

**A Brief History of Moore Township**  
**Reprinted from writings of Isabella C. Finlayson 1934**  
**(Note: original spellings and grammar have been transcribed as written)**

Moore Township has Played an Interesting Role in History (by Isabella C. Finlayson)  
printed in 1934

Moore Township is situated on the St. Clair River, which forms its western boundary. On the north it is bounded by Sarnia Township, on the east by Enniskillen and on the south by Sombra. It is twelve miles in length from north to south and eleven miles from east to west. The greater part of the surface is almost completely level, which made the drainage in the early days very difficult and this is still the chief problem with which the township council is concerned and the cause of great expense to the landowners.

On the west side there are several creeks which flow into River St. Clair, the largest being Talfourds Creek and Baby's Creek. A larger stream Bear Creek, enters the township between the eighth and sixth concessions on the east, and flows southwest till it enters Sombra Township. A few miles to the west is a branch of it Burton's Creek, which also flows south.

The land adjacent to these streams is hilly and as it afforded easier drainage, was settled earlier than the region between there and the river.

The soil of the township is mostly clay except in the southern section where there is considerable black loam.

Before the [European settlers arrived], this region was . . . densely covered by every variety of hardwood, some specimens of which grew to an enormous size. An elm tree was cut on Lot 37, River front, during the 40's. A grown man lay across the stump with his head at the edge on one side, and his feet did not reach the edge on the other.

The country was peopled by [Indigenous peoples], . . . Disputing the privileges of the woods with the [Indigenous peoples] were wild animals, bears, wolves, deer and many smaller species were plentiful and for many years after the settlers arrived their domestic animals frequently fell prey to the wolves.

This was the condition of the country when the [European settlers] arrived.

The voyageurs' bateau and sailing vessels passed back and forth on the rivers and lakes, engaged in the fur trade. A sailor on one of these vessels landed on the shore of River St. Clair and proceeded to establish a home about 1800. The sailor was John Courtney, a native of England, and he was the first white settler, not only in Moore Township, but on the east bank of the St. Clair River, his farm was lot 39, now owned by Neil Simpson. One proof of his early

arrival is to be found in the cemetery on his son's tombstone; the record being – “Born in Moore, 1802.”

The next settlers to arrive were French; one a squatter named Papineau, who settled on the lot which afterwards became the Catholic church property, No 43, and another named Campeau, a bona fide settled on Lot 31. He made good headway in clearing the land as he had forty-two acres cleared before the township was surveyed. The date of their arrival is not known but it was before 1813. In 1813 Rufus Henderson came from Grosse Pointe near Detroit to lots 6 and 7 and shortly afterwards James Baby from Windsor came to lot 34 and 35.

The township was surveyed in 1829 by Col. Mount, whose supplies consisted of a barrel of flour, a barrel of pork and a barrel of whiskey. At that time there were twenty-four settlers all on the river and, ten were French from the French settlements on the Detroit River. Previous to this date, what is now Moore, Sombra and Walpole Island was called the District of St. Clair. The name of this township was then changed to Moore in memory of Sir John Moore, the noted British general, who- “was buried darkly at dead of night” on the battlefield of Spain.

Although surveyed into townships the territory remained a part of Kent County until 1850 when Lambton County was divided off.

Dr. Dunlop who had settled at Goderich, and who was the Canadian manager of the Canada Land Co., wrote a book, “The Backwoodsman,” setting forth the opportunities to be found in this country. This book was widely distributed in the Old Country, the result being a great influx of settlers from 1830 on.

Then, too, the British government desirous of having the country settled as quickly as possible, made liberal grants of land to retired army and navy officers, some receiving as much as five hundred acres. A grant of one hundred acres was made to each private soldier who came here to live. The officers chose their homesteads on the river. The names of these are: Capt. Storey, Col. Graham, Admiral Vidal, R.N. Capt. Vidal, R.N. Capt. Wright, R.N. Capt. Keating, Alex Sinclair, Pay-Sergeant Thomas Fisher, Color-Sergeant Joseph Biddle and Mrs. Patrick Donnelly whose husband had been a doctor in the British army. The names of other river settlers who purchased their land were Reynolds, Kewley, Leslie, Gurd, Beggs, Wight, Ford, Cathcart, Johnston, Bell, Brightwell, Stockdale, Gallineau, Sutherland, Abbott, Little, Watson, Talfourd, Major McGlashan, Wheatley, Proctor, Warwick, Fisher, Abernathy, William Scott and Mrs. Hannah Scott. These all came in the thirties.

