

EARLY DAYS AT PORT RYERSE

By Mr. Geo. J. Ryerse

The first resident of what is now known as Port Ryerse was Colonel Samuel Ryerse, who was born in New Jersey in 1750, and who died June 12th, 1812. Why two brothers of the same family, who lived but two miles apart, should have different names, namely, Ryerson and Ryerse, is a mystery that has never been satisfactorily solved, as far as I know. My guess is that it came about by the name being written Ryerse when my grandfather received his commission as a captain in the British Army of 1776. His four brothers were Ryersons. One brother, Joseph, afterwards Colonel and father of five Methodist preachers, joined the British Army near the same date, though but sixteen at the time, and not being in good physical health. The brothers served the full seven years to 1783. Their property being confiscated, both went to New Brunswick, Samuel being induced by friends to return to Long Island, found it a most uncomfortable place to live, as he was regarded as a Tory, and an enemy of the new republic. Writing to Governor Simcoe, he was urgently solicited by the Governor to come and make his home in Upper Canada, and promised liberal grants of land. They met at the Niagara River in 1794, when satisfactory arrangements were completed. My grandfather returned to his home, settled his affairs, and in the summer of 1795, with his wife, my father, then one year old, a son of his first wife named Samuel, who was then twelve to fifteen years of age, his worldly goods and some hired help, started for Upper Canada. It was a tedious and trying journey across New York State, but Niagara River was finally reached. Passing out of this river into Lake Erie by boat he coasted along the north shore of the lake until what is known as Ryerse's or Young's Creek was reached. There he landed, and going up the

hill adjoining the present English Church property, he surveyed the place and remarked, "Here I wish to live and die." He and his wife now sleep a few feet from the place where he stood at that time.

Some three years later his brother, Joseph, afterwards Colonel, came from New Brunswick and settled in Charlotteville, two miles away on the road to Vittoria, where he lived till ninety-four years of age. Bringing assistants with him he appears to have had considerable means for that time. Securing a comfortable place of shelter for his wife and child at old Dr. Troyer's place near Port Rowan, he commenced to build a place for himself and family. First it was a shanty made of any material that could be procured. The first three weeks were a most trying time for him. Before the shanty was hardly completed, his men cleared out and left him alone with his young son, Samuel. Surviving this sickness and trying time, at the end of three weeks he was able to do something for himself again. From his shanty door he shot a number of wild turkeys, which gave him much needed food. Procuring more hired help, he erected a fair sized, comfortable log house, so that his family were quite well provided for.

These buildings were located on the flat ground close by or on the present site of Harry Brook's summer cottage. After a time the fireplace and chimney of this house, being made largely of sticks covered with clay, took fire and was burned down. We have no record of the next residence of my grandfather. However, he filled his place in the community and county to the full and faithfully served his fellow men. Governor Simcoe and those who followed him in provincial authority, honored him with various offices in their gift. For the first two or three years after 1795, if he required supplies of any kind he had to