. James Reed was the postmaster in Chatham then and he kept his office just below where the Fifth street bridge is now."

"Chatham, I can tell you, was a very small place in those days. There were two dry goods stores kept by a man named Jacobs and another by a man named Weir. Grocery stores were also small in number and limited in supply. There were four groceries owned by W. and W. Eberts, John Dege, Thomas Clark, and a man named Wilson. Of course all of these men are long since deceased. William Doleen, commonly called Billy Doleen, kept a hotel, or rather a saloon, on the present Garner House site, and another man named Palmer kept a saloon in North Chatham. Another man named Miles, an Englishman, also kept a saloon where The Planet office now stands."

"As you are probably aware this country was all a huge bush when I came here first, and the three farms which were cleared between Dresden and Louisville, only consisted of a couple of hundred acres each. Outside of this there was not so much as a gad cut. A man named Lindsay started into the bush and cut an underbrush roadway through Chatham Township from Louisville to Dresden. This is known as the Lindsay Road. There were no drains or bridges and Mr. Lindsay in building this road had to build up the sides

matter how hungry a wolf is, he always looks for a means of escape before he will attack anything. He saw no chance of escape from the pit so he remained quiet."

"Those are days never to be forgotten," continued Mr. Houston, "but there is no use in dwelling on the privations endured by the early pioneers. In 1838 the country became more settled through Camden, Chatham and Dover, and from that on the population gradually increased until what was so recently a solid bush is now almost equal to a prairie field."

Mr. Houston in his time has been greatly honored with public confidences and he has had several high offices in the County of Kent. The Municipal Act came in force in 1849 and 50, and in 1850 Mr. Houston was elected tavern inspector, which position he held for three years. He was then appointed tax collector of Chatham Township for four years. He was elected councillor and acted as such until 1871, and during that time he was for twelve years reeve and two years deputy reeve.

After that he went to the Northwest in the spring of 1871 and walked from Bensen, Minnesota, to Fort Garry, now known as the city of Winnipeg. It consisted then of 16 log huts. He then took up a tract of 340 acres of land near Portage La Prairie. He there met Governor Archibald, the first Governor of the Northwest. He called on him and lived with him on a wild goose. Mr. Houston then returned to Kent, intending to move to the Northwest. His wife, however, was taken ill and he could not go.

In 1872 he purchased a place in Dresden, where he has remained ever since. He was chosen Township Clerk of Chatham Township, and held that office from 1880 to 1890. In '93 he was elected councillor in the town of Dresden, where he was keeping store on the time, and he was also a license commissioner in the town of Bothwell.

Mr. Houston was the man who first nominated the late Rufus Stephenson to the candidacy for the Dominion Parliament. In describing this incident in his life he said—

"I was the reeve of Chatham Township at the time. We met in convention at Blenheim and there were three nominees for the position of Conservative candidate—Joseph

Northwood, John Carmichael, and Rufus Stephenson. At the first ballot, John Carmichael dropped out. Stephenson and Northwood stood the second ballot and Stephenson won out by three votes. This was the first time that Rufus Stephenson ran for Parliament, and he was then owner and publisher of The Planet."

"Archibald McKellar was the Reform candidate and had been previously elected by large majorities until it was thought that it was impossible to beat him. The contest lasted for two days open vote, and at the conclusion of the time Mr. Stephenson was elected by a majority of 98. He was re-elected for two terms after that, defeating Messrs. Stripp and MacMahon, the Reform candidates. He beat them badly each time, and in his last election he was elected by a majority of 400."

In speaking of the late Rufus Stephenson, Mr. Houston said—

"He was a grand man, free and affable and liked by everyone. He gathered everyone around him, friend or foe, it made no difference. He was a good member and greatly esteemed by Canada's greatest statesman, Sir John A. Macdonald. He was never defeated in any campaign and I was very sorry indeed to see him retire from the political arena."

In speaking incidentally about the Gagey affair in Toronto, Mr. Houston expressed very strong views. He thought it was the most corrupt thing from the Government's standpoint that he has ever heard of.

"The corrupt decision of the judges," he said, "will, I feel sure, be blackened when it comes to the intelligent vote in the coming elections. From the feeling of the country, I can't think otherwise."

Mr. Houston was also at one time President of the Conservative Association of Bothwell. He was also a lieutenant in the old militia at the time of the Fenian raid, although he took no part in that campaign. This militia was the forerunner of the old 24th Battalion.

In 1874 Mr. Houston took a trip to the continent and through England, Scotland and Ireland, and visited his old home and other scenes of his early childhood. After a very busy life, which has not been lived in vain, and after extensive travels, he has at last settled down to spend his last days contentedly in the comforts of a quiet home life.

ARTISTIC WOLERSTEIN MODEL.



The artistic gown, so simple and yet so perfect in taste, and so finished in fullness of rich effect, is made of lace striped silk linen. The gumpie and ruffle shoulder are of French lace embroidered in heavy appliques.

