Early Settlement
Settlement in Norfolk County

By R. Robert Mutrie

The Background to Settlement

Ontario has a long tradition of welcoming peoples of many nationalities dating right back to our first settlers—the United Empire Loyalists. Even two hundred years ago, in Loyalist times, this was very much a multi-cultural, cosmopolitan province. The ethnic origins of our first settlers included German, French, English, Swiss, Portuguese, Irish, Scottish, Russian, and Dutch, to name a few. Some of them descended from families who lived in the American Colonies for generations; others had been there for just a few years. They brought here a mixture of customs and languages that could rival the Biblical Tower of Babel.

Even many of the Indians were non-native to this province, having lived in New York and served with the Loyalist forces. The government officials had to search carefully to find a few scattered tribes of the Mississauga and others from whom they purchased the land here.

As is often the case of immigrants today, those of the late 1700's fled their homes as refugees of war. At that time, they faced the War of the American Revolution. Then as now, Ontario's lure came as a haven for the war weary and the peaceful. Although these men and women derived from many different backgrounds, all had one thing all had in common during those formulative years of the late 1700's. They felt a deep rooted desire to live with the orderly laws and security they had known under the British Crown in pre-Revolutionary times, now promised in Canada.

Many immigrants could be described as peaceful farming and business folk alarmed by the mob scenes that occurred in the larger American cities prior to and during the Revolution. They had been alienated by the wanton destruction of the property of those suspected supporting the British cause both during and after the war. Anyone who did not espouse either side militarily became accused of Loyalist leanings by the republicans and fell under ostracizion in their community. Also, after the Revolution, further uncertainty developed as the federal Congress of the United States struggled to establish its identity in the face of demands for individual states' rights. Additionally the unsavoury threat existed of yet another war with Britain espoused by elements of the American population. The United States proved not to be a place congenial to the peaceful immigrant from “the old country” to set down roots. The peaceful immigrant required a land devoid of the political and religious wars that rent the Europe of their forebears.

The earliest of the immigrants to Canada came as refugees who served in the Loyalist corps during the Revolution. Having fought against neighbours and even near relatives in the British cause for nearly a decade, they afterwards found themselves unwelcome in their home communities. Many had already moved their families to the military encampments during the war and their property had been confiscated.

Among the later arrivals in Ontario during the 1790's were loyalists who had returned to or remained in their American homes after the war, braving the ostracism of their neighbours rather than entrust their families and fortunes to an uncertain future in Canada. More included opportunist men and women looking for land wealth.

In the earliest settlement period from 1780 to 1783, the Loyalists had few choices of where they could go. They found many parts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick inhospitable land-wise—a crucial problem in a largely agrarian society. Many a prospective settler cleared a part of his government grant only to discover the soil unsuited to crops. They either returned to the United States or went elsewhere.

Quebec, which at that time comprised all of the territory west of the Maritimes, still had the old seigneural system of land ownership and French civil laws guaranteed to the inhabitants by the Government of England under the Quebec Act. In this system, an individual settler could not own his land outright, a prospect alien to the ways that had developed in the colonies to the south.

At any rate only small pockets of surveyed lands developed along the St. Lawrence River, the northeastern shore of Lake Ontario, and along the Niagara River during the 1780's. These all went to the men of a few Loyalist regiments, among them the King's Royal Regiment of New York and Butler's Rangers.

So, many Loyalists adopted a wait and see attitude and remained in the United States, enduring the fines, confiscations and taunts that came their way despite a clause of the Treaty of Paris which specifically forbade such treatment. They wait through the 1780's into the 1790's. The decade of the 1790's marked the turnaround for the "wait and see" Loyalists' fortunes. In the immediately preceding years, a trickle of immigration to Ontario gradually developed into a stream as more and more in the new republic could no longer deal with the persecution. Some compensation went to those who arrived by 1789 providing a welcome relief. With most of their American possessions confiscated or fined away, they had little to lose in making the move.

