

Saugeen Township

The land of Saugeen Shores is a fertile valley covered in mixed hard wood with maple, beech and elm originally predominating. Evidence from archaeological digs suggests that the First Nations people have lived in this area for thousands of years. The Ojibway First Nations were well established in the area by the time of the first contact with Europeans. French Jesuit missionaries were some of the first Europeans to come through the Saugeen area in the 1600's. Fur traders from the Hudson's Bay Company followed them soon after and established a fur trading post along the Saugeen River in present day Southampton.

In 1851, Alexander Vidal surveyed Saugeen Township and divided it into farm and town lots. Most of the early settlers journeyed to Owen Sound, walked to Southampton and then moved inland. The two other common routes were by schooners from Goderich or by following the Garafraxa and Durham roads to Hanover where they would secure a craft to take them along the Saugeen River.

In the 1851 Census, about two hundred people had already settled into the area. Recorded are 130 people over the age of 20 and another thirty percent under age 10. Most of these settlers were Scottish and English born - only nineteen were born in Canada.

Saugeen Township was the second township incorporated in Bruce County (1854). Southampton was incorporated as a town in 1858 and Port Elgin in 1874. One of the first township expenditures was to improve road conditions in 1865. The Goderich Road was graveled to make it passable during the summer season. In these early years, obligatory time by the citizens had to be spent to build and maintain roads and fences.

The Wellington Grey Bruce Railway Line to Southampton was opened in 1876. Trains played a large part in the prosperity of Saugeen Township with the transport of farm goods and local industry products. Stockyards were built in Port Elgin and Turners for the sending of cattle to Toronto and the arrival of calves from western Canada. Trains also had an impact on personal travel as it provided a quick and safe way for residents to get to the big cities and it was a great way for tourists and cottagers to get to the area from anywhere in North America. The improvement in roads and efficiency in vehicles eventually lead to the decline of the railway and in 1970 service was discontinued. Electricity first came to Saugeen Township as early as 1897 and the telephone arrived in 1910.

When it came to answering the call to war, residents of Saugeen Township bravely stepped forward as volunteers. Over one hundred and twenty Saugeen residents served in the Canadian forces from the Boer War to the present, not to mention the various militia groups that existed since 1855. However, not only the soldiers showed their patriotism during the trying times of war. The community of Saugeen actively supported the war efforts through the Women's Institutes, church groups and other organizations that created and mailed soldiers care packages, blankets, socks and comforting words from home.

Recreation and conservation programs started to become more popular in the 1950's. Chantry Island was designated as a Federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary in 1954. MacGregor Point Provincial Park , containing 2,773 acres along the shoreline, has brought many to the area since its opening on June 26, 1976. The Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority plays a large part in the preservation of the Saugeen River. Many golfing venues have opened to serve the public.

In the late 1990's, Saugeen Township was amalgamated with Port Elgin and Southampton to become Saugeen Shores.

A regional history would not be complete without mentioning the villages Burgoyne and Dunblane. The Burgoyne Store was built in 1872 and quickly became the centerpiece of the entire village. A Post Office existed in Burgoyne on the Arran Township side and the Knox Presbyterian Church opened in 1859. These three establishments attracted a number of families that made Burgoyne their home. Dunblane, another village just south of Burgoyne that was originally spelled Dunblane, also had a post office that opened in 1852 and closed in 1921. The Dunblane Presbyterian Church once had a very large congregation but it closed in 1968. Stark's Mill at Dunblane started operating in 1869 and a schoolhouse was built in 1881.

The story of Denny's Dam begins with John Denny who purchased in 1855 the rights of a mill race and grist mill, completed in 1857. A wool mill was built by 1865. In that same year the Upper Canadian government also built a timber bridge over the river. Denny then built an Inn that served as a popular gathering spot in the early years.

Source - supplied by the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre