

# The Ancient History of Courtice

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Courtice is a rapidly growing community on the western border of Clarington. Much of its growth has happened recently so many people think it is a community without a history. How wrong they are! The history of Courtice goes way, way back and some of our best pioneer stories come from this area. Historians will agree that the first settlers to this area came in 1795, but as we will see people have traversed through and spent time in this area for thousands of years.

On October 2nd 1794 three Loyalist families arrived where Port Darlington is today. They were the Burks, Trulls and Conants. It was late in the season so the families stayed together in log shanties at Port Darlington before moving to their properties in the following spring. The Burks settled where Bowmanville now stands and the Trulls and Conants moved to just south of the present Courtice area.

They were not the first people here. Natives had been in the area for at least the last seven thousand years (perhaps even before then). The French came in the 1600's. French musket balls have been unearthed at Port Darlington and just west of Courtice, along the Lakeshore a French trading post was built. It was called Cabane de Plombe and was believed to have been built around 1750 and used until 1759 (The year the French lost their Canadian Colonies



ROGER CONANT'S FIRST SETTLEMENT IN DARLINGTON,  
CO. DURHAM, UPPER CANADA, 1778.

*Images provided by the Courtesy Clarington Museums and Archives*

If Conant family History is correct then these small log cabins, built in 1788 would be the first structures built in Clarington. Image is an engraving from 1898." The Trull Family began holding an annual reunion in 1898. This is an undated photo of an early reunion (right). It was taken at the home of Jess Trull (grandson of the original pioneers) on Baseline Road. Note the "J.T." over the front door. This house still stands and is owned by Dom's Auto parts."



to the English). This cabin was situated to take advantage of the lucrative fur trade with the natives. To the north is Lake Scugog and its access to the rich fur areas of the Kawarthas, Haliburton and even up into Georgian Bay. After the French Defeat English (from the New England Colonies) and Dutch (from New Amsterdam) traders came into the area. Oshawa's first settler, Benjamin Wilson, made his first home in this old French cabin.

While the 1794 arrival date for the settlers is agreed upon there is a tradition within the Conant Family to suggest that their patriarch, Roger Conant, was actually here as early as 1788. He came, built a log shanty and cleared some land.

The Conants had been Governors of New England and gave up a lot to come to Canada. Unlike most settlers they had some money behind them. This leads us to our first pioneer story. Clarington has a lost treasure that has yet to be found! Roger, fearful someone might steal his hoard of gold coins, took an iron pot and buried it near a stream. He died before revealing its location to anyone. His farm is now Darlington Provincial Park so the next time you are down there keep your eyes to the ground. Who knows, maybe you can find this fortune.

Another story involved Roger's son, Thomas. He was seeing a young lady whose home was some three miles inland from

the shore of Lake Ontario. Consequently to pay his respects he had to travel from his home along the shore through forests and clearings to get to her house. I will let Thomas' son Gordon Conant tell the story:

"This story takes place in November 1806, the ground was frozen, but no snow had fallen. While walking home one night, "he heard the distant baying of wolves. Fear would, it may be supposed, lend speed to his feet, but thinking rightly he could not outstrip the wolf on foot, he walked quietly along, watching for a convenient tree for climbing. In a very few minutes the wolves were upon him, in full cry, eyes protruding, tongues lolling,

# Courtice Goes Way Back

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and ready to devour him. A near-by beech tree, which his arms could encircle, furnished him with the means of escape. He climbed, and climbed, while the wolves surrounded him and watched his every motion, never ceasing their dismal howls the live-long night. Thus he kept his lonely vigil. To lose his hold for a single second meant instant death. Great, however, as was the tension upon his strained muscles, they held on. Morn tardily came at last, and with its first peep the wolves left him and were seen no more...he began looking about him, and found, with all his climbing, he had ascended a very few feet from the ground, and but just out

erage life span was about 40 years). She had been well educated and her father was a doctor. When she arrived in Clarington in 1794 she carried with her a small forged iron pot that she used to mix her herbal medicines. She made it her mission to treat the sick in the area and would call on anyone who needed her help, whether they be native or settler, within a 40 mile radius of her home (from Pickering to Cobourg). Her husband, Captain John W. Trull, bought her a horse and taught it to swim. He knew if she came to a stream or river there would be no bridge. She was said to be very courageous and let nothing stop her while on a mission to help someone. She often travelled alone on her horse



ROGER CONANT TRADING WITH THE INDIANS FOR FURS.

