

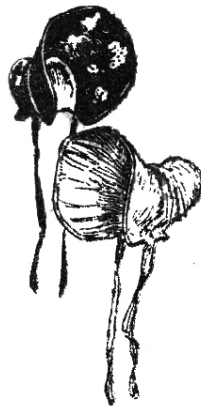
**PIONEER  
DAYS  
AT GREENBANK**



**By MARY ANN TILL**



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~ Mary Ann Till ~  
1844 - 1925

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By Mary Ann Till

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# Pioneer Days at Greenbank

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO REACH TOWNSHIP.

Written by Mary A. Till, read before the  
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## INTRODUCTORY

The genius and hope of civilization is in its progress, and the experiences of one generation are its richest contribution to the life of the next. The present is ever shaped and influenced by the past, and existing conditions of society in any land depend upon that which has gone before. What, then, does not the present generation owe to the courage and energy, prudence and patience, the toil, self-sacrifice and forethought of those early Pioneers who planted their homes in the Canadian wilderness and laid broad and deep the foundations of our present prosperity and progress?

The debt we owe them can never be paid; yet – lest we forget – or fail to appreciate the priceless blessings of our present day existence, it behooves as to glance back occasionally, measure our national progress, and compare our lot with that of our earliest forbears in this land, who won from its soil the first-fruits of the heritage we now enjoy.

The present paper affords opportunity and scope for such a survey, and if it but serves to deepen in some measure our spirit of thankfulness and our sense of duty to succeeding generations, the effort will not have been wholly in vain.

Aided by old records of her grandfather's day, dating from 1833; the author will endeavour to outline general conditions in the country at that time, giving known facts regarding the early development of our neighbourhood here in Reach Township, and adding some description of the life of some of our earliest pioneers.

## Settlements

Turning backward to the year 1833 when the tide of immigration from the Old Land was well set toward our own shores, we find that Canada consisted of but two Provinces – Upper and Lower Canada – now Ontario and Quebec.

The sparse population of Upper Canada was scattered chiefly along the waterways, because it was then difficult to get in or out of the settlements except by water, for the land was a wilderness of woods. The chief settlements were along the St. Lawrence, Bay of Quinte, and Lake Ontario, with Kingston, Newark, and Toronto, as the chief market towns, the latter being commonly referred to as “Little Muddy York.”



## Pioneer Roads

Roads were few, and, in most cases, but rough waggon tracks through the woods. In many parts the only means of communication between settlements was a “blazed” path or trail marked out for the lone traveller on horse or foot.

Where waggon roads lay through low, swampy land, logs were laid side by side for the necessary distance, little or no earth being placed on top, forming thus the famous “corduroy roads,” of which some relics may be seen (and even felt) to-day in the eastern part of our own neighbourhood.

A brisk jaunt along such a road by the early swain who ventured to eke his lady-love a riding, must have been a thing to be remembered for many days at least.

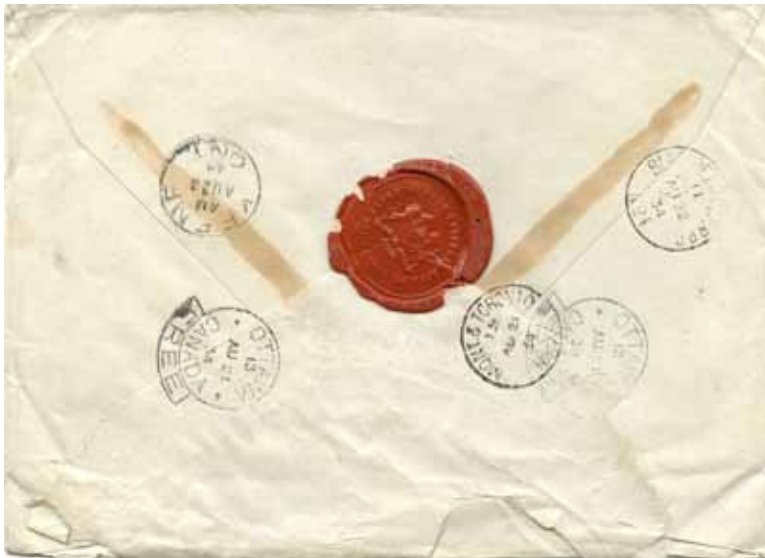
The first established road between Manchester and Whitby was a “plank road” with an occasional toll-gate placed upon it to provide for its upkeep. The first oatmeal mill in this part was on this road near Whitby. The settlers usually made but one trip to it a year, getting enough meal ground for all his family for a twelvemonth.

## Post Offices and Currency

Government post offices were few and far between, the first the author knows of in this section being at Prince Albert. No convenient R.F.D. routes were then established, and the settler in quest of news from the “old land” had to go a ten or twelve mile journey, by way of Epsom.

Letters were more or less expensive to send or receive and were usually written on long sheets of paper which were then folded to conceal the writing, addressed and sealed profusely with coloured wax, and posted to be struck with the Government stamp on payment of the dues.

The currency used in the country was the English pounds, shillings and pence, but some York shillings of 12 1/2¢ value, dimes, half-dimes, and a three-cent silver coin, strayed into Canadian settlements from over the border, and were always acceptable, as coin was scarce in a new country.



£ - Pounds S - "shilings" D - "penny"

## Lands for Settlement

Grants of Crown Lands could be obtained from the Government on certain conditions, but the sale of lands was for the most part in the hands of chartered land companies who sold to incoming settlers on profitable terms, the necessary surveys being projected as settlement progressed.

Brock Township was settled before Reach, as the latter was passed by as of little worth, owing to the great marsh lands on the east and west limits.

The square or rectangle was followed in laying out the townships into concessions and 200 acre lots, making the outlines of most of our counties look like a chess board.

My grandfather's diary, begun at York, Upper Canada, September 26, 1833, showed that my two grandfathers bought their 100-acre lots here in Reach, concession 11, on October 21st and 23rd, 1833, my paternal grandfather paying at the rate of \$2 per acre, for his land, then virgin forest.

Another old record notes the sale of three lots at 7s. 6d. per acre, £1.12.0 being paid down, and terms made for the payment of £10 yearly. Even such terms involved a heavy burden for the new settler who had little capital to begin with, and who had to hew out his home and face the utmost toil and hardship to make ends meet until his first crop should be reaped.



## Natives of the Wild

The Indians at this time were free to rove !heir ancestral forest home at will. Bands of hunters, sometimes with their squaws and little children were met within the forest. Some Indians built up a profitable trade in baskets with various white settlements, bartering these useful articles for clothing or food as desired.

The author has been told of a band of Indians with many gay coloured baskets calling at her mother's home when she was a child about a year old. The Indians had a little dog with which she made friends and evinced such delight that the Indians wanted to buy the baby and offered all the baskets they had for her. My mother, of course, "watched me, until the Indians were well on way to another place."





## Wild Animals

Wild animals, as well as Indians, roamed the woods, and game and fish were fairly abundant. Bear, deer, “wildcats” or lynx, and the dreaded timber wolves were sometimes met by the hardy woodman, and no “grandfather’s tale” of those pioneer days would be complete without the recital of such thrilling adventures.

## Bear Stories

There is one which can be vouched for by the author:

Two buxom young women of the settlement, with their favored swains, strolled rather for into the woods one bright Sunday in summer, and eventually sat down on a big fallen log to rest and chat. Their peace, was, however, soon disturbed by signs of commotion within the log, and out came the great shaggy form of a brown bear, which had been awakened from his afternoon nap by their chatter. The sequel may be imagined.

On another occasion two brothers were helping a neighbor with some logging, and returning to their work after dinner, one in advance of the other the first one came suddenly face to face with a great female bear shambling along in the middle of the narrow way.

Strangely enough, when promptly given the whole right-of-way, the bear passed the woodsman by with scant notice, but not so the brother. Without chance of warning, at a turn of the path, the second woodsman walked fairly up to the bear before he saw it. It charged him, seized and held him down in its huge claws, and it might have killed him but for his little dog, which bit at the beast’s heels so viciously, than its attention was distracted toward its small assailant, and the woodsman made haste and got out of its way, little the worse for his mauling.



## Deer and Wolves

Deer were at that time frequently seen grazing in the wilds with the settler's few cattle, and their runways were used as paths between settler's homesteads.

Their hereditary enemies, the wolves, often became, in scarce seasons a real pest to the settler's little flocks, and sometimes tales were told of how they had even -treed- and menaced the life of a lone woodsman himself as he returned to his shanty at dusk after work in the woods.

The author herself remembers, as a little girl, lying quaking in her little trundle bed at night at hearing the long-drawn howl of the wolves about Marsh Hill, as they tracked some prey through the swamp. Settlers there at that time said the wolves would sometimes come right up around their houses and buildings, and one poor settler just in Uxbridge limits had his whole flock destroyed in a single night – the very night before he was to turn it into payment for its original cost. Such incidents were not rare in those times.

Mosquitoes and black flies were, of course, an omnipresent pest in season and feasted with as much relish at their human banquets as they do in our day.

Such were some of the general conditions in the country when our earliest pioneers in this district came. Let us now note some of the earliest experiences of pioneer life.



## The Emigrant's First Experiences

Lured by the offer of free passage and grant of land made by the Government of Upper Canada about that time, the prospective settler gathered together his effects, bade his friends and the home of his fathers a long or final farewell, and embarked on a sailing vessel for Canada.

The voyage occupied from 7 to 12 weeks, depending on wind and weather. Much might be written of the varied experiences of the voyage, but passing these, let us meet the emigrant on his arrival at Quebec, accompany him on the slow river barge to Montreal, thence by boat and stage at intervals up country to Kingston, the headquarters of the old "Durham" flat bottomed boat which freighted grain and goods between Kingston and Montreal, not without resort to the towline in some places.

Thence by a lumbering stage to "Little York" where temporary lodgings might be obtained at a rude "tavern". Here travellers were dined on pork or venison and potatoes, and lodged in scantily furnished room, with bare floor, and void of every comfort and convenience except a bed, a chair, and a table – at four shillings a night for bed and board.

## Selecting Land

Locating a land office here, he might after some expense and investigation, obtain a holding of free, or purchased land in a desirable locality, perhaps fifty miles away.

Leaving his effects to be moved out later by wagon and ox-team, he would proceed by the same slow stages to take his family to the shelter of some friendly roof in the nearest settlement to be reached from his "bush farm". Hospitality and the "help-one-another" spirit abounded in those pioneer days, and by exchanging work ready hands would soon be found to assist the newcomer to carve out his humble home.



## Building the Log Cabin

First, the site of the homestead must be cleared. Facing a task which might well discourage the stoutest heart, the emigrant with sharp new Yankee axe attacked the first giants of the forest which obstructed his path to prosperity.

Great oaks, magnificent maples, and big pines, some of really huge girth and vast height, would be laid low and topped and trimmed for the needed timbers. Or they would be chopped into logs and piled for burning, oxen being used for the draught work.

His house was usually a small, rude rectangular structure, built of logs, the chinks being filled with wood or mortar made from burning the limestone found near at hand. A "shanty- roof might be put on, made of thick bark or basswood troughs, or – it might be gabled and covered with hand split shingles, if he could buy or make them.

Only one window was cut to light the interior, and this would be boarded up until the luxury of glass could be brought from Toronto, fifty-five miles distant. An old record mentions that when the window was at last glazed it was "good to be able to see without having the door open, and this at Christmas time.

## Furnishing the Cabin

The lumber for door and window frames was at first made by digging a "saw-pit- so that one man could operate from below, another from above, in cutting a log into planks. By this means needed lumber for a plank floor would at length be obtained, also later enough for partitions, tables, stools and benches.

The beds would be made up first upon balsam boughs laid upon the floor, but if the settler were handy and industrious, he would soon contrive homemade furniture such as bedsteads, chairs, rockers, cradle, churn, chests and cupboards for clothing and provisions. He would also make his sleigh and many of the necessary tools and implements used about his bush farm.

## The Settler's First Crops

His first crop was usually a little wheat and potatoes put in amongst the stumps of his "clearing," without plowing, and as a rule he reaped a good yield from the virgin soil.

