

History Of Orono

by Charles Taws

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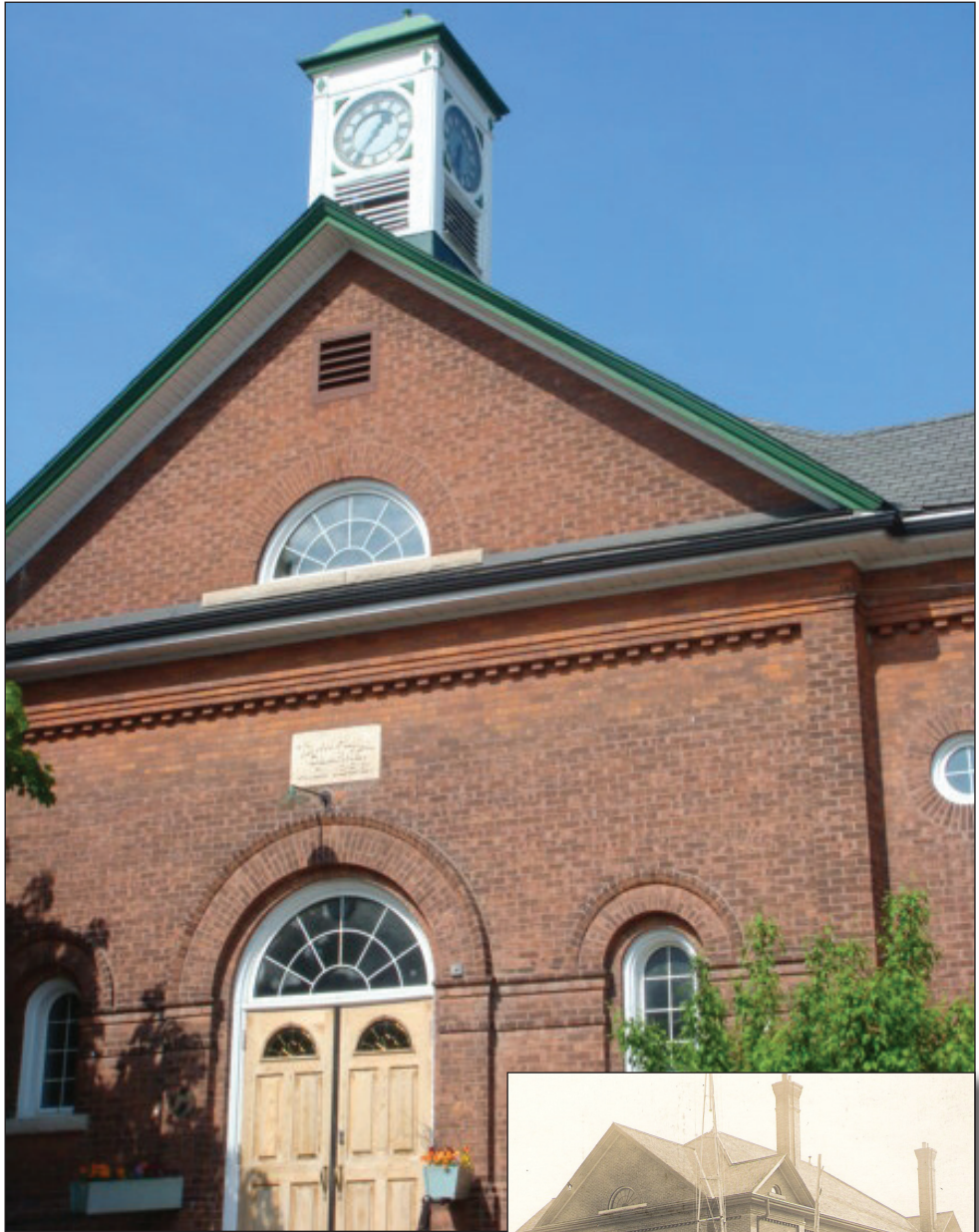
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Like many places in Ontario Orono's early history is not clearly understood. History has only left us a handful of stories. Some of them may be folklore and contain highly romanticized notions or incorrect embellishments. However, they usually contain a kernel of truth and a diligent scholar should be able to reconstruct a logical course of events. The dates may be a bit off, but the stories ring true.

