

Historic Research Paper
by Rose Cvitkovich
Chelmsford, Ontario.

The First Pioneers and The History of Chelmsford

The men who worked on the construction of the Canadian Pacific railroad were the first people to come to this part of the country. At about the same time, in the year 1882, the Fraser Lumber Company began operating lumber camps here. The men employed by them were kept busy cutting down trees to make telegraph poles and track ties for the C.P.R. These men were hard workers. They were known as lumber-jacks because they were experienced in that trade. Preferring the rough life in the woods, some of them chose to settle on homesteads in this vicinity. Before any farming could be done, the timber had to be cut and the brush cleared. This meant a lot of work. However they were accustomed to hardships and went to work with courage and perseverance. With logs cut off their land, they built sturdy log cabins. These homes were roughly made but they withstood the cold weather & were comfortable.

In 1883, there were about twenty families settled in this area. Among the newcomers were the Jesuit Priests who helped the settlers with spiritual comfort. The people had been accustomed to living in large towns and at first found the going very hard ; so they turned to the good priests and found some measure of strength in prayer. As there was no

Historic Settlements in the
by John O'Brien
Ottawa, Ontario

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church in the community, mass had to be said in private dwellings but mostly in the home of Noel Pelletier. Father Caron said the first mass in Chelmsford. The home-made altar was beautifully decorated with embroidered linens with fresh flowers in the summer. In winter these busy women, who were expert at making paper flowers, made lovely artificial flowers of bright hues & different designs ; so that the altar always looked nice. Three of the village women who did that work were Mrs. D. Seguin, Mrs. Raphael Groulx and Mrs. Clement Methe. In those days attending mass was really a sacrifice because of the discomforts involved. Nail barrels, (kegs) with boards over them served as benches and the people had to kneel on rough floors. A blanket hung across one wall served as confessional.

The colony increased during the following years due to rich Nickel deposits found nearby. The village of Chelmsford became a municipality in 1890. Elzear Belanger was the first merchant and had the first post office. According to records and the parish register, there were 76 families here by 1891.

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The church has always played a vital part in the lives of the people in this parish. It is interesting to note just how much the early pioneers thought of it. Prior to 1891, the government had given a piece of land, to the Chelmsford district, on which a catholic church was to be constructed. This land did not seem ideal for the purpose but a building was under construction when it was burned down. It was suspected that someone had set fire to it, but nothing could be found to prove it.

In 1891 a small church was built in the village of Chelmsford. It measured 46' by 60'. The church bell was installed and blessed in 1894. By 1908 this church became much too small to accomodate the 294 families ; so a drive was begun to raise funds for a new and larger building. The people co-operated whole heartedly. They subscribed the sum of \$22,015. (twenty-two thousand and fifteen dollars). Those who did not have money, gave their spare time in hauling stone from the rock deposits to the new site. Approximately 525 cords of stone were hauled and later used in the construction of the new church. The contract was given to Mr. J. Quinlan of North Bay, for the sum of seventeen thousand, nine hundred and ninety five dollars. The corner stone was placed in June 23rd. 1912. The new church was officially opened to the public on Dec. 2nd. 1913.

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In 1891 a small church was built in the village of Chelmendorf. It measured 48' by 60'. The church bell was installed and blessed. In 1894, by 1908 this church became much too small to accommodate the 284 families; so a drive was begun to raise funds for a new and larger building. The people co-operated whole heartedly. They subscribed the sum of \$22,015. (Twenty-two thousand and fifteen dollars). Those who did not have money, gave their spare time in hauling stone from the rock deposits to the new site. Approximately 225 cords of stone were hauled and later used in the construction of the new church. The contract was given to Mr. J. G. Smith of North Bay, for the sum of seven thousand, nine hundred and ninety five dollars. The corner stone was placed on June 23rd, 1912. The new church was officially opened to the public on Dec. 2nd, 1912.

During the following years many changes were made towards improving and modernizing the interior and the exterior of the church. In 1937, Mr. Alfred Faniel, a renowned Belgian artist, from Montreal was given a contract. He painted the pictures of the saints on the church walls and ceiling. The color scheme harmonized beautifully with the life-size pictures, of Our Lord's Life, portrayed on the stained glass windows. Mr. Faniel died in February Of 1950 but his beautiful work will always be a reminder of his great talent.

1947 marked three important events in the church history.

- (1) It was fifty years since the parish got its first resident priest. from 1897 - 1947.
- (2) The final debts of the church were paid off in full.
- (3) On the 31st day of August. 1947, a Sunday, the Eucharistic Congress of the Diocese took place in Chelmsford.

There have been two protestant churches in Chelmsford at one time, as many of the early pioneers were of English origin. The Baptist Church burned down in the year 1909. The Anglican Church was built on Errington Street, South, just where Duval had his bakery. When the majority of English people moved away, this church broke up and the building was later sold and torn down.

Since then, there has been only one church in town, the St. Joseph's Catholic Church. It is one of the nicest churches in the district and we can truly be proud of it.

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Chelmsford became incorporated in 1901. The first mayor of this town was Raphael Groulx. Mr. Groulx was very fond of music and acted as choir master in St. Joseph's Church. He also organized a music band of which his sons were members. They played at many of the community dances. One of his sons Louis is choir master in the same church. Another son Medor or Rolande teaches school in Chelmsford and gives music lessons.

The cannon which stands on the front lawn of the rectory or priests residence has quite a history. It had been used in the Papineau War, protecting the Church of St. Eustache, in Quebec, during its bombardment. It was brought from Quebec City by Doctor Gagne who was the first doctor to set up medical practice in Chelmsford. He died in 1906; so the cannon was donated to the church by a friend of his Mr. William Chouinard.

Mention should be made regarding two well known men who passed away recently. Mr. Hughie Gratton ^{resident of Chelmsford} held the position of post master of Chelmsford for twenty-five years. He held office as mayor, town clerk, merchant and was one of the most ardent canvassers during the selling of the victory war bonds. Mr. Gratton was respected and liked by everyone in the community and district. Doctor Rodolphe Tanguay ^{of Sudbury} established a practice in Chelmsford in 1920. He remained here for four years making rapid progress as a general practitioner. He moved to Sudbury in 1924 and became a prominent surgeon.

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There is so much to be said of our pioneers and those who have lived in our community. We can all only hope we can do our share of good work and try to live up to the ideals of those same people. By keeping in mind our motto " For Home and Country " we can attain much.

Chelmsford has certainly made rapid progress during the last five years. Since the installation of electricity and water many new families have moved into town. Now there are different nationalities living here. They represent every nation in the world, or nearly so. Our organization can do much towards bringing those people towards better understanding and friendship. So it is with hopes that we look for a brighter future and growth of our little town of Chelmsford. It hardly seems possible that nearly seventy years have elapsed since this place was first inhabited.

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