

The Historical Hamlet of Ballinafad



Trafalgar Road stretches north from Lake Ontario, dividing Halton County. The hamlet of Ballinafad straddles this artery as it passes into Wellington County. The Town line or 32nd Sideroad crosses here at right angles.

For military service in the War of 1812, Nathaniel, George and Eldrich Roszell were granted land in Erin Township. In November 1820 Nathaniel Roszell, his second wife Hannah Fowler, and George Roszell arrived at lot 1 Con 7, Erin Township. George left in the spring, selling his half lot to his brother. But Spring brought other settlers. Eldrich arrived to farm part of lot 2 Con. 7. Joseph Hilts and Sarah Johnson took Lot 32, Con. 8 Esquesing. Benjamin Vannatter and family were quickly followed by William and Peter Hilts, Abraham Buck, William Havens, Peter Binnie, Fred Near, Archie Patterson, Obediah Roy, Duncan McLean, and the Lindsay, Sparrow and Sinclair families. Howling wolves and the occasional bear worried these early settlers and played havoc with the cattle and sheep. When mail or store bought goods were needed, these settlers travelled south to Esquesing Village (Stewarttown) and to William Watkins' store at Ashgrove.

These isolated pioneers quickly decided to build a Meeting house to ensure visits from saddlebag Methodist preachers. Nathaniel Roszell donated land on the corner of Trafalgar Road and 32 Sideroad. A log cabin was built about 1825, becoming the centre of what would be called Ballinafad. Rev. Mr. Heyland was the first visitor, inspiring young Joseph Henry Hilts, who became a saddlebag preacher himself. During the week, the building served as a school.



A man named Pitcher was the first School Master engaged by the parents of Ballinafad.

Trafalgar Road soon became the major road south and consequently the little clearing grew in importance. Thomas Merry is credited with bestowing the name Ballinafad, named after his Irish home.

In 1842, the Methodist left the log cabin to the school and built a fine brick church on the Roszell land. A post office and store were established that year by James and Thomas Stevens while John Frank opened a hotel. A cemetery was established in 1845 behind the log school.

The original post office store burnt down in 1905 and was rebuilt of stone the following year by Frank Betz. Other proprietors included Betz, Ewans, Gardiner, Farnell, Hewins, Perkins, Miriam, Kirkwood, Robinson, Smith, Spear, Shortill and in 1983, Dave and Bonnie Walker. Fire gutted the store in 1987, but it was restored quickly.

In 1850 the Trafalgar, Esquesing and Erin Road Company opened a planked road from Oakville to Brisbane. Although tolls were charged about every eight miles, the speed it allowed made Trafalgar Road a very busy place. By 1857, Ballinafad had three hotels, two blacksmiths, two stores, two wagon makers and a shoemaker. Regular stagecoach service from Milton and Georgetown carried travellers to Erin and Garafraxa. One two-storey hotel was on the Erin side. The other two were in Esquesing.

George Gibbs ran the Mechanic's Hotel, a small frame place on the west side of Trafalgar. He also operated a blacksmithy on the corner, next to his hotel. In 1871, he had young Peter Ferguson working as a blacksmith. He sold him the business and the hotel became the Ferguson home. In 1901 a brick shop was build on the corner. Sons Peter and Duncan took over the smithy, serving Ballinafad until 1954.

The Commercial Hotel was on the east side of Trafalgar. Hoteliers included David Hill, Robert Bennett, A. P. Thompson and Donald McLeod. A fire destroyed the last hotel in 1912.

In 1931, James Kirkwood opened the chopping mill on the site of the Commercial Hotel, across from his store. The mill and cleaning plant was closed and demolished in 1992.

Adam Ackert made a name for the pumps he manufactured here. He was established here by the 1860's and produced pumps for forty years.

Early Presbyterian of the area gathered for services in the Methodist Church. In 1878, they purchased land from David Hill, owner of the Commercial Hotel and built a brick Church. When the United Church of Canada was formed in 1925, the two congregations voted for union. They decided to use the newer and larger Presbyterian Church. The old Methodist Church was used as a Church hall until it was demolished in 1954. Much of the timber from the old church was used to put a basement under the United Church.

The village had a public hall from about 1870 when the Good Templers, a temperance society, built rooms above the driving shed next to the Methodist Church. It fell into disrepair and was sold for scrap in 1961. The Women's Institute organised a campaign to build a new hall behind the former site of the Methodist Church. It opened in 1963.

Farmers pooled their buying power to form a co-operative about 1875. It was called the Ballinafad Grange. The building was located west of the Temperance Hall. After the Co-op was dissolved the building was vacant until about 1907, when it became a house. The log school in the centre of the village served the area until 1869. It was never recognized by either Township, so it did not receive funding. The last teacher was Miss Bella Young.

Erin Township built a new school in 1869 at lot 5 Trafalgar Road, known as SS#4, Peacock Corners. The Esquesing students had SS#14, Blue Mountain established in 1842 at lot 29 Concession 8 on the farm of D. Cook. By 1860 it was moved south to the thriving village of Silvercreek at lot 26. Finally in 1871, a new brick school was built at lot 29, Concession 7. William Cook was the teacher that year. Mrs. Rita Shortill was the last teacher when it closed in 1962.

This pamphlet was written by John Mark Benbow Rowe for the
Esquesing Historical Society

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