The eastern part of Clarington (formerly Clarke Township) was first settled in 1796. The earliest settlers stayed near the lakeshore. The lake provided food and back then it was the easiest way to travel. Settlement inland could not commence until the great primeval forest was cut down. This took about a generation and in 1832 we see the first settlers coming to the future Orono area. Asa and Harriet Baldwin arrived in 1832. Their farm was just northwest of today's downtown Orono. After their arrival,

"Harriet decided to go for a pail a water. She made her way to the foot of the hill through the trees, so thick with leaves as to obscure the sun at midday. Arriving at the stream she dipped up a pail of water and to her amazement discovered two speckled trout in the pail. On her return to the cabin she said to her husband, 'Father, we have come to the land of milk and honey.'"

The Baldwins were soon



Orono Town Hall - This lovely structure is one of Orono's best known and most recognized buildings. It is also one of the historic gems of Clarington. This photo (right) shows the building shortly after completion in March of 1899.



joined by others. The Billings, Bests, Thorntons, Powers and Johns families were among Orono's earliest pioneers. Mr. Eldad Johns deserves special mention as he is the "Father" of Orono.

He built a sawmill around which the village formed. He later built a woollen mill, but both are gone today. His house can still be seen at the northeast corner of Main Street and Millson Hill Drive.

Eldad made a name for himself and probably contributed to the growth of the village by his generosity.

"In the 1830's a couple of poor crop seasons resulted in dire scarcity and wheat

Rich In History

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prohibitive price in those days. Bachelor Johns (Eldad never married and was sometimes called the Bachelor of Orono) had a backlog of grain and his bins were full. Other less fortunate settlers flocked to his door in search of seed wheat, but he would sell none. 'Go and buy it from those who have it to sell. My wheat is for men without money and for them it is without price.' Such magnanimity did not prevent Eldad from being a successful farmer and businessman of Orono."

Some of the early settlers recorded their early memories of the Orono area. The Powers family say that when

they came to Kirby in 1832, Orono was nothing more than a hemlock bush. Others speak of the abundance of game like deer and of bears and wolves. Samuel Billings once saw 10 deer at once in a clearing just south of where Orono would soon be. He said natives from as far away as the Credit River came to hunt them.

In 1845 Thomas Hooper arrived and later remembered that the settlement was small with tree stumps still standing in many places on the west side of the street. Where the main street buildings are today there was just a few detached shops and houses. The first church was built in 1845. Prior to that services were held in a log school

near where the public school is today. Thomas Doncaster came in 1844 and noted that Orono was a rough looking spot with plenty of bush still standing. In fact, there were enough trees to keep three sawmills busy.

People have noted that the name "Orono" is merely "Toronto" without the "T's" In fact; they have nothing in common except both are of native origin.

"Orono received its name sometime between 1840 and 1845. A number of men gathered in a blacksmith shop to decide on a name for the village, as it had been loosely called Jericho, Slab City. Bloomington was a name suggested. A stranger joined the gathering and said the

lay of the land greatly resembled the town from which he came, Orono, Maine. This was the name chosen. The stranger was Mr. Beal, a Methodist preacher."

Orono Maine was named after Chief Joseph Orono, a Penobscot native who died in 1801 at the reputed age of 113.

This is the reconstructed history of the early years of the Village of Orono. Future research may change, alter or enhance it. History, like present events can be interpreted in many different ways.

All quotes from "Out of the Mists: A History of Clarke Township" by Helen Schmid and Sid Rutherford. Now available from Clarington Museums and Archives. If



Waddell House

Currently the Orono branch of the Public Library this stately structure was built as the home of John Waddell in 1882. He was one of Orono's leading businessmen. The Library opened here in 1970 and at one time the Clarke Museum and Archives were housed on the second floor.

you'd like to learn more about local history or have specific questions please contact Charles Taws, Archivist at Clarington Muse-

ums and Archives. He can be reached at 905-623-2734 or claringtonmuseums.archives@rogers.com.