The early settlers held their land by “squatters rights” until the Township was surveyed, when they were able to obtain the deeds. The majority of them sold out their improvements, however to the new arrivals. The first deed issued in the new township was to William Kewley in 1833 for lot 11, River front. He walked to Chatham to obtain it.

Though the river settlement had begun so early in the century it was not till the 30's that the settlement of the interior began. In 1832 William Tremells came to lot 17 on the Sixth

concession. Other arrivals in the western half of the township during the 30's were William Whittet, Henry Cross, John McLean, John Blackie, also on the 6<sup>th</sup>, Duncan McCash on the 4<sup>th</sup>, William Turnbull, Phillip Reilley, James Butler, James Cruickshank, Baptiste Viger, George Nesbit, Colin McDairmid, John and Joel Hiscott, Samuel Edwards, and Joseph Anderson on the 8<sup>th</sup>, Donald Duncan and Alex Callum, William Fleck and John Perryman on the 10<sup>th</sup>, Capt. Elliot and Richard Dobson, who received government grants, and James and Andrew Hossie on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

The Bear Creek settlement was also begun in the 30's with the arrival of Charles Duncan to lot 6 on the 5<sup>th</sup> and Donald Bruce to lot 3 on the 9<sup>th</sup> in 1833. They were followed during the 30s by Peter Duncan, John Grant, John Galloway, John McKenzie, Samuel Harkness, George Grey, Finlay Farquharson, John Coutts, Robert Faithborne, Robert Brown, James King, James Lang, William James, Alex and David Nisbet.

The two sections of the township, the riverfront and the interior received two distinct classes of people as settlers. Along the river besides the army and navy men were others of what are called the official class, business men, physicians, master mechanics and others in that line. While these found the conditions of living so different to those to which they had been familiar, the majority of them had enough money to make themselves fairly comfortable. In most cases they were able to hire help for laborious work of clearing the land, and also in the household tasks made doubly arduous owing to the primitive methods necessitated by the pioneer conditions of the country.

The interior was settled mostly by laboring class, farmers, shepherds, sailors, fishermen, carpenters and private soldiers. This variety proved very fortunate for everyone. The river settlers, not being used to such strenuous work which the clearing of the land and in wresting of living from it entailed, were able to obtain help from those to whom hard physical labour was usual; they in turn were very glad to get the opportunity of earning the money which was the reward of teaching their employers the arts of holding a plow, breaking in a yoke of steers, planting crops and swinging an axe. This last accomplishment was the most necessary as without it the land could not have been cleared of the dense growth of timber, or even the houses built, as most of the latter were constructed of logs. The tale is told of some, who when using an axe to cut wood, stood in a tub or sugar kettle to protect their feet from injury.

In 1840 a system of municipal government was established to inaugurate which, the settlers met on New Year's Day and elected the officers required. Reeve Thomas Fisher, clerk, William McPherson, treasurer, Thomas Sutherland, assessor George Wight.

The great need in those days was for roads and ditches. Then, as now, the only means of providing funds for this work was by taxation. In 1840 the first assessment roll was prepared, which showed the number of ratepayers to be one hundred and thirty-eight. The taxes levied amounted to, from fifty cents to one dollar fifty cents for each one hundred acres. Although after the survey was made the government had the roads cleared of trees, it was many years before they became passable for any kind of vehicle, or even for pedestrians, except in the

winter when the ground was frozen. The lack of roads that would permit use of wheeled vehicles was not severely felt for some time as in 1840 there was only one four-wheeled wagon in the Township.

There was one grist mill owned by Froome Talfourd who also owned the saw mill. James Baby, William Cathcart Sr., Louis Gallineau and Thomas Sutherland each operated a store and in addition Sutherland and Clement Bertrand each owned a warehouse. There were 67 horses, 63 oxen, and 188 cows besides 68 other cattle. Five houses were of logs hewn on two sides and twenty-one of frame. Each of these contained one fireplace and some two or more. The other houses were of logs left in their natural state. Besides the 135 ratepayers listed, there were also 643 members of families, but the wives were not mentioned.

