

HISTORY OF WINDSOR, N.S.



ABOUT the year 1703, the country lying around the hill now known as Fort Edward, and extending along the banks of the rivers Avon and St. Croix, was settled by a number of French Acadian families, who had come from the settlement "Les Mines," which occupied the lands where the village of Horton now stands.

They cultivated the rich marsh lands in this vicinity keeping back the waters of the Avon and St. Croix, which flooded them at high tides, by throwing up strong running dykes. These marsh lands, together with their cattle, sheep, and swine, constituted the chief source of their wealth. They derived but little profit from the wooded uplands which lay to the south and east of Fort Edward, and, therefore, almost totally neglected them.

To the portion of country settled they gave the name of "Pigiguit," an Indian word, meaning "the junction of waters," or "flowing square into the sea."

In the year 1714, according to the French census, Pigiguit had a population of 337 persons, and again, in 1751 the same district contained 150 families, or about 900 persons, showing conclusively, the comparatively rapid growth of the centre and the prosperity of the people.

The Acadian French and the Indians were, from the first, very friendly to each other, and for many years the peace of the country, and good will entertained between them remained unbroken. All this had its beneficial effect upon the thrifty French farmers of Pigiguit. Having nothing to fear from the Indians, they naturally devoted the greater part of their time to the improvement of the soil, which resulted in the wealth and prosperity of the settlement.

During the years between 1751 and 1758, the growth of Pigiguit was phenomenally rapid, having, at the latter date, a population of 2,700 Acadians. These people were scattered along the banks of the St. Croix and Avon rivers.

Their homes extended as far as the headwaters of the Avon, along which river they erected many miles of dyke, thus obtaining large tracts of valuable marsh lands. They raised grain in abundance, and constructed grist mills at convenient places in the district. Old ruins of cellar walls, and various other indications of their homes in the localities mentioned, may be seen at the present time.

first erected for Protestant worship. It stood upon the north-west corner of the old parish burying ground; and, during week days, was used as a school house, for the instruction of the young of the vicinity.

The growth of the township must have been exceedingly slow in the earlier part of the English occupation, for, in 1784, twenty nine years after the deportation of the Acadian French, we find Windsor mustering a population of only 278.

The Indians were still troublesome, from time to time, in harassing the English settlers, but, in 1780, Lieutenant Governor Franklin wrote from Windsor to General Haldiman, saying that the Indians were quiet.

In the latter part of the last century travelling in Nova Scotia was extremely difficult. There was only one road in the Province, and that extended from Halifax to Annapolis. Various forest paths lead out in different directions from Windsor, connecting this place with other settlements and forts throughout the country.

The years 1788 and 1789 are memorable, in the history of Windsor, as the time of the founding of the Windsor Academy (now Collegiate School) and King's College. The Assembly, in order to prevent the possibility of young men becoming alienated from their native land by going away for the purpose of receiving an education, wisely resolved to institute an Academy at Windsor. Several years later it received a royal charter from King George III, and became King's College.

The war of 1812 had its effect upon the good people of Windsor. The old fort was repaired, garrisoned, and guns were planted for the protection of the place. It was at this time that a privateer was fitted out here to prey upon American shipping, as the people of this place had long been annoyed by the damage done to the trade of the country by American privateers.

The year 1819 is interesting to the members of the Baptist denomination as that during which the first services were held in connection with that church. The church was organized at Wentworth, but in the winter months of that year the services were held in the room of a house still standing on Gerrish Street.

Prior to the year 1837 the people of Windsor and Falmouth were compelled, through the lack of bridge accommodation, to ford the river Avon when the tide was out and to cross it by ferry when in, in order to visit their friends on either side. In those times there was no road skirting the foot of Ferry Hill as now, and persons wishing to go to Falmouth had to go over the hill to a point beyond the railroad bridge and there ford the river, frequently sinking to the hubs of their wheels in the mud and sand in the bed of the Avon, and sometimes getting caught in a quicksand, which gave them no little difficulty in extricating themselves and horses.

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It was about February 9th, 1757, that 600 French and Indians, having been dispatched by Ramsey, at Chagnoy, in Canada, to attack Colonel Noble, arrived at Pigiguit, led by Comrade Villiers, after a long and fatiguing tramp of over one hundred and fifty miles through the woods and snow. They camped here over night, and next day went forward to Grand Pre, where they perpetrated their cowardly massacre upon Colonel Noble and his men.