The grain would be scattered on the rough ground and scratched into the surface with a home-made "drag". This was a three cornered harrow drawn in and out between the stumps. His precious crop would be reaped with a sickle and threshed with a flail.

His nearest market for grain would be Whitby or Toronto, but a grist mill was located at Uxbridge from very early times, and here the settler took his wheat to exchange for the precious flour for his daily bread. Flour, meal, clothing, and manufactured goods, such as brooms, were dear, and the latter goods were hard to obtain, because of the long distances they had to be carried. Sugar, pork, flour, and salt had a standard value, and were much used as a medium of exchange instead of money.

## Products of the Pioneer Farm

Potash and pearl ash were usually the first products of the burned over bush farms, and were sold at a good profit in the distant market. The ashes were scraped together, filled into great wooden "leaches," into which water was poured, and the lye drained off was boiled down in large iron kettles till the potash salts or the more refined pearl ash salts were obtained. Such a "salt-works" was a feature of almost every pioneer farm. The author's mother in one season boiled down \$117 worth of salts for her father, and an old well in a fertile field near Greenbank still marks the scene of her labor.

Sawmills soon came into the early settlements and lightened the pioneer's never-ending and heavy task of clearing. Logging-bees were often held to hasten the work. Some lumber would be sold.

With the making of new and better roads, the settlers drove the long journey to Toronto, to market, selling pork, butter, maple sugar, berries, and such other products of the bush farm as were on hand, and buying from the proceeds a stock of groceries, etc., for the family.



## The Old Fashioned Fireplace

The fireplace was the chief centre of life in the settler's home, and deserves special mention. Built of stonework, and placed where it would best warm the interior, it was spacious enough to take in a huge "back-log, at least four feet long; and so heavy that it must be rolled into its place.

Against this the fire would be built, using a smaller fore log placed on the fire dog, and split wood piled above it, to be renewed as needed. Such a fire shed warmth and cheer throughout the humble home, though in very severe weather one would have to keep turning as on a "spit- to keep the face from roasting and the back from freezing. Flat stones, two or three feet wide formed the hearth, and about this inglenook,\* the family gathered on long winter evenings to work or read, and tell their tales of long ago. Books and newspapers were scarce and precious.

## Cooking Conveniences

Inside the fireplace hung the old-fashioned crane, an iron crossbar that swung out at need to receive the iron pots or kettles, with heavy lids, used by the housewife for cooking purposes. Her frying-pan had a handle about three feet long, having a large hole at the end by which it could be supported at the right angles before the fire by means of a notched such suspended from above the fire-place. She also had a large, round, iron bake-pan supported on iron legs, and with flat lid, no that the fire could be

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\* Inglenook - is a space on either side of a large fireplace

drawn beneath it and piled above it for roasting. Sometimes she used this for baking bread. Potatoes were often baked in the hot ashes, Her starch was made by scraping potatoes into water, straining off the liquid, and using the residue, which made good starch. If she had no saleratus (*baking soda*) to raise her cakes, she poured boiling water over clean ashes, let stand till clear, and used the liquid as needed.

The following incident, related to me, shows the merits of this method. A settler had brought in a doctor for his sick wife. The bread running short, he himself made biscuits raised by this method for breakfast. The doctor declared them to be the best he had ever eaten.

Her bread was commonly baked in an outside stone oven, built in beehive shape. A good fire was built within this, and when the interior was well heated, the coals would be raked out, the pans of bread placed inside, and both openings closed until the bread was baked. Bread thus baked was no good as to bring a thought of its fragrance when remembered to-day.

Dutch ovens of over grandmother's day were like long double tin boxes, in the inner one of which the loaves baked before the fire, being turned as needed to bake evenly. They were only common at a later day. The housewife's dishes and cooking utensils were often stored conveniently in a huge cupboard beside the fireplace opposite the inglenook.



## Housework in Pioneer Days

Beside her household tasks, including soap-making, candle-making, knitting, darning, mending and making the warm flannel garments for the family in winter, the wife and mother commonly assisted in the outside labor, such as boiling down sap, leaching ashes. and harvesting.

As soon as the settler had acquired a small flock of sheep, the housewife added to her duties that of spinning her own wool, the carding being done at the nearest carding mill. As time advanced hand weaving was also often undertaken and

comfortable “homespun” garments for the whole household were made by the thrifty housewife’s busy hands. Fine sewing and needlework was also an accomplishment of those early days when sewing-machines were not, and many pieces of handwork such as quilts, were real works of art.

My own mother too, trade for herself many pretty and useful boxes from birch-bark – some for her “Berlin wool” round, oval, or square as desired, the seams being neatly bound with coloured paper.

There were no Women’s Institutes in those days, and the pioneer’s wife learned much of her domestic art in the hard school of experience. Of social life and recreation she had little to enjoy other than occasional visits with some friendly but distant neighbor. As settlements grew, in later years, paring bees, quilting-bees, sleighing parties, singing schools, spelling-bees and “sugaring” parties became features of the social life of the settlement, but the ear-list pioneers had no such pleasures to beguile their loneliness.

The author was born in 1844, when the surviving pioneers of this locality; of whom my father, the late Timothy Cragg, was one; had mostly become established in snug and comfortable log houses, quite superior to the first ‘shanties” built by the pioneers. My earliest recollections are of such a comfortable home, with a good orchard, the first planted in this part, standing in the midst of a considerable “clearing” which extended toward my grandfather Bassingthwaight’s place adjoining. Elsewhere all around about where Greenbank now stands was a great woods.

I have heard my mother say she believed herself to have been the first white person to set foot on the hill just east of Greenbank, when as a young woman, she once climbed its rugged slopes looking for some of her father’s cattle which had strayed.

Settlement however, was progressing, but there were conspicuous lacks. There was no doctor nearer than Whitby and many a rough but kindly hand practised the surgeon’s art in time of need. “Bleeding” was the great “cure all” of those days, whether this remedy was applied by means of leeches or by “letting” a vein in the elbow. Dentists her were none, and I can well remember suffering people coming to my father to get their aching molars removed. Lawyers too, were few and far between, and many people of the neighborhood came to my father for such services as writing title deeds, leases, drawing up wills, etc., and also for survey work, all of which he did when desired, as a neighborly act.





