

Background History of the Area

In this area of Grey County it was probably bands of Algonquin Indians who were the first farmers in this county. Other tribes who dwelt nearby were Petun (Tobacco) Indians and the Hurons. Early accounts tell of the Indians picking huckleberries and raspberries in great quantities to dry for use in winter when they had very little else. To-day we still buy our blueberries, which come from the Northern Shore and Northern Ontario and picked by present day Indians. These colourful natives of the old days were fishermen and great hunters and are remembered because of their tattooed bodies, painted faces and pierced nostrils.

Besides planting Indian corn and other cereal grains, they were expert weavers.

Because of the white man's cunning and interfering the Iroquois came into Grey County and massacred the two Indian tribes and the scattered survivors were absorbed into the other tribes. Later Ojibway Indians, by their warfare and persistence, cleared the Iroquois out of this county and came to settle here themselves. These children of nature made the white travellers welcome and provided a feast of fish, venison, berries and Indian corn.

Early records tell of missions and missionaries and we find at one time before the white man came to settle the territory there was a French trading post situated near where Leith is now located.

To clear land was a burden but Sydenham was especially difficult, as it had the heaviest growth of huge hardwood trees. After the land was cleared the stumps still had to be contended with. The land was cultivated between the stumps with a "drag" a v-shaped timber with iron pegs driven through it. The first grain crops were cut with a cradle, then the reaper came and the cut grain was bound by hand into sheaves and stoked in bunches of a dozen to dry. Sydenham was soon recognized as a very good farming area.

The younger generation will find it difficult to envision the struggle of the early settlers in trying to clear the land and plant and harvest a crop. The first powered threshing machines were those that were worked by driving horses around on poles to provide the power. The machine itself was a large wooden framework, containing gear wheels something like clock-works on a large scale. The gears and cog-wheels were so arranged that when the arms or poles were drawn around, it moved the machinery, when the power was transported to the threshing parts or "separator" as it was called in the barn, by long shafts called "Tumbling Rods" which were connected by joints called "knuckles". Later power for the threshing was supplied by a steam engine and many a weary lad can testify to the amount of fuel that was necessary to keep the boiler stoked up. Some of the men who threshed in the Annan area and went from farm to farm were John Day, Neil McNeil and Peter Cameron.