

ELGIN'S FIRST SETTLER

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From the beginning of recent researches it was felt it would be of special interest to determine who was the first settler of the county and in what year he took up his residence here. There seems no room for reasonable doubt that the first white man to make a clearing in the county of Elgin was Mr. James Fleming, grandfather of Dr. Fleming, of Chatham, who settled on lot 6 on the river front in Aldborough. The evidence in support of the theory that this settlement was made in 1796 is cumulative, and goes to prove that for about seven years prior to the landing of Col. Talbot at Port Talbot, there had been white men living within the lines of the county, although the general supposition is that Col. Talbot was the first man who settled in what is now Elgin. Mr. Fleming lived for some time at Fort Erie, where he was married, and it is believed that he made one or more trips with Governor Simcoe when the latter visited Detroit and the mouth of the Miami River about 1793-94. It may have been during these trips that Mr. Fleming became acquainted with the country and decided to settle in what is now Aldborough. He doubtless came up the river Thames from Detroit, and settled a little east of the lands owned by the Moravian missionaries, who took up their land about 1791, and after that were in constant communication with the settlement at Detroit.

The direct evidence bearing upon the date of settlement has been kindly furnished to The Journal by Dr. Fleming, and may be briefly summarized. Such documentary evidence as may have been in existence prior to 1813 was probably destroyed when Mr. Fleming's house was consumed by fire during the war of that year. Mr. James Fleming's wife died in 1862, and to the last her memory of the facts connected with her early life was remarkably vivid. She was one of the United Empire Loyalists, and probably left the United States with her parents in 1781, the family then taking up their residence in Fort Erie. Her father's name was Henry Windecker. She was quite positive that she had resided fifteen years at Fort Erie, which would bring the date of her removal to Aldborough to the year fixed, 1796.

One of the stories which Mrs. Fleming was fond of relating was in regard to the first tree her husband felled. He asked her to come into the woods to see his first effort in that direction, and she remembered carrying her baby in her arms and leading the other child by the hand. These two daughters