## The Great Storm of 1850

I was but six years old when the great storm passed over Reach Township, leaving death and ruin in its wake. The day it came, I had gone over to my Grandfather Bassingthwaighte's place with my cousin to see my aunt's new baby. We had been told to return home at a certain time, and were just about starting, when grandfather and uncle came hurrying in from the fields, and bade us remain where we were until after the storm, which was coming up from the Northwest had passed.

Even then the sky was growing dark and the air was thick with dust and bits of branches torn from the trees. There we stayed while the fearful tornado swept by, with lightning, hail, and torrential rain, cutting a narrow swath of devastation through the woods and farms a little to the West of us.

When it was well over, my eldest brother, David, came with a large umbrella to take us home. I remember we had to climb over a large tree which had blown down across the roadway on the old Brock Road. I also remember that my uncle picked up a very large shingle near his home, and looking at it carefully, remarked that there were "no shingles like that nearer than Brock," which part the wind must have carried it. My father made the round of his farm afterward, and found but one rail displaced at the corner of a field, so escaped luckily.

But not so our neighbours to the West. On the lanson farm just West and South of us, death and destruction followed the sweep of the tornado. Mrs. lanson was on that day at home, alone with her children, together with her sister and niece, who had newly come to the country. They had a frightful experience. Amid the roar of a mighty wind, with trees crashing to earth all around them, the house was caught in the fury and blown down over their heads. When the great old fashioned chimney fell, it killed Mrs.

lanson's eldest son, while other portions of the building struck and killed her sister, and broke her niece's arm. It is said that Mrs. lanson (who was but little hurt, gathered her other three small children – James and Tommy and the baby – from the ruins of the home, and made her way with them through the slash of fallen trees to her nearest neighbour, Mr. John McLaren, carrying in her arms her three weeks old baby, Lizzie, now Mrs. Jas McKitterick, of Greenbank. Mrs. lanson declared afterwards that she never knew how she got through that desperate journey.

The roof was blown from the lanson sawmill, and most of their cattle ,were blown or driven into the millpond. The neighbours, searching about the home site next day, heard from some uncertain quarter the bleating of a little lamb and later discovered one (unharmd) under a great iron potash kettle which the wind had turned over it.

Our neighbours, the Hornes, on the Joseph Ward homestead, almost directly West of us, had a very similar, though less tragic experience on that day. Two families lived there and a new house had been built, but at the time of the storm both families happened to be gathered at the old house, where Mrs. Horne's son-in-law, Harry Bewell, lived.

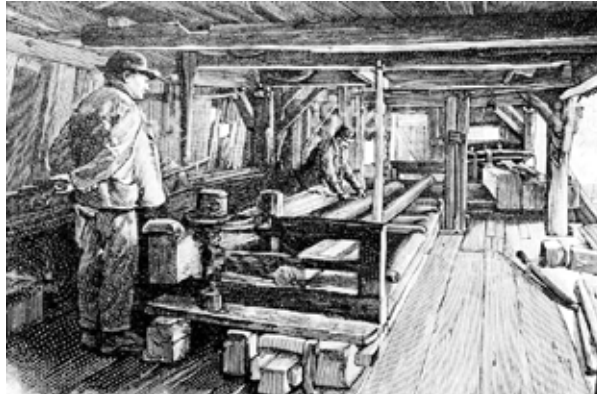
Reaching his home, just as the storm broke, the latter ordered them to go down cellar, which they did just in time to save their lives. He said he never knew whether he closed the trap door or whether the wind did it, as at that moment the house was lifted from its foundations and scattered far and wide over the country.

One of my school mates of that time, Elizabeth Johnston, who lived on the John Beare farm told me later that some of her family had found one of Mrs. Horne's bonnets and one of her dresses caught in the limbs of a tree in what is known as Beare's woods on the 10th concession, where Sunday School picnics were once held.

## Our Own Earliest Roads

Roads are a great factor in the progress of any new settlement; but of some of the first roads in this district, little trace remains today. The old Brock road passing through my father's homestead, was one of the earliest in this part, and the only road to either Prince Albert or Uxbridge lay via Epsom. Even that was but a rough wagon track through the woods, with corduroy bridges over the creeks.

The present Centre Road was not opened above Manchester till the year 1860. Some years previously three men (of whom my father was one) were delegated to examine possibilities for it. Two of them reported that it could not be done, so dense and low lying were the swamps through which it must pass. The third (my father) went through with his compass and said the road could be built. A few years later a corduroy road was carried through.



## Sawmills and Grist Mills

Our own first grist mill was where the present mill stands. Of sawmills there were several early ones built to serve the neighbourhood, one of the first being located on the farm now occupied by Mr. Blake Cragg. Another was located on the lassos farm, and still another on Mr. Jos. Stone's farm.

## Early History of Our Village and Its Name

It may be of new interest to many to learn that the Village of Greenbank was originally located on the 12th Concession, in the vicinity of the old Presbyterian Cemetery.

There was then a Post Office, a store, a Presbyterian Church, a blacksmith shop, and perhaps half a dozen houses, variously situated on or near the old Brock Road. When this road was closed and the new Centre Road was opened, the village Post Office was moved here on the 11th Concession, and the settlement soon gathered around it.

Its official name had early been decided on. At a meeting of the settlers of the district, it was named "Greenbank" upon the suggestion of some members of my father's family, in remembrance of their home in England.

## PIONEER FAMILIES of Greenbank and Vicinity

Land in the early days changed owners occasionally as at the present time, and it would be a difficult task involving much detail, to mention with exactitude every family that came into this district during its first settlement, most of them of English or Scottish origin, with a sprinkling of Irish among them “for seasoning,- Some, like my grandfather Cragg, were well advanced in years when they came, but all were of hardy stock, men fitted to their task, who founded with honor many of the families known and residing here to-day.

