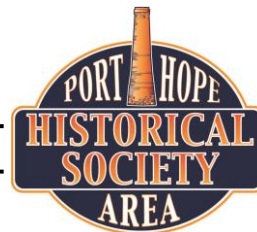


“Their Stories”



Oct. 2023

THE FOLLOWING STORY IS A SMALL EXAMPLE OF THE HARDSHIPS OF A FAMILY WITH A DESIRE TO START A NEW LIFE IN AN UNDEVELOPED LAND.

ROBERT ROLEY & FAMILY –AMONG PORT HOPE’S EARLY SETTLERS

Most of us have experienced moving from one home to another, whether it be in the same town or another town or even another state. Usually, it’s because of a job(s) transfer, retirement, or simply an upgrade to our lifestyle. Along with this being a big decision, it is a stressful process and involves a lot of work. Packing boxes, hiring a moving company to pack up and drop off our belongings, and several trips with our car filled with all the little stuff that we probably should have thrown away. When it’s all said and done, you may be further away from your old neighbors, family, and friends, but you’re only a cell phone call, text or Facetime away. Local shops, big-box stores, banks, entertainment, etc. are all a short drive away, on modern roads, possibly using our GPS controlled car or truck. We take it all in stride and none of us really think about how easy we really have it.

Things were vastly different back in 1860. The thumb area of Michigan was a vast forest of valuable timber. Workers were being hired to work in the sawmills, one being in a little town in its infancy called Port Hope. One of those early settlers in the Port Hope area was the Robert Roley family. Robert, originally born in Ireland immigrated to Canada with his parents at eight years of age. He married Martha Radcliffe in 1842. In the late fifties they immigrated to the US and for a short time lived in Lexington MI. In 1860, They made the decision to relocate to this undeveloped heavily wooded little town in the thumb.

Jumping forward 67 years, It is now 1927 and one of the Roley Children, Mrs. Dorothy Roley Carr, now about 78 years of age, sat down with Port Huron Times Herald reporter Paul Soini. She related the following story of her families arrival in Port Hope 67 years prior, when she was eleven years old.

"Mrs. Carr, arrived in Port Hope late in November 1860, coming on the last boat of the year from Lexington, Michigan. She recalls the difficult journey through the ice. Her father had been employed by W.R. Stafford to work in the lumber woods around Port Hope. Previous to coming to Port Hope, their residence was in Canada, the birthplace of Mrs. Carr. When the family first arrived at Port Hope, the country surrounding the village was a dense wilderness. The town consisted of a mill, four or five stores, and a few scattered houses. There were no roads, and the only thoroughfare was a footpath. The young people of the village frequently took charge of the logging car to carry them to the lumber camps for dances and parties, Mrs. Carr says. Motive power for the logging car was supplied by a horse. There were no roads in those days and all supplies were brought in by boat. Each fall, a full store of necessities was shipped in and the village isolated during the bleak winter months. Frequently the first boat of the year was anxiously awaited as supplies sometimes ran low. Mrs. Carr recalls with delight her ride in the very first buggy in Port Hope. There were no roads and the route on the ride was over a short, cleared portion of beach property. The woods were so dense that when the end of the cleared space was reached, it was necessary to unhitch the horse and turn the buggy by hand, because of lack of space."

The story is short but certainly describes conditions that are hard to imagine. When the Roley’s arrived in 1860, They had three children ranging in age from 1 to 12. What was unknown to them at the time and all others in Port hope was that the hardships of a new life were about to worsen. Devastating fires would sweep through Michigan and Huron County in 1871 and 1881 with hundreds of casualties and the forests being wiped out. The Roley family along with many of the Port Hope area families were fortunate to survive the fires. The tall chimney, currently in Stafford Park is an example of the devastation and is all that remains from the original Stafford Sawmill, totally burnt to the ground.

Life today may have its trials and tribulations, but comparing it to the Roley’s back in 1860, we have to be grateful to God for what we have, and especially thankful to those that struck out to start a new life in a little sawmill town in a forest on the edge of Lake Huron.