By 1791, when the province of Upper Canada was created, it has been estimated that it had a population of as many as 30,000 people where none had been twelve years earlier. These pioneers cried out for more familiar and closer government than Quebec City. The sheer size of the immigrant population lent undeniable weight to their claims.

On May 14, 1791, the Parliament of Great Britain made a partition along the Ottawa River and created the Province of Upper Canada with a popularly elected sixteen member assembly. The pioneer capital was tentatively placed at the mouth of the Niagara River, then called Newark, now known as Niagara-on-the-Lake. The new province's name, Upper Canada came from its location "up" the St. Lawrence River.

The second boost to the early settlers occurred with the arrival of Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe. He landed at Quebec on November 11, 1791, wintered there and then set foot in Upper Canada in June 1792 with a well thought out plan for the development of his new province. Simcoe felt highly sensitive towards the plight of the Loyalists. He fought in the trenches with them as the Colonel of the Queen's Rangers, an incorporated company of men loyal to the British cause. He had an awareness that many loyalists still remained in the United States awaiting the opportunity to come to "greener pastures".

Accordingly, soon after his arrival, Simcoe enlarged the surveying department and sent them out on an orderly mapping of new townships. In the next four years, the rest of the Niagara Peninsula would be surveyed, along with the area at the head of Lake Ontario and the townships along its north shore. The lands west of the Grand River were mapped as far as Long Point.

Simcoe issued a proclamation that any who would become a bona fide settler in Upper Canada and

who swore an oath of allegiance to the Crown could obtain a two hundred acre farm lot, a very substantial grant for the times. Those who served in or supported the Loyalist regiments would receive an additional one hundred acre allotment. Field officers enjoyed the promise of even more according to their rank. A Regimental Colonel could receive five thousand acres. Simcoe ordered his policy advertised in the major newspapers in the United States and met with respondents on the steps of his log house. This immediate meeting with the province's ultimate authority likely convinced many an uncertain settler.

Simcoe's all-important proclamation proved to be the impetus needed by many to uproot their families and return to the British laws. They could now feel secure in bringing their wives and children to Canada to begin afresh within the institutions they had known. Of course chopping down trees and building a new house had to be expected, so at least one grown son or son-in-law came with them. The promise of free land grants to those who developed them made the move possible. The further promise of a familiar system of government peacefully administered was viewed with relief.

In the 1790's, the population of Upper Canada jumped to more than 100,000 with additions not just from the United States but also from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Europe.

What happened next is a matter of public record, the story told in a remarkable collection designated the Upper Canada Land Petitions. All who arrived applied for land with a petition to the Executive Council of Upper Canada justifying their request. These petitions are held by the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa and filmed for general viewing. The documents are further discussed in the "Bibliogaphy, Sources & Abbreviations" section of this work.

It is important to make a differentiation between Loyalists and those designated officially by the Government on the "U. E. List" as United Empire Loyalists. All who came to Upper Canada had to swear loyalty to the Crown in order to receive a land grant, but not all had visibly served or supported the cause during the Revolution and so did not have inclusion in the official U.E. List.

The list does not include men who died while fighting or while confined in jail during the Revolution. It does not include those who fought but died afterwards in the United States, and whose widow and children came to Upper Canada. It also does not include the many military Loyalists who arrived in Upper Canada after 1797. One unfortunate man who served in the Loyalist forces with his father thought it sufficient that his father's name be placed on the list and then discovered too late that his name should also have been there for the benefit of his own children.

The government exercised a certain amount of favouritism in the preparation of the list. The names came as submissions from local Justices of the Peace. In some instances a qualified United Empire Loyalist was out of touch with the authorities and left out. Some names were omitted in the copying and others struck off without consulting the individual. In after years, applications flooded into the Executive Council for their inclusion, but Simcoe's strict terms remained in effect.

The Government's official U.E. List should be viewed with caution and reference should be made to the Upper Canada Land Petitions which include thousands more of the people who arrived during these years.

