



# AN HISTORICAL RECORD OF THE COUNTY OF HALTON,

Including Lists of the County and Town Officers, the Agricultural Production, Educational Statistics, Population, and a description of some of the Principal Towns and Villages of the County.

Although the scope of this portion of our work is to present to our readers more particularly an historical sketch of the County of Halton, a brief notice of the general history of our country, and particularly of the Province of Ontario, will not be considered out of place. More than the outlines of that history could not be expected from the limited space allotted to the letter-press accompanying this work, and the reader is referred for fuller details to the numerous excellent works which have been written on this subject. We shall, therefore, only briefly set forth the more salient features of the general history, and not deal in details until we reach that part more especially connected with the County of Halton. Canada was discovered by Jacques Cartier in 1534, and from that time until the treaty of 1763, when it was ceded to Great Britain, belonged to France. Samuel de Champlain was the first French Governor of Canada (then called New France), and died in 1635, after having conducted several important exploratory expeditions. At that time and down to the year 1663, a company chartered by the French Government, under the designation of "The Society of 100 Associates," exercised supreme control over the affairs of the colony. This company was bound to provide for the settlement of the country, and for the religious care of the colonists as well as the conversion of the savages. But the Company did little to further the settlement of the country, for in 1648 the population of the colony did not exceed 800, and in 1662 less than 2,000, very many of whom had been brought out by associations of pious persons, or religious orders. About the last mentioned period, in order to supply the colonists with wives, young women of good character, principally selected from among orphan girls, were brought out from France under the auspices of religious persons of their own sex. After the suppression of the "Company of Associates" in 1663, the increase in the population was more rapid, and in 1763 we find that it had reached 70,000, principally settled in the lower part of what is now the Province of Quebec. Under French dominion Canada was more of a military than an agricultural colony, and the various settlements were little more than a chain of barracks; presenting in this a striking contrast to the then British colonies on the other side of the St. Lawrence.

The most bitter animosity existed between the British colonists, who occupied territories lying east of the Alleghenies, and the French inhabitants of Quebec, and even when the parent countries were at peace, war raged between their respective subjects on the question of disputed boundaries.

On the breaking out of the seven years' war in Europe, both England and France sent reinforcements to their troops in America. In 1752 the Marquis de Montcalm arrived in Canada with a large force. After various sieges and battles lasting over several years, finally Niagara was captured by the British in 1758; and about the middle of February, 1759, a squadron having on board an army of nearly 8,000 men, under the command of General Wolfe, sailed for the St. Lawrence. On the 26th June, the fleet anchored off the Isle of Orleans, and Wolfe published an address to the Canadian people, in which he promised them safety in person and property, and freedom in religion, if they remained neutral. But this appeal had little effect on the brave peasantry, who adhered loyally to their valiant commander. While the British fleet had been slowly ascending the river, Montcalm and his followers were busily preparing to receive it. They labored unceasingly to add to the great natural strength of the country about Quebec, and above all no efforts were spared to organize the peasantry. Great reliance was placed by the Canadians on the supposed difficulty of navigating the river, and they were filled with disappointment when the preconcerted signal announced that the British fleet had passed the "narrows" in safety. Many weeks were spent by the invading force before the apparently impregnable fortifications without any decisive advantage being gained. At length it was determined to make a night attack and approach the city by the Plains of Abraham. On the evening of the 12th September the movement was commenced, and on the succeeding day a desperate battle was fought, in which both Wolfe and Montcalm were killed. The British troops gained a decisive victory, which was followed in a few days by the surrender of Quebec. A vigorous but unsuccessful attempt was made in the spring of the following year to regain possession of Quebec; but finally Montreal and all Canada capitulated, and by the treaty of 1763 the country was formally ceded to the British Crown. The inhabitants, being nearly all Roman Catholics, were guaranteed the free exercise of their religion.