The following are some pioneers of Greenbank vicinity known to me as having been in this settlement before 1850, the year of the great storm:

- Thomas Ganton, father of Peter Ganton and Mrs. Phoenix, Sr., of Greenbank, settled on “Canton’s Hill.”
- Joseph Watson, father of Robert and Joseph (“Joss”) Watson.
- Thomas Clyde, the Warrens, William Jack, the Helmkeys, all of 11th Con.
- Mr. Jamieson, father of Alex Jamieson, of Uxbridge, settled on the present E. Jamieson farm on the 11th.
- John lanson, who had a sawmill on his land.
- James Copperthwaite the blacksmith, had his shop near the cemetery at the Brock Road.
- John McLaren, in whose “bush, opposite the cemetery, the old time camp meeting, and later the Sunday School anniversaries were held.
- David Cragg, and his sons, Isaac (father of Richard Cragg) Timothy Cragg (my father) and David, father of T. E. Cragg, late of our village. All came here in 1833. My father resided for a time in Virginia, where he helped in the construction of what was claimed to be the first railway in the United States.
- Edward Bassingthwaighte (my grandfather) and his sons Edward and Jonathan.
- Robert Wells, who settled where Ernest Phair now lives.  
James Johnson, who lived on the present John Beare farm.
- John Asling—and sons, Chauncey, Calvin, John and Walter— first owner of the Blair grist mill of to-day.
- Thomas Chippendale had the “mill farm” where Blake Cragg now lives.
- James Burnett, a local preacher, lived on the present McKitterick farm.

To the eastward several Scottish families located, among them being: James and William McMillan, John Michie, John Leask, and Edward Boe (these two still live here). Alexander ("Sandy-) Leask, father of Alex and James Leask, the well known cattle breeders. Alexander afterwards returned to Scotland for his health and died there later. The families of these Scottish pioneers are all well known to-day.

- Reuben Stillwell then owned the present George Real farm. His father was killed in the bush by a falling tree – an incident mentioned in grandfather Cragg's diary of 1833-34.
- William Real, father of William Real, of Greenbank, and Rev. Joseph; John Real, his brother, father of George, Richard, and Morcombe, all well known here, had farms near by.
- John Phoenix and his son, Edward, had a large holding of land where Albert Phoenix now lives.
- Joseph Lee, well known as a local preacher, bought part of the Phoenix holding, about 1845, and settled where George Lee now lives.
- Jesse Salter settled on the hill farm on the 12th concession, now owned by George Till. His brothers, Abram and George held the farms now owned by A. Stone and R. T. Lee.
- George and Jerry O'Leary (the latter is still living) settled on the present McDonald farm and one nearby.

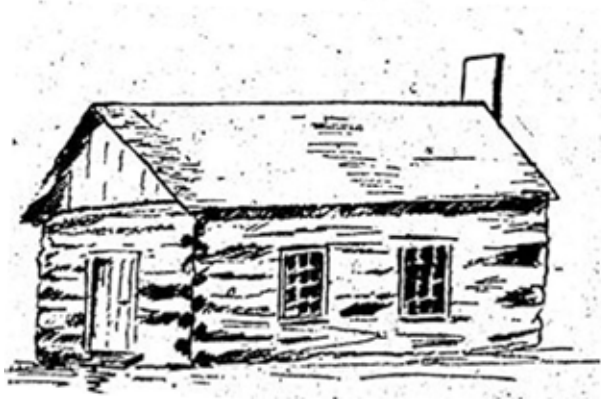
On this line also were the Van Aliens who kept the first Post Office at Greenbank on the old Burns farm on the 12th.

Further along the same line to the West were the Hornes, on the Joseph Ward homestead, Robert Tuffin and James Harrington, the Bagshaw brothers – Joshua and Aaron. Joseph held the present Flewell farm near the Village Joshua Horne, father of Richard Horne and Mrs. Wm. Leask, Robert Allen, and Paul Sugden. the latter being known as a fine singer and music teacher.

At Marsh Hill Corners were Albright Spring, the Chases, Wagoners, and Tomlinsons, their names giving rise to old rhyme by wags of those days – Springfield, Chasetown, Wagon-wheel, and Tumbledown – to designate their settlement.

- John Beare, father of Isaac and John Beare of our Village, also settled first in this vicinity.
- Richard Smith held the old tavern site where the Greenbank Methodist Church now stands. He took the contract for building the Centre Road through this neighbourhood.

Near this time (1850) but somewhat later came other settlers once well known here, among them the Burtons, on the Wm. Thomas farm, Jas. McPhail, John and Isaac Truax, Amos Stone, father of John and Joseph Stone of our Village; the Markhams, and Edmund Luke, father of Pascoe and Wesley Luke, who came from Whitby district. The Wards came in later from the same district.



## The First Schoolhouse

The first schoolhouse known in this neighborhood was a log building built about 1847 on the old Brock Road, where a blacksmith's shop also stood. Both were in deep woods, where the school children played as happily as they do in their trios and spacious grounds to-day.

Rudely made desks and benches for both teacher and pupils, with lower benches for the little folk, furnished the interior of this primitive institution of learning, and a great box stove provided heat in winter.

The first and only text books then used were Mavor's Spelling Book, and the New Testament. Grown up young men attended in winter, and scholars were wont to' come long distances for the schooling afforded; some walking three miles to school, coming from the Marsh Hill district and even from Saintfield.

One of the earliest teachers was the eldest brother of the late Andrew Horne. Whatever their qualifications, these early teachers strove earnestly to ground their rustic scholars in the "three R's - and some who survive to-day can attest the thoroughness and kindness woven into their task.

## The First Church Services in Our Neighbourhood

The first church services known in this immediate neighborhood were held in my grandfather Bassinghwaighte's log barn on his farm, where now stands the McArthur homestead. The first preacher was the Rev. F. Berry, who resided at Bethesda. Later meetings were held in the schoolhouse before mentioned.

The first Methodist church was Bethel Primitive Methodist Church, built where the Greenbank "Bethel" Cemetery now stands, and it was erected and dedicated in the year 1848. The author has in her possession today a receipt for 41 pounds sterling paid to the man who undertook the construction work on this sacred edifice. The author was then little over four years old, but can remember the opening well as she recited some verses on that occasion. The church 'coos frame structure plastered inside, with neat doors and windows, and bench seats with backs—quite a luxury in those days.

