

VITTORIA, THE OLD CAPITAL OF LONDON DISTRICT, 1816-27.

BY FRANK REID.

(Read July 6, 1922.)

One of the points at which we stopped to-day was the site of the old Court House in Vittoria. It was built in the place of the one burned down at Charlotteville, or Turkey Point, and in 1815, the District Courts were removed from that Town of Charlotteville to the village of Vittoria and continued there until 1826. We find an item in the legislative records that in 1815, the sum of two thousand pounds was voted for the building of a jail and Court House at Vittoria, which was undertaken in 1822, and in 1823 the Justices were authorized to borrow one thousand pounds more to complete it. In 1826 this Court House was burned down on St. John's night in June. After that the Courts were removed to London, and never has Vittoria had such prestige as it had at that time.

The Registrar of Deeds was at Vittoria. I was unable to point the office out to you because every vestige has departed. Those who went north into the village, if they had continued to the town line, would have seen the site of the first Registry Office of the County of Norfolk on the S.E. corner of lot 19, concession 4, Township of Charlotteville. It was the first fireproof Registry Office in the Province, and was built by the Registrar, Francis Leigh Welch, at his own expense. It continued to be the Registry Office until 1848, when it was removed to Simcoe, where it has been ever since. The first instrument (one relating to Lot 7 in the Gore of Woodhouse) was registered on Sept. 8, 1797.

We visited the grave, at the early start of our journey, of Thomas Welch, the father of Francis Leigh Welch. He was appointed in 1796 Registrar of Deeds for Norfolk County, which then included, besides the present townships, those also of Walpole and Rainham, now in Haldimand. In 1808 his son, Francis Leigh Welch, was appointed Deputy Registrar, and in 1810 he was appointed Registrar. He died in 1884, having occupied the office, as Deputy or Registrar, for 76 years until his death at the age of ninety-five. Every position of importance had been in his possession.

There are two points of interest at the village of Vittoria—the Court House Square, where the Episcopal church now stands, is the second, the first being the Registry Office. Miss Palmer had an article in a church paper (the *Churchman*), showing the opening of that church in 1846. She also had a receipt given to her great-grandfather for the purchase of the plot of land upon which the present church stands.

The Baptist church alongside that building immediately to the south was built in 1851-2, but the organization of the Baptist church at Vittoria began in 1804. After crossing the stream on the left side coming out of Vittoria, we passed the old Teeple property, and right behind that at the Baptist burial ground, the old log Baptist church erected in 1804 formerly stood. The grant of one and a half acres of land was made on Jan. 3, 1807, for the use of the Baptist Church or Society, to erect a building for worship. That was the oldest Baptist church in this part of the country, and the first organized Baptist church in Upper Canada except the old Boston church which was organized in the same year.

You passed the old Presbyterian church surrounded by a burial ground. That was established by the Andersons. Walter Anderson gave the site for the Presbyterian church, we are told, but find that Rebecca Anderson made the deed.

At Vittoria one of the earliest properties was called the Russell mill. It was situated at the creek as we came out of the village. The grant was obtained in 1800 from Oliver Mabee, and resold to Ephraim Tisdale in 1812. The first mill stood there until replaced by the old red mill of the Tisdales built in 1812, which stood there in my boyhood days. When General McArthur was coming through with his raiders, in 1814, during the war, burning all the mills, one Thomas Bowlby, a prominent mason, approached him under a flag of truce and pleaded with him for the women and children, and asked him not to destroy that mill. This Tisdale mill and the small mill of Squire John Backhouse in Walsingham, which was overlooked, were the only ones in the Long Point Settlement that were spared.

There are some points of interest in respect to the Baptist church. There was a great deal of feeling because dissenters were not allowed to marry. Applications were made on behalf of Jabez Culver and others to perform the marriage ceremony, but they were refused. On June 9th, 1807, the commissioners, on the appeal of several members of the Baptist church at Vittoria who declared that Rev. Titus Finch was their ordained minister, unanimously agreed that Rev. Titus Finch shall have license to marry people agreeable to the Statutes of the Province in that case made and provided. Many interesting facts regarding this early church are recorded in E. A. Owen's "Pioneer Sketches of Long Point Settlement."

The London District Grammar School, once taught by Egerton Ryerson, was held in part of the old Gustin home, east of the village.

The Teeple house was built in 1812 by Caleb Wood, and purchased by Luke Teeple after his return from the war of 1812.

There are many interesting things about that old village of Vittoria that were very dear to me because it was my birthplace.