At this time nearly the whole region was a wilderness, the principal settlements being along the St. Lawrence and its chief tributaries, and from 1760 until 1763 was governed by councils composed of military officers.

In 1763 General James Murray was appointed Governor-General, with instructions, as far as practicable, to introduce the laws of England. Much discontent was produced by the attempt to introduce English laws, and finally a compromise was adopted. In criminal cases, trial by jury and English legal forms were established. As regarded property and civil rights, the ancient laws of the colony were allowed to have force. But upwards of fourteen years elapsed before any settled mode of administering the laws can be said to have been introduced.

In 1774, Sir Guy Carleton (afterwards Lord Dorchester), being Governor, the "Quebec Act" was passed, by which some of the principal grievances complained of by the French Canadians were removed. The English inhabitants were greatly dissatisfied with the provisions of this Act.

In the meantime, notwithstanding the errors connected with the government and the administration of the law, the country had recovered from the condition in which it was left on the cessation of the war. Exports of wheat, fish, and other products were made, and the population had increased to over 80,000.

In 1775 and 1776, on the outbreak of hostilities between the American colonies and the mother country, Canada became involved again in the miseries of war. General Richard Montgomery, commander of the colonial forces, advanced with a considerable body of men toward the River St. Lawrence and Montreal, and forced Governor Carleton to make a retreat to Quebec, which he effected with great difficulty. Obtaining control of the navigation of the river, Montgomery proceeded to effect a junction with the notorious General Benedict Arnold, who had already begun to besiege Quebec. This undertaking, however, failed, Arnold was badly wounded, and Montgomery was killed on the night of the 31st December, 1775. Early in the ensuing spring the Americans retired, all the places which they had captured were abandoned by them, and finally they retreated from the country. In spite of the endeavours of the Americans, the French Canadian population, under the guidance of the priests, remained loyal to the British Crown, and cheerfully seconded the efforts of the English troops.

When hostilities ceased in 1782, and the independence of the United States was recognized, many persons in the States who had refused to join in the revolt, and had remained faithful to their allegiance, found themselves discarded by their fellow-colonists and their property confiscated. Upwards of 10,000 of these, known by the name of United Empire Loyalists, removed from their homes and came to settle in Upper Canada, now Ontario. The addition of so large a number of intelligent and loyal settlers was a great advantage to the country, and they rendered material aid in after years in preserving this country to the old land. Many of their descendants still hold prominent positions in Canada, and no body of men are more deservedly held in high esteem than the brave U. E. Loyalists.

In 1791 the province was divided into Upper and Lower Canada, and representative institutions granted. This lasted until 1841, when the two provinces were again united under one parliament, with equal representation in both houses—the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council. The first Legislature for the Province of Upper Canada met in the fall of 1792, at Niagara (then called Newark), under Governor Simcoe. For a while the new constitution of 1791 worked comparatively well, but it did not altogether do away with the former causes of dissension, and finally introduced new elements of discord. In each province there was created an irresponsible body, which the Governor was empowered to create under the title of an Executive Council. In Lower Canada the Roman Catholics were not fairly represented, and the chief Protestant ecclesiastic was honored with a seat, while in both, paid public officials formed the great majority of the Executive Council. The most unseemly disputes occurred between the Council, almost entirely composed of persons of British origin, and the Assembly, principally of French, and the feeling continued to increase in intensity. Matters were not much better in Upper Canada, and only the breaking out of war with the United States in 1812, prevented open rupture. However, in defence of the provinces all parties united, and, for the time, laid aside their disagreements. The war lasted until nearly the close of the year 1814, and the Canadians exhibited a great amount of patriotism and bravery. Five successive invasions were made by the Americans with very little result.

For fuller details of this interesting struggle, upheld with such stubborn valor by Canada, with but little assistance from home, the reader is referred elsewhere. Suffice it to say that unshrinking fidelity to the old flag prevailed, and the invaders were compelled to retire. A treaty of peace

was concluded at Ghent on December 24, 1814. After the cessation of hostilities the former internal dissensions were renewed with increased bitterness, and finally culminated in the rebellion of 1837-8.

