

## Egmondville and Van Egmond House

On learning he had previous experience constructing pioneer roads, Galt quickly enlisted Van Egmond in his project, hiring him to build a long section of the road that Galt proposed as a means to hasten the opening of the Tract.

Van Egmond and his son Constant were contracted to build that portion of the road running from Wilmot in Wellington County to Goderich on the edge of Lake Huron. The 1827 contract stipulated that the Colonel had three years to complete the task which also included constructing three inns at intervals along the 40-mile route.

The task of driving a road through the dense bush of southwestern Ontario was completed in approximately a year. Van Egmond, who was to be paid one third in cash and the rest in land, became the largest private landowner in Huron, possessing over 13,000 acres of property. Unfortunately, the money was never paid and the government confiscated nearly all his land after he participated in the rebellion of 1837. And so the family which opened the Huron Tract was eventually left with nothing for their immense feat of construction.



While building the Huron Road, Van Egmond did not neglect his personal affairs. On his chosen homestead to the west of what is now Harpurhey in Tuckersmith Ward of Huron East, he cleared nearly one hundred acres, planted a crop of wheat and built a combination home and tavern.

Van Egmond's interest in opening up the area did not end with the road. It is recorded that in 1831 he had five hundred barrels of flour delivered to ensure settlers had supplies and that he maintained 20 four-horse wagon teams to assist arriving emigrants. These ventures may have been partially commercial in nature. However his letters appealing on behalf of settlers fallen on hard times and his many gifts and loans to those less fortunate, can have had no other purpose than to aid the new settlers in difficult times.

Within a few months of the signing of the road contract, John Galt had been recalled to England and been dismissed by the Canada Company. His successor, Thomas Mercer Jones, was a different sort of man and Colonel Van Egmond grew to dislike him.

In August 1829, Jones, 'Tiger' Dunlop, and a Major Strickland attended a dinner party given by the Van Egmond's. The occasion was the first wheat harvested in Huron, the reaping and gathering being performed by Mrs. Van Egmond.

By 1833 however, things were not as convivial. Van Egmond was suing the Canada Company because they refused to pay the one-third cash balance due on the road contract. He was also complaining bitterly about Jones' policy of evicting settlers for small arrears in their payments to the Company.

By 1835, Van Egmond had become president of The Huron Union Society, formed to seek the righting of wrongs against the settlers. Canada Company representatives refused to hear the complaints. That same year, Van Egmond became a member of the Reform Party and then contested the elections of 1835 and 1836. Both attempts were unsuccessful. Few of those Van Egmond championed had sufficient property to qualify to vote. At that time, property generally equated with support for the Tory party and the governor. As could be expected, 'Tiger' Dunlop's brother Graham, the Tory candidate, won both contests.



The election results appear to have convinced Van Egmond that reform was impossible and that only civil disobedience remained. On December 7, 1837, Van Egmond arrived at Montgomery's Tavern, now part of Islington in the west part of Toronto, to take command of the rag-tag rebel forces that had been assembled by then fire-brand William Lyon Mackenzie, the most militant of Upper Canada's reform advocates. By the early afternoon, the rebels were dispersed and the leaders on the run.



Although Mackenzie escaped, Van Egmond was captured almost immediately and incarcerated in Toronto's Don Jail. There he became seriously ill, probably with pneumonia. He died in a Toronto hospital on January 5, 1838. The government confiscated all his property except the farm on which his wife still lived. None was ever returned despite the official pardon issued posthumously by the

British government many years later.

Such a tragedy might have crushed some families but the Van Egmonds, under the leadership of the Colonel's redoubtable wife Susanna recovered and prospered. In this, they were aided by the fact that Madam Van Egmond and the

five sons, Constant, Edouard, Leopold, William and August held property in their own right.

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