

NEW DUBLIN: Once a Busy Irish Settlement



By Sally Smid

St. Patrick's Day is perhaps the best-known Irish tradition. Today some 4 million Canadians are of Irish descent, so it is not surprising that many celebrate by "wearin' the green", participating in parades, enjoying Irish music and possibly visiting some local pubs for "a few pints". St. Patrick's story is much like that of the Irish folk who came to North America, for he moved from Britain to Ireland as a stranger, where he adapted to his new home and became quite a leader.

The Irish it seems were the largest immigrant group in Leeds and Grenville at the beginning of the 20th century with half of the entire population being of Irish descent. Driven out of Ireland by famine, eviction and other difficulties these immigrants endured a long three month journey across the ocean. They landed in Quebec and travelled further on bateaux. Like many others, they persisted in the face of the harsh climate and adversities and helped local communities to grow and prosper. Edna B. Chant, author of *As the Pages Turn*, describes the Irish as hard working neighbours who could be quick tempered and superstitious and who also enjoyed music and fun.

New Dublin, Ont. was one of those early Irish settlements. First named Lamb's Pond, adventuresome Irish immigrants renamed it Dublin Corners and then New Dublin. In 1820, Nicholas Burns, is said to have given the

name in honour of his home town, Dublin, Ireland. Most of these early pioneers had Irish names such as Rowsome, Horton, Davis, Brown, Bolton, Kendrick, Eyre and Moore. The first consideration after homes were built was the establishment of churches which first met in homes and schools. During that time circuit preachers would conduct the services, sometimes five a Sunday, as they travelled to various area churches. The St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church was founded in 1830 at the corner of New Dublin Rd. and the 7th Conc. Rd. While no longer in operation, it is surrounded by the cemetery where early settlers are buried such as Joseph Kendrick, who was killed in the Battle of the Windmill. A Methodist Church was built in 1886 on land donated by the Hortons. Henry Horton was a pioneer inventor. One of his inventions was a dog powered washing machine. A dog walked around on a platform to make it revolve, turning the spindle of the machine. Many were sold to Leeds farm wives. The first schools in the area provided a place for meetings, Christmas programs and community fellowship.

New Dublin has been the township seat since the establishment of municipal government in 1850. It was a busy industrial center with grist and saw mills, a tannery, cheese factory and general store. The store replaced the tavern where Irishman Ogle Gowan used

to "drink with the lads". Gowan was a fiery orator, politician, and the founder of the Grand Orange Lodge. There was also once a hotel owned by Sam Spence. Later J. S. Rowsome operated it as a village general store until 1911 when it was destroyed by fire. It was restored by W. H. Horton and eventually sold to H. R. Landon who ran the business for 40 years. It was remembered as a place to pick up the mail, buy penny candy, a loaf of bread or just catch up on "local news".

New Dublin has undergone many changes over the years, but its history is permeated by the influence of determined, hard working Irish immigrants, who exemplified much of the leadership and perseverance of St. Patrick himself. **LH**

Top Left: The St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church and cemetery was a very important part of New Dublin history.

Top Right: The New Dublin Methodist Church has had an annual service for many years.

Bottom Left: Post cards were a popular way to send greetings to friends in earlier days and this one was a tribute to St. Patrick's Day. (Courtesy of Athens Museum)

Bottom Right: Irishman Ogle Gowan was a frequent visitor to the tavern in New Dublin.

