

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE SKETCH

OF THE

COUNTY OF WELLAND.

The whole of this District between the two great lakes is superlatively beautiful.—*Mrs. Jameson, Winter Studies.*

The Peninsula lying between Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron was originally occupied, at the earliest period of which there is any historical record, by the Algonquins, Hurons, and Wyandots, and the tribes composing that singular confederacy known among the French explorers as "La Nation Neutre," who inhabited that portion of the country, afterwards termed the Niagara District, and the entire north shore of Lake Erie. "La Nation Neutre," after a desperate struggle was nearly exterminated by the Iroquois in one of their frequent inroads into Canada about the year 1650, and the few individuals who survived were incorporated with their conquerors. Their settlements were destroyed and abandoned, and their country remained for years uninhabited, except by an occasional roving band of Wyandots or Hurons in search of small game, in which it abounded. After the lapse of half a century the Chippawas (Otchipwes) and Missasaugas appear to have gradually emigrated from their original hunting-grounds on the shores of Lakes Huron and Superior and occupied the lands of "La Nation Neutre" and other tribes extirpated or dispersed by the conquering Iroquois. Daring French explorers from the settlements near the sea had already made their appearance. The Jesuit Father, Hennepin, conducted by his Indian guides, was the first white man who penetrated to the banks of the Niagara to gaze with awe upon its stupendous cataract, which he estimated with true Gallic extravagance as falling a height of six hundred feet, and assured the world that its thunders were audible at times forty-five miles away. Adventurous La Salle, on his way as he hoped to China, a few years later made a halt above the Falls, where he built a vessel for lake navigation. The chain of French posts, trading and military, was rapidly extended westward from Montreal to Mackinac and even farther. Fortifications were built at the mouth of the Niagara on its eastern bank, above the great falls at Schlosser on the east and at the mouth of the tributary Chippawa, and near the site of Fort Erie on the west bank of the river where it debouches from