It had a very high pulpit which in later days was nicely painted, but it had no choir corner, for there was no choir, and no organ. The singing was always led by some tuneful member of the congregation. Home made tallow candles set on wooden wall brackets which try father made, were used for lighting.

The women all sat on one side of the church, and the men on the other, in Quaker fashion. The children, when room was scarce, were seated about the altar railing around the pulpit.

The first Sunday School here was started when I was a very little girl, by Mr. George Gibson, father of Mrs. James McMillan of our Village, and my own father, who bought the hymn books for it at Toronto. I still have one of the quaint old time books in try possession.

## A Pioneer Preacher and His Church

The pioneer preachers were characteristic of the times, and went the rounds of their large circuits on horseback or on foot. The Primitive Methodist Mission Circuit here for years extended from Whitby to Sandford. The first preacher was Rev, Mr. Berry. The next was Rev, Thomas Adams, of Bethesda, who officiated at the opening of the church at Bethel. Old Time Primitive Methodism in Canada gives this account of the event:

"The Rev. Thomas Adams built a new church in Bassinghwaighte's settlement, which was dedicated on Oct. 8, 1848. This would be the old Bethel Church at Greenback, which has been replaced since by a white brick. The first church was twenty-four by thirty feet. There was an acre of ground for burial purposes and it was

situated on a hill. Rev. John Lacey preached both morning and evening, and the debt was covered by collections and subscriptions at the opening. It was the first place of worship belonging to any denomination in the Township of Reach.

To the church people flocked in those days from many miles around in sleigh or wagon. In summertime it was not uncommon to see these men in shirt sleeves, and the women in neat calico dresses. "Revivals- were frequently conducted with marked success, as preachers exchanged circuits, and whole families were sometimes baptized together. When these travelling preachers made their rounds, they found a welcome at any home where the close of day overtook them.

Local preachers held a special and important place in the church life of the settlement in pioneer days and deserve special mention. Old "Circuit Plans" of services at Bethel record among others the names of Andrew Moore of Sandford, William Crosier of Utica, Joseph Lee and James Burnett of Greenbank, as pioneer preachers whose life and work will ever be remembered by the people among whom they lived and labored.

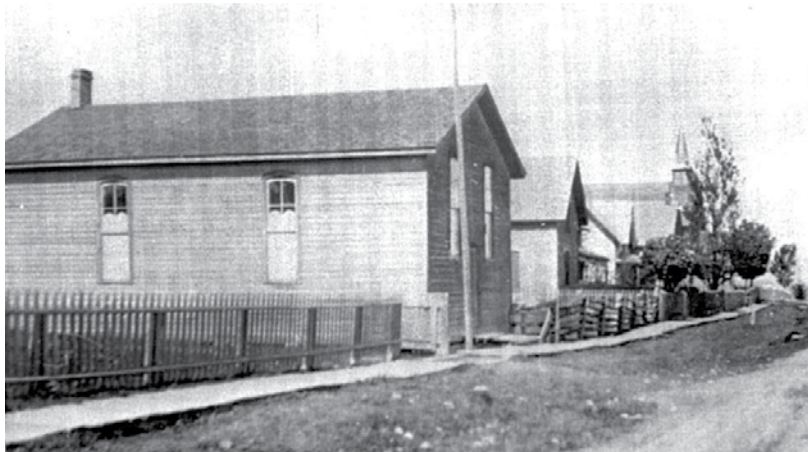
The last of these to preach in Greenbank was Joseph Lee, who is now represented in the active ministry of the Presbyterian Church by two grandsons, the sons of James Miller, a life long elder of the local Presbyterian Church, James A., of Toronto, and J. George, of Sr. Marys.

These local preachers were hardy pioneers whose daily life of toil spoke as effectively as their preaching on Sunday. Their faithfulness in keeping their appointments, visiting the needy, conducting funeral, and all their labor of love in assisting the preacher on his large circuit, is one of the richest memories that come down to us from those times. "Their works do follow them-though they have passed to a higher reward.

## Sons of Temperance

Working hand in hand with Church and Public School, Greenbank Division No. 331, of the Sons of Temperance is an organization which has wonderfully helped to shape the life work of the rising generations in this and adjoining communities since its inception on September 29, 1858, by my uncle Edward Bassingthwaight, who was the first store and post office keeper in the present village,





Temperance Hall,  
Greenbank, Ont.

On his invitation, Mr. Bugg, of Markham, came and organized the Division at a meeting held at my uncle's store. The following are the names of the charter members:

Edward Bassingthwaighte  
Timothy Cragg  
Richard Markham  
Joseph Ward  
Robert Walker  
Edmund Luke  
John Phoenix  
Joseph Lee  
Jason Stone  
Richard Holdershaw  
William Watson  
George Madison  
Edward More  
James Scott  
Edward Cragg



Timothy  
Cragg

Probably all of them have passed to the Great Beyond, except Joseph Ward (aged 89) now of Prince Albert, and William Watson.

For years the membership was the largest in the Province – at one time over 300 being on the roll. One cannot possibly estimate what a wonderful force the Division has been, first in promoting the principles of total abstinence and

mainly instrumental in banishing the licensed bar from the Village about twenty years ago, and from the Township of Reach.

Secondly, a splendid training school for preparing all over 14 to debate, entertain, and conduct public meetings.

Thirdly, a weekly social centre patronized by practically all our people at some taste.

During nearly seventy years of history its power has been far reaching. Scattered over Canada and the United States are many Greenbankers who have made good and who now remember gratefully the hours of profit and enjoyment spent long ago in the old temperance hall at home.

Such organizations, much to the loss of our country, do not flourish extensively in these modern times, but we hope that our local Division will not lose its old time grip on our young people, even if there is the near at hand prospect of no drink evil to fight in Canada.

## The Message of the Past to Us

Such, then, were some of the conditions of life the pioneers of this locality experienced, and all must recognize the fortitude and patience with which they faced the hardships, difficulties, and privations of their life in the Canadian wilds. They readily accepted the limitations of their lot, entering with cheerful interest on their novel experiences, and making the best of the situation in which they were placed.

