



# Our St. Marys Schools

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## CHAPTER I

### Pioneer Days.

One of the important factors that influenced the history of the origin of common schools in Ontario dates from the latter part of the Eighteenth century, when the United Empire Loyalists turned their backs on the comparative comforts and advantages that had surrounded their homes in the New England colonies and set their faces towards the unbroken forests, which afterwards became Upper Canada. These people had been, as a rule, educated in good schools, established by their British forefathers and those with their property they left behind, but in their new settlements as soon as they had sufficiently advanced to protect themselves from hunger and from the inclemencies of the weather their thoughts at once turned towards the securing of a measure of education for their children. This was imperfectly supplied by a system of private schools scattered throughout the settlements, but an agitation soon arose to secure public support for schools, and as a result large tracts of lands were set aside for school purposes. About 1820 a Township Common Schools Act was passed, and a little later a General Superintendent of Education was appointed, and an endeavor made to secure some uniformity of system. Various changes were made in the subsequent years, especially after the troubles of 1837, until in 1846 our present system was established as a result of the investigations of Dr. Ryerson in Great Britain and Ireland, in Europe and in the New England states.

The township of Blanshard, including the site of the present town of St. Marys, was until 1841 an unbroken forest, and formed part of what was known as the Huron tract, a large block of land which had come into possession of a colonizing company known as the Canada Company. Under the supervision of Mr. Thomas Mercer Jones, a Canada Company commissioner, the survey of the Township of Blanshard was made and was completed in 1839. In the spring of 1841 the first settlers reached the junction of Trout Creek with the Thames River and founded the settlement known for some years as Little Falls. In the fall of this same year Commissioner Jones and Mr. Lauriston Cruttenden, a prominent figure in the after-history of the settlement, attended a public sale of company lands at Little Falls.

Mr. James Ingersoll, a member of a United Empire Loyalist family, which had previously given their name to what is now the town of Ingersoll, entered in September 1841 into an agreement with the Canada Company by which for a cash consideration and a block of land embracing almost the whole central part of the future site of St. Marys, he agreed to erect a sawmill and a gristmill for the use of the settlers. His brothers, Thomas Ingersoll, father of the late Justus Ingersoll, settled in Little Falls and at once began the erection of a sawmill, and the following year the gristmill was commenced. He also built a double log house where Mr.