FRESH NEWS YOU READ TO-DAY IN NO OTHER PAPER

HE KNEW

Entrance Candidate Described Sir John A. Macdonald as "Father of Conference."

It is generally the case in any school examinations that the pupils meet after they have finished writing on their papers and compare answers.

This old-time custom is still in force and is being followed by the pupils from the rural schools who are trying out the Public School Leaving examinations in the Central school.

Yesterday they met as usual during the noon hour and were talking over the history paper which had been written on in the morning.

"It was a very hard paper," said one of the youthful scholars who, by-the-way, has aspirations of some day becoming a preacher. "I did some of the questions, though, and I wrote all about Sir John A. Macdonald."

"What did you say?" asked one of the group.

"Why, I said among other things that he was one of the fathers of conference—"

And then he stopped and wondered why all of his schoolmates were enjoying a hearty laugh.

TOM'S KICK

Mr. Martin Enters Vigorous Protest Against North Chatham Being Neglected.

"I just wish to call attention to the pavement on St. Clair street," remarked Thos. Martin, merchant. "It is a disgrace and a shame the way the mud is allowed to accumulate upon it. The crossings haven't been cleaned in three days and you can see the state they are in. No lady can cross them without getting covered with mud. Look at the pavement. You can't tell that it is there for the coating of mud, but it is. I hope that the Board of Works will see fit to attend to this without delay. They seem to have forgotten that there is such a place as North Chatham. Last year our borough had no representative in the Council. This year we have two aldermen, but things don't seem to have improved much. It would be a good idea also if the Board of Works would turn their attention to North Chatham long enough to send the scraper over and put St. Clair street and Head street in proper condition. We pay as much taxes into the civic treasury as any other citizens, and we should be respected."

DO GOOD WORK

Principal Plewes Pays Tribute to Rural Schools—Kindergarten Feeder for Central.

There were 700 pupils in attendance at the Central school Wednesday. This is not taking into consideration the pupils in the entrance class and the kindergarten pupils. There are 14 teachers in the school, which gives an average of 51 pupils for each teacher. The promotion examinations were finished Thursday. There are a large number of pupils from the kindergarten who will commence Public school work next term, so that the Central will be filled to overflowing with pupils next fall.

The Public school leaving examinations, which were presided over by Principal J. W. Plewes, were concluded Thursday. Mr. Plewes says that the High school work done by the rural schools of the County is well up to the standard. From what can be obtained, the scholars from these rural schools who wrote give evidence of careful and efficient training.

NEEDS FIXING

King St. Pavement Passing in to Decay—Becoming the Muddiest St. in the City.

Something should be done to keep the King street pavement clean. It is already concealed beneath a coating of mud and, if the wet weather continues, the pavement will soon be lost sight of. The flushing of the pavement every Saturday night, as done last year, was a good practice and should be continued. It at least had the merit of keeping the pavement clean. Now after each sprinkling cyclists find difficulty in navigating the sea of slush and mud.

On several occasions the aldermen have called attention to the defective state of the pavement. It is full of holes. The city has \$1,000 held back from the contractors as a guarantee. They are paying six per cent. on this money and meanwhile the pavement is getting worse every day. It is an open secret that the King St. pavement is bad and that the property owners were gold bricked. The concrete foundation is such in name only and the sooner the bad spots are repaired the longer will the life of the rest of the pavement be.

"If I Were King"

What a Monarch Could Find to Do in this City Had He But the Will to Turn His Hand to the Work—Many Improvements Suggested.

There is one pleasure that no man is deprived of, be he a king or a peasant, a millionaire or a beggar, and that is the pleasure of dreaming. Dreams are great transposers of positions, and the somnial imagination may lead a king to see himself, for the moment the pettiest beggar in his kingdom or may give the pettiest vagrant the pleasure of seeing himself arrayed in royal robes. The pleasure is indeed great for the moment, but the hallucination is dispelled when the god of sleep wings his flight. We all have our dreams, and some of us have even dared to dream that we were a king. A man of Servis recently had such a vision in his sleep, and woke up to find it come true. The dream book tells us that to dream of kings signifies poverty, although it may only signify in reality a supper of mince pie and Welsh rarebit or strawberry shortcake. The other night The Planet's general utility man had a vision in his slumbers that he was a real king. He blamed his somnial accession to the ranks of royalty upon an over-indulgence in strawberry shortcake, not on poverty. However, the idea of being a king led The Planet person into a day dream on what he would do if he were king, and he has here set down a few of the improvements that King Planet would order.

If I were King—

I would have the electric lights in Chatham lighted every dark night; not half of them out one night and the same half out the next night.

I would have the burdocks and weeds that do not adorn the streets cut, at least before they went to seed.

I would then be in a position to command that a building be provided to protect the scrapers, sweepers and sprinkling carts from the weather. A scraper has been left in front of Chief Holmes' residence for the past many weeks.