Images provided by the Courtesy Clarington Museums and Archives

"Money was very scarce in pioneer times and bartering was very common. Furs were one resource that could get a settler actual money. One trader received a gold doubloon in his payment (There was no such thing as Canadian coins so those of other countries, notable Spain, were used throughout the North American colonies). The coin was worth \$16.00 and he kept it for 6 years before he could find someone to change it."

of reach of the wolves' jaws as they made frantic jumps to reach him."

Hardships of many kinds were common with our early settlers, but they persevered and thrived. The Trulls, neighbours of the Conants, are a good example of this. Their family has grown with each generation. In 1994 the Bowmanville Museum held a celebration to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first settlers to Clarington. Representatives from the three founding families came. By far, the Trulls were the most represented and the only one that still had members living in Clarington. Today, Trulls Road is a reminder of their early and important presence in our area.

Most notable of the first Trulls was Lydia Casey Trull. She had a remarkable constitution and stayed young and active into her Seventies (at a time when the av-

in the dark forest at night to reach her patients. In recent years a school has been named after this remarkable woman. Her little iron pot can be seen at the Bowmanville Museum where it is one of the treasures of the museum's collection.

The next family to leave their mark on the community came a generation later. It was the Courtice Family. Thomas came in 1831 to be followed by brothers James and Christopher in 1833. Christopher seems to have taken the lead role in encouraging settlement of the area. His large farm was broken into two halves: Higher and Lower Alsworthy. From here he provided assistance, advice and loans to early settlers and looked after their educational and spiritual needs by founding a local school and church. The Church is still very active and is today's Ebenezer United Church.

When Christopher arrived



INDIAN WIGWAMS OF BIRCH BARK.

Images provided by the Courtesy Clarington Museums and Archives

"Natives frequented the Clarington area to take advantage of seasonal food such as salmon and berries. Pioneer accounts are mixed- some found the Natives helpful while others had trouble with them."

from England in 1833 the only directions he had to find his brother were, "He lived in the Township of Darlington, four miles west of Bowmanville, and two and half miles north of Lake Ontario, by the side of a small creek." Even with such imprecise directions he found his brother living the isolated life of a pioneer deep in the primeval forest largely concerned with cutting down trees so he could grow crops. Thomas related this story which illustrate the lonely life of the early pioneer:

"In the early settlement of the country it was not easy to keep a correct account of the days of the week, and the dates of the month, for newspapers and almanacs were seldom seen. One day Thomas Courtice was keeping the Sabbath day sacred by laying aside all work, when to his surprise a neighbour came in and wanted to do some business. Thomas told him it was Sunday and he was not in the habit of doing business on that day. The neighbour said it was Saturday, and he intended to

keep it tomorrow. After some debating they could not decide, so they went to another neighbour to help them out of their difficulty. When they came they found him chopping wood, they asked him what day it was, 'It is Monday' said he, 'I kept yesterday for Sunday.' So the question was not easily settled."

This is the end on this story on the early history of Courtice. The later development of hamlets such as Prestonvale, and Short's Corners, the establishment of two schools and two train stations along with the arrival of other families like the Rundles, Annis', Okes, Wordens, and Osbornes will have to wait for another article.

If you are interested in Clarington History or are researching your Family please contact the Archives at Clarington Museums. The phone number is 905-623-2734 and e-mail is claringtonmuseums.archives@rogers.com.



CAMP MEETING SCENE.

Images provided by the Courtesy Clarington Museums and Archives

"Natives frequented the Clarington area to take advantage of seasonal food such as salmon and berries. Pioneer accounts are mixed- some found the Natives helpful while others had trouble with them."