In 1842 a District Council, which was composed of the reeve from each township in Essex, Kent, and what is now Lambton met at Sandwich. This council was the forerunner of the present County Council. Moore was represented by James Baby in 1842 and '43 by Thomas Fisher from 1844 till '53 the year of his death. In 1852 he was elected warden.

All court business of this district was transacted at Sandwich also. A Frenchman living on the riverfront was called to serve on the jury. He had a sick wife and two small children, one an infant, so he thought it was impossible for him to attend. The other men who went offered to explain his absence to the officials, but the excuse did not suffice. The judge was highly indignant that anyone should disobey the summons and he levied a fine of \$25. The poor man had to sell his cow to pay it, although the neighbours also gave contributions to make up the amount.

Any business transactions in those days usually involved a long journey. Those whose privilege it was to vote for a representative to the Legislative Assembly, also had to make the trip to Sandwich, usually on foot, the journey requiring several days. As there were no voters' list, each man established his right to vote by producing his deed to his property and the receipt of last year's tax bill.

Besides the land which was given in grants to the army and navy men, the greater part of the remainder of the township was granted in 200 acre lots to the sons of United Empire Loyalists who were settled in the eastern part of the province. These were required to have a well dug and a house built; the house in most cases being only a rude shanty. Apparently but few of these came here to live but sold their land cheaply to incoming settlers. Lot 23, Con. 7 was granted to a son of a U.E. Loyalist of Lincoln County in 1836. In the same year he sold it to a man in Toronto for 50 pounds. He in turn in 1844 sold to John McLean for 75 pounds. He in turn sold it to his son John McLean for 3000 dollars and in 1880 this farm of 200 acres was valued at \$10,000.

The price of one farm, of which the deed was granted direct from the government in 1840 was 25 pounds. The price of another one of one hundred acres in 1857 was 40 pounds or \$200, while another one of one hundred acres in 1858, half a mile distant cost \$800. Even in those

days speculators were abroad in the land. Some private individuals who had money, bought these land grants cheaply and resold them at a great profit, though the land still lacked improvement, hence the difference in price.

So much for the land. What about the people who left the land of their birth, their friends and all the comforts they had previously known to brave the hazards of the long ocean voyage and the mysteries of the wilderness, to settle in a strange country. Why did they come? To satisfy a desire to become landowners in their own right. In the Old Country the land was owned by the wealthy and was rented to the tenants under very hard conditions. These wishing to improve their fortunes, eagerly seized the opportunity of cheap land, which a new country afforded. If they had families they were more easily provided for here than at home. Many of the new settlers were young couples, newly married, where others were young men or maidens eager to better their lot in life. The army and navy veterans, though drawing a pension, would have an opportunity of augmenting it by the advantages to be gained as landowners, and true to British traditions, were willing to endure the hardships entailed, for the purpose of extending the boundaries of empire.

In those days as now, Detroit exerted an influence over the township though of a different kind. It was the source of supply for food and other commodities which the settler needed. One resident left the following description: Detroit was the London of all the folks on the river. They bought everything they wanted there, it being easy of access and its size offering a larger choice than could be obtained elsewhere. It is a great and growing place (in 1848), though in the lifetime of a person still living – General Cass - it was only a little French village which it had been for one hundred years before.

Detroit was easy of access during summer when boats - the General Gratiot and General Brady - plied between here and Port Huron; but when they ceased to run the only way of travelling was on foot which many did. A bill of groceries bought by John Wheatley shows the price of such articles then: Detroit, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1839. Mr. Wheatley, Bo't of H. Hyatt 6 lbs. of tea at 4-9 ... \$3.54, 4 lbs. currants at 1-6 ...75¢, 4 ½ lbs. coffee at 1-4 ... 68¢, 1 Gal. wine at 12s ... \$1.50 1 ½ lbs. castile soap at 1-6 . . . 28¢, 5 lbs. of yellow soap at 1- . . . 63¢, 7 lbs. loaf sugar at 1- ...91¢ - total \$8.29.

Although boats did bring supplies it was a strenuous undertaking for those living inland to convey them to their homes through the woods. Once, when the boat was delayed for some reason, a family on the river had to live for nearly a week on potatoes, as the supply of flour was exhausted. That would not have seemed a hardship to a settler further back who, after planting his potatoes one spring had to dig them up to use as food, and for three months the only form of flour another family had was cornmeal.