Valued lessons to as assuredly come down with the many treasured memories of those early times, and it is ours to profit by them for the benefit of the succeeding generation. Above all the spirit of profound gratitude for our blessings to-day should abound. May we ourselves so live, then, in our day that we may experience the truth of Moore's words:

*"When Time, who steals our cares away,  
Shall steal our pleasures, too,  
The Memory of the Past will stay;  
And half our joys renew."*

MARY ANN TILL  
Greenbank, Ont.,  
March 1916.



~ Mary Ann Till ~

Mary Ann Cragg (Till) was born on June 17, 1844 in Reach Township. She was one of nine children for her father and mother Timothy and Mary Ann Cragg.

The Cragg's were among the first pioneer families in the north section of Reach Township during the 1830s, settling near what would become Greenbank.

Mary Ann was married to Daniel Till on February 19, 1863 at Greenbank. They raised a family of 14 children during their lifetime together.

Mary Ann Till was 82 years old when she passed away on September 1, 1925. Her husband Daniel predeceased her on August 5, 1918. They were buried at Bethel Cemetery, Greenbank.

Mary Ann Till was 73 years old when she published Pioneer Days at Greenbank in 1916.



Timothy and Mary Ann Bassingethwaighte  
Cragg parents of Mary Ann Till.



THE TILL FAMILY

Back Row: Walter, Mary (Minnie), Edward, Annie, Tom.

Middle Row: Letisha (Lettie), Daniel (Father), Emilie, Rosalie, Agnes.

Front Row: Grace, Wilfred (Freddie), Mary Ann (Mother), George, Bertha.

### REV. JAMES A. MILLER

James Andrew Miller was born at Greenbank, the son of James and Margaret Miller, where he spent his boyhood. He attended Port Perry High and Model Schools, and taught Public School at Greenbank, Scugog and Prince Albert before entering the ministry.

He became a well known figure in church circles in and around Toronto, and was responsible for the founding of 18 congregations, the first being Riverdale Presbyterian Church. In 1944 he retired from the active ministry and spent most of his time as Court Chaplain of Toronto Gaol.

Mr. Miller delighted in gathering pioneer history and had a wonderful collection of pictures of Greenbank district dating back many years. Rev. James Andrew Miller, passed away at his home, 710 Coxwell Ave., Toronto, on Friday, March 24, 1950.

The following story are some of his memories of his old hometown.



*Rev. James A. Miller*

## REMEMBERING GREENBANK 50 YEARS AGO (1883)

Written by Rev. James A. Miller, Toronto

Published in the Port Perry Star – March 9, 1933

So Sam Dusty, the last of the artisans, who flourished when Greenbank was a busy industrial village, away back in the early eighties, has gone to his long rest. He was a most worthy citizen and of him it can be well said: "An honest man in the noblest work of God."

Where now stands the residence of Isaac Beare, was the combined shoe shop and home built some sixty-five years ago, by Ned Dusty, who along with his son Sam and Johnny Whiteford, made the footwear of the whole countryside. For many years after the coming of the factory products, the father drove the "Black Maria" (Royal Mail) to Blackwater and the son carried on a big repair business, perhaps putting in longer hours than that veteran pegger, John Doubt, of Port Perry, (and that was going some.)

Ralph Somerville and Tom Gulley were the two smithers, with such efficient helpers as George Ledingham, Hugh McMillan, Lon Wood and T. L. Salter, practiced their iron work, and were ably assisted in woodcraft by Joe Sanders and Billy Whiteford, in turning out a splendid supply of buggies, cutters, wagons, etc.

John Linton's harness shop, with such hustlers as Harry Hortop, Raymond Byers, Jack Foy,

Billy Cragg and Jim Ashton, decorated the horses for miles around; and wasn't it a splendid place to get the latest village gossip or to find a sure solution of the problems of Church and State.

One must not forget the tailor shop of Dave Perkins and Abe Cragg, generally assisted by alert apprentices like the Bundy Brothers or Britton Love.

The general stores of Bob Harrington and Dave Perkins were well patronized, as mail order business was then unknown. The "barter" system was then at its height as the housewives were expert butter makers and the old speckled hens worked over time. Cash in quantity was only available with the fall sale of grain or the spring departures of fat cattle. Most farmers killed their hogs before marketing.

What busy places were Billy Beare's grist mill, a mile south; and Tim Cragg's, saw mill, a half mile south-west. What wonderful stories are told of the adjacent ponds where we learned to swim, skate, and did much fishing (good catches, too), or admired the great flocks from miles around getting their spring wash in preparation for the yearly shearing.

All these industries have long since disappeared (some by fire), except Mrs. Neil McArthur's residence, which was the first store of the village.

Other immortals were Jim Miller, the builder of many barns; Bob Watson, the thresher; Alex Horne, the weaver; Isaac O'Neill, the brick maker; Billy Michie, the plasterer; Henry Love and Jimmy Innes, masons; Richard Branton, Jessie Harman and Jimmy Cross, the star labourers; Ned Phoenix, the Postmaster; Philip Taylor, the popular teacher; Dr. John Parks, of Saintfield; and not forgetting Bob Walker, the old sailor; and Johnny Mac., the gentleman of leisure, second to none in his knowledge of current events.

While in those days the village proper had 40 houses, it now has good reason to be proud of its 50 improved or new residences, which have come with the good roads. An increasing number of farms talk of retiring in Greenbank. The village tavern (one time 23 in the township) under the care of Jimmy Thompson, accommodated many travellers, but thanks to the work of the Sons of Temperance, had no licence after 1885. It stood on the United Church site.

The spiritual needs were well cared for by Canon Davidson in the English Church; Rev. S. Acheson in the Presbyterian Church; Rev. George Bishop or Rev. W. C. Washington in the Wesleyan Methodist; and Rev. Richard Lessard in the Primitive Methodist. The Primitives had their own Sunday School with Johnny Beare as Superintendent, while the other churches had a union Sunday School under the direction of James Miller.

For three years much excitement and some ill-feeling was caused by both Sunday Schools having their anniversaries on July 1st. Two choirs and two bands from outside, along with hundreds of visitors, made the day highly interesting.

