

WALLACEBURG.



Wallaceburg, an enterprising and important town of 3,000 inhabitants, is pleasantly and—in a commercial sense—advantageously situated on the Sydenham river (which is navigable for the largest lake vessels) at the “Forks” or confluence of the North Branch and the main stream, about 9 miles from the River St. Clair, 12 miles from Wilkesport the limit of navigation of the north branch above and 12 miles from the Town of Dresden, the limit of navigation of the east or main branch beyond, and lies in the North Gore of Chatham Township, 17 miles north of the Town of Chatham. It is a Port of Entry and a prominent station on the Erie & Huron Railway. First laid out south of the river by L. M. Dougall and Hugh McCallum in 1833, and on the north side (called at one time Babyville) by James Baby in 1840, it has grown steadily, lately rapidly, being incorporated a village in 1875, and although by population long above the necessary population entitling to incorporation as a town, has declined the empty honor, avoiding in consequence the cost of erecting and the maintaining of two expensive bridges.

The early history of Wallaceburg is the history of the Baldoon settlement of Earl Selkirk, (the location of which lay immediately below the town limits) for the settlers of the one subsequently became merged into settlers of the other. It was within the triangular oasis (thendry land) formed by the Indian Line of 1790 surrender and the Sny, & Sydenham Rivers that the Earl placed his Highland emigrants—some 30 families—111 souls, in 1804. Here, near the “Sny,” were erected the common buildings, cattle and sheep provided, stores laid in, and a portion of the land platted out in 50 acre farms. The erection of the “Castle” (so called)—long an interesting landmark looming up from the prairie against the unobstructed sky—followed in due course. Apart from the world, a score of miles from any settlement and surrounded by the primeval forest on the one hand and the almost equally interminable “Grand Marais” on the other, here they commenced their gruesome but hopeful future. The location, however, was not a fortunate one and was made less so by proximity to the not over pleased Walpole Indians. Sickness came, decimating the little colony to such an extent that nearly one half its number were laid in the lonely God’s acre of the colony the first year; and through rising waters and other adverse circumstances, in little more than a decade thereafter—so far as the Selkirk farm was concerned—the colony was broken up and the settlers dispersed in the immediate neighborhood. The settlement did not escape the evils incident to the 1812 war. The Sydenham valley and Indian Line furnished a short and safe route for the American troopers, bent on plundering raids on the Upper Thames and Lake Erie settlements beyond. It is said a large body of Col McArthur’s troopers bivouacked on the very site of Wallaceburg, and the general himself generously entertained by the friendly Scots at Baldoon Castle; while on another occasion Captain Forsyth and his men—less friendly and generous than Mr. McArthur—plundered Baldoon farm of its cattle and famous sheep, &c., (which, for some reason, the United States afterwards made restitution) and hunted the men and threatened the families, who as Royal Kent Militia had taken part in the defense of their country. Much to their pluck and patriotism the settlers of Baldoon formed a large quota of McGregors famous company of Kent volunteers and saw bloody fighting at the Longwoods and elsewhere.

Below Wallaceburg is Walpole Island—the Indian reserve—where are located some 800 Chippewa and merged Huron Indians. Here stood the old Huron village then extant and forming the starting point of the survey of the Indian Line of 1790 surrender. Across the river, nearly opposite, is the McDonald farm—lot B in the 4th concession, so famous as being the location of the “Sny Spirits,” which 1829 so peculiarly manifested themselves to the superstitious and terror stricken settlers. From stone throwing—coming from the depths of the “Sny”—spirit rapping and other antics, to the more reprehensible acts of fire raising buildings and crops, were not above the “doings” of these shadowy devils. Silly as it may appear at the present age; for undoubtedly it was the work of two-legged devils in the flesh and a result of a land wrangle, yet the “spirits” were readily believed, not only by the local settlers but those on the River Thames and elsewhere. Indeed the “facts” were sworn to by intelligent people; and even to this day persons are to be found who are believers in the supernatural. Incredible as it may be, numbers of the settlers temporarily left the locality and priests made visits to quiet the people; whilst numerous pilgrimages were made by persons from the