When the settler had a little clearing made, his first crop was wheat, though it had to be scattered between the stumps, garnered with a sickle and threshed by a flail. The only means of grinding it was by a small hand mill, until commercial mills were built. Even then the grist was small, the farmer having to take only what he could carry on his back. Besides the

disadvantages encountered in obtaining food supplies, mail facilities were also restricted. Mail for this region came to Detroit or Sandwich and was sent by boat to be dropped off where convenient. For some time, this was at Sutherland's but in February 1837, a post office was opened with James Baby as postmaster. This post office and the one at Sarnia established at the same time, were the first in Lambton County.

Though no doubt the establishment of a post office was an event of importance, there appeared to be a limited amount of patronage, according to a record left by John Geikie. The post office was in a store owned by a French Canadian (and operated by his tenant) and was limited enough in its arrangements. "I remembered taking a letter one day a little later than was right, it appeared. 'The mail is made up,' said the postmaster, 'and it is against the law to open it once it is sealed. But I suppose I may as well oblige a friend.' So saying, he took down a piece of brown paper from the shelf behind him, cut round some seals which were on the back of it, and exposed the mail which I found consisted of a single letter. Mine was presently laid peacefully at the side of the other, and I hope did not make the bundle too heavy for the mailboy's saddle-bags."

For years the people were without medical services until the arrival of Dr. Thomas W. Johnston in 1834. He ministered to the needs of the people under very trying circumstances, having to travel on foot or by horseback through the woods to reach his patients. When Sarnia showed signs of becoming a town, Dr. Johnston moved there, and the people were dependent on the services from a doctor from St. Clair for some time until the village of Moore was founded in 1852. In 1870 Dr. Seager opened an office on the corner of the 8th concession and No. 10 sideroad.

For many years the only road in the township was the one along the river, though as late as 1839 it extended only as far north as the 8<sup>th</sup> concession. Beyond that was chaos. When the concession lines were opened up ditches were dug alongside the roadway, but it was many years before the roads even when cleared of debris, were anything but morass.

The soil being heavy clay, when wet it rolled up on the wheels till they were entirely covered, when the weight of it would cause it to fall off, then the same process would begin again. The motive power being oxen and the conveyance a lumber wagon, speed was not a factor in the life of the pioneer. Though road improvement was ever before the people, the process was slow. It was not till late in the 80's that the main arteries running into Sarnia - the River road, the Reserve road and Kimball sideroad were graveled.

Within the new century changes came. The oxcart had long since given place to the democrat and teams of horses and that again to the height of luxury - a top buggy, which in its turn was succeeded by the automobile. Now the concession roads were gravelled, and speed and more speed became the creed of the country. Twenty-five years ago, the sight of an automobile on the roads of the township was a novelty, while at the present time it is the horse drawn vehicle which is a rarity.

With the advent of the automobile pleasure seekers adopted the slogan "See Canada First," and preceded to do so by touring the River road. Today we see it - the most southerly section of the Blue Water highway - under the supervision of the provincial government, being transformed into a paved road. Running as it does for a great part of its length, beside the river or within sight of it, this section of the highway will compare favorably, in scenic beauty, with any part of it. There is only one St. Clair. "The great resplendent river, flowing so softly it seemed scarce to move - its bosom broad sheet of molten silver, on which clouds and sky and white sails and even the further banks, with the house and fields and woods far back from the water, painted as in a magic mirror - it was a beautiful sight of which we never tired." This description written ninety years ago by John Geikie, a resident on the riverbank, is equally true today.

In a quiet field overlooking the river, on the first farm settled in a township stand two historic pear trees. These trees were planted by Catholic priests who came as missionaries to the [Indigenous peoples] sometime in the 18th century. Although not less than one hundred and fifty years old they still bear fruit. Beneath their shade were laid to rest, the remains of the first pioneers - John Courtney and his wife, who for many years braved the dangers and solitudes of the wilderness, their only human company, the [Indigenous peoples] in the forest. Here they have lain, as remote in death, from the turmoil of the world, as they had in life.

Today all is changed. Progress, in its ruthless march has in roached on their isolation. The new road runs adjacent to the ancient pear trees and the graves they have guarded for a century. Will the spirits of these pioneers be disturbed by traffic of a continent marching past?