The Beginnings of Settlement

Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe left Quebec City to the new province west of the Ottawa

River in the spring of 1792 and had with him a firm grasp on the geography of Upper Canada. He carried a plan for a new capital situated well inland at present London flanked by supporting forts and settlements at York (present Toronto), Long Point (in present Norfolk County), and Gloucester (present Collingwood), key locations on Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron. After a two-month sojourn at Kingston, Simcoe sailed across Lake Ontario to his first capital at Newark at the mouth of the Niagara River, arriving on July 26.

This proved not an easy time for the new Governor of the Upper Canadian frontier. He immediately faced a flurry of requests from prospective settlers who arrived daily and petitioned for lands not yet surveyed. Where surveys had been completed, he adjudicated conflicting land claims from those who settled before the mapping. Simcoe was also dogged by poor health hampering his administration and travels. Despite all of this our province's first Lieutenant Governor personally covered all of his jurisdiction. Always in his heart and mind, continued his master plan for military establishments on the Great Lakes and the capital on the Thames River. A sprinkling of requests for lands in these areas trickled in to whet the Lieutenant-Governor's appetite for getting on with the business of developing Upper Canada.

Simcoe wrote precisely in his singling out of Long Point as a key defensive post for Upper Canada and his proposed capital and he noted the growing pressure for settlement there:

> "Applications have already been made for lands near to Long Point on Lake Erie, where I have always projected to establish a Military Colony as being situated opposite to Presque Isle, the most practicable route from the United States."

Historically, the year 1793 may be noted as the tide-water one for settlement in Norfolk County. Some arrived earlier under permissions from Simcoe's predecessors. More, impatient with any delay, filtered in during 1793 with an approval letter from Simcoe and simply squatted on land along Long Point Bay in the expectation that surveys and grants would follow. Frederick Mabee and his sons-in-law, Peter Teeple and John Stone pulled up stakes and travelled all the way from New Brunswick to establish themselves at Turkey Point on Long Point Bay in the spring of 1793. A mile westward, the brothers-in-law, Conradt Cope, Tunis Cronk, and John Darby began improvements on the bay shore immediately south of present St. Williams. They belatedly applied for their permission in 1793.

Already well established, "Doctor" John Troyer made his home in the hollow that bears his name. He purchased the rights to his lot from an earlier settler, Asa Holmes, and was joined by John Foryea. Troyer's brother, Christian, dropped in and out of the Settlement, each time bringing with him his Amish neighbours from Pennsylvania.

West of Troyer, on Big Creek, Lucas Dedrick and his father-in-law, John Parsin, cleared their first acre and planted their crop of wheat in 1793. Nearby, Timothy Murphy established himself earlier on the creek that came to bear his name but then changed to Dedrick's Creek.

John Stacy, Christian Warner, and Nathan Barnum made their explorations on Long Point Bay in the area between the Mabees and Secords before those families arrived. Stacy stayed on to form a settlement. Peter Walker settled at the mouth of Patterson's Creek at present Port Dover. The Abraham Smith family established themselves up Young's Creek west of present Vittoria.

Townsend Township to the north when surveyed went in total to the Pierce Associates of New England with Paul Averill as their local agent. The Collvers, Omsteads, Cooleys and others arrived among the first there. Simcoe personally met the prospective pioneers at Newark and those he did not meet he ordered away.

Only a few of those along Long Point Bay had the Governor's official blessing. Some received earlier tentative permissions from the Land Board of Quebec and others had no permission at all. On September 20, 1793, Simcoe wrote to Home Secretary Henry Dundas extolling the advantages of the area:

"Long Point is the favorite object of all descriptions of people; Its vicinity is represented as the most desirable for Settlements, and whether the restraint which it has hitherto thought prudent to place upon its colonization seems to enhance its value, or it really possesses great Advantages, there appears to be little doubt but that it will become a flourishing part of Upper Canada."

The restraint to which Governor Simcoe referred were deterrents of his own making. He considered the establishment of a fort on the heights overlooking Turkey Point and the entrance to Long Point Bay to be a pre-requisite to settlement.