During this period from 1814 to 1837, many Governors of distinction and ability had been sent out from England, but they discharged their duties under instructions from the Home Government, which, while it doubtless was desirous of promoting the welfare of Canada, was ignorant of the requirements of the people. But the task of reconciling the differences between the contending parties was no light one, and it is questionable if any amount of tact in the administrators would have accomplished it. In 1831 the House of Assembly presented a long list of grievances to the Governor, some of which were remedied by the Imperial Parliament, which passed an act giving the Colonial Assembly full power over the Colonial revenues. In 1832 the cholera first appeared in Canada, and was very fatal in most of the towns and villages. The breach between the House of Assembly and the Imperial Government began to widen, until in 1834, the Assembly refused to vote the supplies, and sent Mr. Viger to England to lay before the Government a statement of grievances.

By this time the populations of the provinces had increased to 300,000 and 500,000 respectively, and the people demanded an Elective Legislative Council instead of the appointed one. In the Legislative Councils of the two provinces, consisting of twenty-three and seventeen members, respectively, no less than twelve and ten, respectively, were public officers in receipt of pay, of whom the majority held seats also in the Executive Councils. In 1834, in Lower Canada, the Assembly passed a series of resolutions, 92 in number, and passed addresses to the King, setting forth their grievances. In 1835 a commission was appointed to enquire into the alleged grievances and their remedy. The Commissioners reported at great length, and the report was discussed at great length in the House of Commons. Resolutions were passed which virtually suspended the Canadian constitution of 1791. On the arrival of the news in Canada in April 1837, the opponents of the Government held "indignation" meetings, and finally broke out into insurrection. The movement was renewed in 1838, but never had much chance of success. It is not our purpose to enter into an account of this unfortunate affair. Lives were lost in several risings that took place, but finally the Government succeeded in crushing out the rebellion. A few of the unfortunate rebels were captured, tried and executed, others were banished from the country. Most of them were, however, restored to their civil rights, and many of them still remain among us, holding positions of trust, honored and loyal citizens, and respected by those who formerly opposed them. The causes which led to this unhappy struggle being all now removed, their removal being no doubt greatly accelerated by it, let us hope that our country may never again be placed in such an unfortunate position. In 1841 the two provinces of Upper and Lower Canada were united, the total population being about 1,000,000, that of Upper Canada being estimated at 465,000, of Lower Canada at 625,000. By the Act of Union there was to be one Legislature framed after the model of Great Britain, an equal number (42) of elected representatives for each of the old provinces in the House of Assembly, and also a Legislative Council to consist of life members, not less than twenty in number, and appointed by the Crown, and the powers of the Legislature were defined. In 1856 a modification of the Constitution as regarded the Legislative Council was made. The province was divided into forty-eight electoral districts, and that body was made elective, excepting as to the life members already appointed. The Constitution of 1841 existed until it gave way for the more comprehensive Constitution which now exists, and which came into force on July 1st, 1867. By this system the different scattered provinces belonging to Britain in North America have, with the exception of Newfoundland, been united into one solid confederacy, the Dominion of Canada. The period from 1841 to 1867 was an era of continued progress in legislative reforms, in population and in wealth. The principal measures and improvements were the passing of laws for the establishment of systems of municipal government to enable the people to manage their own local affairs, also of systems of public education; the introduction of Responsible Government; regulation of the finances and currency, and of the tariff on imports; the completion of the system of canals for improving the navigation of the St. Lawrence; railways and other public works; the postal system; settlement of the clergy reserve and seigniorial tenure questions; the establishment of universities, colleges, and normal schools, and the better division of the country for judicial and municipal purposes. Though all these matters were debated with more or less acrimony, yet the violence of old times did not take place. The difficulty of working the Constitution