In 1749 Governor Cornwallis ordered a block house to be built at Pigiguit, which was erected in 1750.

The year 1755 was a disastrous one at Pigiguit. Colonel Winslow, commanding officer at Fort Edward, received instructions from Governor Lawrence at Halifax, for the removal of the Acadians, who were to be placed on board ship and carried out of the country. The task of collecting these people at Pigiguit fell to the lot of Captain Murray, who did his work most thoroughly; for, about the middle of October, 1755, he had placed one thousand Acadians on four vessels in the river, and had sailed for New England.

Many of the French Acadians fled to the woods in the vicinity of Pigiguit and sought the protection of their friends and allies, the Indians. They took with them many head of cattle. Their strength was increased, from year to year, by numbers who had found their way back to the Province from New England, and by those who had fled to the woods at Grand Pre and other places.

For several years the country was kept in a state of excitement by the frequent raids made upon the settlers by the French and Indians, and many skirmishes took place in the vicinity of Fort Edward. For this reason the new settlers had to be protected by block houses and forts, garrisoned by soldiers. All French prisoners taken during these engagements and skirmishes were kept at Fort Edward. During a few following years many Acadians gave themselves up in order to escape starvation and exposure.

It was at this time that Governor Lawrence issued a proclamation stating that the sum of £50 would be given for every male Indian prisoner above the age of sixteen years, £25 for the scalp of any such Indian, and £25 for every Indian woman or child, brought in alive. Such rewards to be paid by the officer commanding any of His Majesty's forts in this Province, immediately on receiving the prisoners or scalps above mentioned.

At the expulsion of these unfortunate people, the burning of their houses, barns, etc., was commenced, in execution of the order issued by the Governor to destroy everything which would offer a shelter or support to those who might escape.

It was not until this time that the English portion of the history of Pigiguit began, when the English settlers, who had been invited from New England by Governor Lawrence in 1764, changed its name to Windsor, erected it into a township, and called the river Avon, instead of the Pigiguit river, as it had been known prior to 1755.

The year 1771 is noted for the building of a chapel in Windsor, being the

It was during this year, however, that the old toll bridge was swung across the river. It was a wooden tubular structure, supported by huge wooden arches, extending from pier to pier, the timbers of which were bound firmly together by strong iron bolts. The ends of the arches rested upon piers made of heavy timbers, and filled up with rocks and stones. The strain of each span was distributed over the arches supporting it, by means of heavy iron bars and bolts hanging perpendicularly from them, and at intervals of several feet. This old structure spanned the river for a period of about 50 years, when it was torn down, and the new iron road bridge now standing was erected in its place.

From the early decades of the present century up to 1857, Windsor was connected with Halifax and other towns of the Province by stage coaches, and the arrival and departure of these means of communication were often the occasions of lively scenes.

By the year 1840, Windsor had developed into a ship building centre of no mean consequence, and this industry has been carried on continuously and extensively in the town and vicinity until recent years, when it has subsided almost to zero, owing largely to the depression in shipping rates, and the inability of wooden ships to successfully compete with steel tonnage. Ten years later the township had a population of about 1,900.

An important event in the history of Windsor was the opening of a line of railway from Halifax to this point in 1857, bringing Windsor into direct rail communication with the outside world. In 1868 this line was continued westerly through King's county and the Annapolis Valley to the town of Annapolis, thus giving to Windsor the immense benefit of a railway extending from Halifax to Annapolis. The town at this time had almost steamboat connection with St. John and Boston.

In 1860, Windsor was honored by a visit from the Prince of Wales, who at that time was making a tour of the Province and Canada. He was received here enthusiastically by the people.

The year 1869 is remarkable as that in which occurred the great Saxby storm, which broke away the dykes on both sides of the river. That portion of the town called the Island, or Point Nesbit, was completely inundated, the people in some instances being obliged to get out of their windows into boats. The place had not been visited by a similar catastrophe since 1828. In 1759, or just one hundred and ten years previous to the Saxby storm, the dykes were carried away causing all the valuable marsh lands to be flooded.

It was during those decades immediately following 1850 that the industries of the town commenced in reality. They have been steadily multiplying until the present day, when Windsor has quite a wide range of manufacturing concerns.

The first newspaper issued in the town was "The Hants and King's County Gazette," published by Mr. Allen, the first issue appearing in the year 1833.

(To be continued.)