Simcoe had two reasons for his military requirement. First, he heard the rumblings of renewed hostilities from the United States where some officials had never reconciled themselves to Canada not becoming a part of their Union. American General Anthony Wayne marched north-westward during this time with designs on establishing forts along the frontier. One of these outposts went up directly across Lake Erie from Long Point at Presqu'Isle. The second reason for Simcoe's reluctance came from the possibility of the Six Nations Indians situated along the Grand River taking sides in a long standing conflict between the western Nations. Their war path would take them right through the Long Point district and the settlers would be caught in the middle.

Simcoe felt that a strong fort manned by the King's troops and Loyalist veterans of the Revolution combined with a supporting settlement would, "effectually separate the Mohawks on the Grand River from the other Indian Nations, and prevent what Captain [Chief Joseph] Brant once intimated to me in a letter 'the Six Nations becoming a Barrier between the British and Western Indians.'"

Simcoe took advantage of every opportunity to put forward his plan for a military base at Long Point, bending the ear of anyone in Canada or England who would listen. He ran into heavy weather from his superior Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester, the Governor and military head of both Upper and Lower Canada.

The year 1793 turned into 1794 and still Simcoe waited for approval of his strategy. Meanwhile, he held up settlement and issued an eviction order to those without his authorization. In obedience to the ban, some left their few cleared acres in Norfolk. One such disappointed pioneer was John Parsin and, in his absence, another opportunistic squatter moved in and took over Parsin's improvements. Murphy, called to duty in the Indian Department in Detroit (at that time a British possession), rented out his land and had no awareness of the order. His improvement fell to confiscation and Murphy spent years proving his claim later. Conradt Cope and his brothers-in-law left to take up grants being offered on the Governor's Road north of Dundas at present Copetown. Christian Warner found his claim denied. Settler Nathan Barnum died in the interim and his heirs would have to make renewed applications in after years.

Most others produced their authorizations and remained to wait out the turn of events. In the summer of 1795, the surveyor completed the first lot mappings on the front from Long Point to the Grand River and identified those with legitimate rights.

Lieutenant Governor Simcoe made his long postponed visit to Long Point in September and came away even more impressed by what he saw at first hand. He afterwards wrote:

"The country is thickly timbered, the chief trees being oak, beach, pine and walnut. Making our way through the forest, we reached the lake at a place which from the abundance of wild fowl is named Turkey Point. A ridge of cliffs of considerable height skirts the shore for some distance. Between this and Lake Erie is a wide and gently sloping beach. The long ridge of harbour sand (Long Point proper) encloses a safe and commodious harbour. The view from the high bank is magnificent. Altogether, the place presents a combination of natural beauty but seldom found. Here we have laid out a site of six hundred acres for a town, with

reservations for government buildings and called it Charlotte Villa, in honour of Queen Charlotte."

Upon his return to Niagara, Simcoe decided at last to open the land for grants and instructed the Surveyor General, David W. Smith to prepare a list of applicants for location in the Long Point Settlement. He also wrote in October that he was, "encouraging the Erection of Saw and Grist Mills in the vicinity of Long Point."

Then, finally in January 1796, Simcoe received the long awaited go ahead for the military establishment from Portland, the Home Secretary:

"... inform you of my approbation of your occupying Long Point, in the manner you propose, and I have only to add, that from the near approach of the time for the delivery up of our Posts [Forts Oswego, Niagara, Detroit and Michilimackinac] it is material that the occupation of that Post, and any other, which that event may, in your Opinion, render necessary, should take place with as little delay as possible."

Dorchester again thwarted Simcoe's plans before the fort could be started. Simcoe wrote to Portland.

"Your Grace will have been informed by prior communications that my wishes to carry into execution such part of the system I think the King's interest requires, respecting an Establishment at Charlotteville have been frustrated."

Simcoe's grand plan for Long Point as a military centre fell into abeyance with his untimely return to England in failing health duringg
the summer of 1796, but the impetus for settlement was now well established. What E. A. Owen wrote of this settlement comes from the century old memories of the pioneers' descendants.