I would have the street name signs tacked up when they come off. On several streets, they are down or are hanging on the bias threatening to fall. The sign at the corner of James St. and Victoria Ave. is one of these.

I would have the water holes taken out of the pavement so that if his kinglyness had occasion to walk past the Idlewild Hotel or J. W. Atkins' office after dark, His Royal Highness would be sure that he would not stumble into a puddle something less than a foot deep.

I would enforce the anti-spitting on the sidewalk by-law.

I would have the refuse on the river bank in the vicinity of the Rankin dock removed so that passengers on the "City of Chatham" would be favorably impressed with the city I ruled.

I would have the Adelaide and Princess St. bridges fixed so that cyclists could cross them without dismounting.

I would have a good sidewalk on Queen St., east side from School St. to Harvey St.

I would have the crossings swept at least once a year.

I would have the water from the Central school yard run some other way than across the sidewalk on School street, so that my citizens might not have to ford rapids every time it rained.

I would purchase the out-houses that border the Central school playground and give the pupils a chance to have a large and healthy place to play.

I would build that Bunglow on the Park in order to aid healthy outdoor sports amongst my loyal subjects.

I would pave all the leading streets in the city that my merchants might thrive on the trade from the country.

I would build a radial road that my good city might still further prosper.

I would order that all employees have a half-holiday a week with pay, during July and August.

I would order the Macaulay Club to build a monument to Tecumseh on the Park.

I would compel the railroads to put their hog-pens where they would not be offensive.

I would have the globes on the street electric lights cleaned so that I could tell whether the lights were lit or not.

I would have the city provide carts at the public expense to go around to the back alleys in all parts of the city and clean up the garbage, old cans, etc.

FLOWER DAY

Charming Closing Exhibition Given by the Clever Kindergartens of Central School—Miss Green Merits Congratulations.

There is nothing which delights the hearts of parents more than to see evidence of cleverness in their children. Judging from this, the parents who witnessed the Flower Day exercises of the Central school kindergarten yesterday afternoon, should indeed be pleased and should feel highly proud of the little tots who provided such an excellent and pleasing entertainment.

There were about eighty children taking part, and the excellent manner in which they went through their various drills and exercises, and the perfect order maintained throughout, was marvellous indeed. Miss Lilly Green, the directress, and her able assistant, Miss Rose Morrison, certainly deserve great credit for the remarkable efficiency which they have shown in training their little charges. Misses Mildred Turner and Broadbent also deserve credit, for they have assisted very materially in instructing the children.

These Flower Day exercises were held this year in the I. O. O. F. Auditorium, which was very elaborately and tastefully decorated for the occasion. A large flower pole was erected in the centre of the room and streamers of flowers were hung from it and caught at different places along the ceiling. It made a very unique scene, and had every appearance of a happy flower garden.

Long before the time of opening the Auditorium was filled with interested parents who had come to witness the work of their children. Much satisfaction was evinced on every side and the kindergarten teachers were the subject of much complimentary comments during and after the entertainment. At 2:30, the time of starting, the little children came marching in with baskets of flowers to music from the piano, singing as they marched to their seats "An Army is Coming." A prayer song, "There cometh a dove," followed, and immediately afterward they sang a hymn, "God is Love."

Then came the songs. These were much enjoyed by the interested spectators. It was surprising to notice the spirit which these little tots put in their singing. They seemed to enter into the songs with their whole hearts. Some of the songs sung were The Little Planet, Sunshine Song, Rain Song, The Snowdrop, The Violet, The For-get-me-not, The Pansy, The Daisy, The Prism and The Rain Coach.

After the singing the children presented their parents with baskets of flowers. These baskets were made by the children themselves, and the work was very clever indeed. Those of the senior class were Ruffia baskets, which is the newest idea in manual training. They were all made of peas and sticks interlaced, with varicolored strips of paper.

The occupations came next on the program. These consisted of coloring flowers, drawing flowers, pasting pansies, and sewing leaves. The parents were allowed to inspect this work and many of them were surprised at the excellence of it, much of which was very intricate indeed.

The desks and chairs were then removed and the children enjoyed a May-pole march. This was a very pretty and difficult march, and the children went through it without making a single error.

The games were then played. This was the part which seemed to be the most enjoyed by the children, and this branch forms a very important part of kindergarten work. The games played were, The bird's nest, butterflies, guessing flowers, tossing balls through hoops, bouncing balls to music, skip tag, running and high stepping over hurdles, and the golden boat, the fish, and the visiting game.

It was interesting to notice the wonderful control the teachers have over such small children. It is hard to understand how so many children can be managed in such small rooms as are provided for kindergarten work, both in the Central and McKeough schools. This is a very important branch of education and it should not be slighted. Both schools are growing rapidly, and there is no doubt that very soon more room will be provided for this work.

Mrs. Fred Brisco, a former teacher in the kindergarten, presided at the piano for the songs, and Miss Morrison played during the games.

The exercises closed with the singing of God Save the King.