Quite amazing is the change of ownership of the farms of the community. West of the Centre road were James Harrington; J. Wilkinson; George O'Leary; Jim Burns; Jack Clyde; Dan Whalen; Josh Horne; Jim Allan; Bill Watson; Tomlinson Brothers; John Howsam; Joe Ward; George Bush; David Cragg; Dan Till; Ed. Phoenix; Bill Haley; Jim Scott; Ianson Brothers; Tom Clyde; Sandy Jamieson; Tom Allan; Dave Jack; Bob Helinkay; Bill Beare; Tom Ganton; Bob Greig; Jos. Watson;

Fowlie Brothers; T. E. Cragg; Johnny Beare, Sr; Ike Beare; George Franklin; Ned Barrett; L. Burnett; Tom Ward; Anthony Wells; Billy Wildman. Of 38 names, only six are on these farms now.

On the East of the Centre Road were: R. Penhall, Jesse Salter, James Troustill, Jim McMillan, Harry Bewell, Mrs. Sandy Leask; Willie McMillan; (Big) Jim Leask, John Turner; John Leask; Ned Boe; Jim Woon; Charlie Rennie; George Wallace; Alex. Whit-ter; Mrs. Joe Bagshaw; Geo. Markham; Joe Lee; Willie Real; JohnReal; George Real; Isaac O'Neill; Jimmy Love; Billy Love; Wilmot Asling; Geo. Byers; Jimmy Walker; Joe Burton; George Bewell; Wm. Akhurst; John Lee; Willie Michie; John Michie; Edmund Luke; Bob Phair; Tom Phair; John Montroy; Jim McKitrick; Jas. Blair, and Dick Real.

Of these 40 names only eight are on the same farms today; that is of the 78 farmers of the Greenbank area only 18 of the names are the same as 50 years ago. More than three-quarters have changed ownership by western migration and the call of the city, etc.

Of the scholars in the Greenbank public school in 1883, not-a-dozen are now in the community. It is difficult for to-day's young people to realize that 50 years ago no farmers had self-binders, steam or gasoline engines, telephones, rural mail, electric power, automobiles, paved roads, and the most marvellous of all radios. Yet it was a pretty happy world then – some of the old timers, even say happier than that of to-day. People spent more time in their own community and were better acquainted with their neighbours

Away back in the long-ago, Greenbank was at the junction of the old Brock road and the 12th Concession, near the Presbyterian cemetery. Besides blacksmith shop, the church and store-post office, there were very few houses. (Wm. Leningham's was the last.) The closing of the old road determined the new location on the 11th concession, of a village on a hill, "beautiful for situation and the joy" of all who have ever lived there. The name was in remembrance of the home of the Cragg family in England. The first house was built by Eddie Bassingthwaite, and is now occupied by his grandson, Bill Phoenix.

Mrs. Albert Phoenix's driving shed was the public school prior to 1874 and was first located near the cemetery a mile to the west.

Sixty years ago Dusty's shop, the white brick church and the Sons of Temperance hall (over a shed) were the only buildings east of the 11th concession, while there were only 20 houses in the village apart from the farm residences of John Phoenix, Joe Bagshaw, Joe Lee and John Ianson.

Surely the world, does move. In the good old days the village was seven miles from four railway stations (G.T.R.), and 10 miles from the C.P.R. Now Toronto (50 miles away) is often reached by auto in the same time as it took to get aboard a train.

Bob Watson was the first to use steam in place of the five-team horsepower, in threshing. Ned Phoenix bought the first self-binder (wire cord.) Dr. John Park owned the first telephone line and also the first pneumatic tired bicycle.

Just 50 years ago on February 28th, the marriage of Annie Perkins and James Leask, now so happily retired in Port Perry, caused great excitement.



A few other memories drifted in since last I wrote you, and may make the “effusion” more complete, so far as enlightening the youth of today on what people managed to do with their time. I was very familiar with some of the “events” of those times

The local Church Activities – not forgetting the winter “protracted services” (frequently for six weeks), the Saturday night gatherings in the Sons of Temperance hall, the occasional quilting, barn raising, logging meet, Presbyterian, dances, or apple paring (often pairing) bee, all give spice and variety to a life never humdrum, as days were filled with work.

About fifty years ago congregations began to sit down for prayer instead of kneeling in the Methodist church, or standing up in the Presbyterian Kirk. Some old people clung to their accustomed way until they passed on.

At a Marsh Hill evangelistic meeting, Tom Ganton brought a sheepskin to ease his “sore” knees when the minister said he could not attend unless he knelt for prayer.

Among the outstanding events for the year were the big Spring Fair at Manchester (predecessor of the Uxbridge 24th of May show), the annual Plowing Match, alternating between Saintfield and Manchester, the Fall Fairs at Sunderland, Uxbridge and Port Perry (on the south side of the sixth near Scugog bridge.)

A great event was the annual ice races on the noble Scugog, a time when lots of people tried to keep warm on John Barley corn. When the horse ruled the road, at least 20 blacksmith shops dotted the township – now only the one at Greenbank, and a score of oil stations have replaced them.

The taverns of the early 1880s were located at Seagrave, Saintfield, Greenbank, Epsom, Utica, Manchester, Prince Albert and Strettonville, but were having a bad time because of the “Scott Act” a county temperance measure.

These places have all disappeared in this improved new day, and South Ontario now leads the Province in dry voting. Several croquet lawns were well patronized and the ring of quoits was added among many men.

Only one story of other days – a fish story at that – yet absolutely true. On an old log projecting out in the Beare pond stood two enthusiastic followers of Isaac Walton. Little John Somerville was the useful shoreman to remove the fish; put on bait, spit on the hooks, etc. The farthest out boy, Jim Miller, landed a sunfish but on bringing his tackle back he made his biggest catch ever by hooking into the jaw of Bob Somerville and landed the ex-Ontario County Warden head first into the drink.

Fortunately the hook did little damage and the days outing was somewhat lengthened as the outfit dried and shrunk on a hickory limb, and Bob has about forgotten what his mother said and did when he got home.

