

Seaforth History

Much of the information in this gallery can be found in *Seaforth Beginnings* by Dean Robinson or was contained in articles by Mrs. Belle Campbell, for many years a chronicler of Seaforth's history. Special mention should be made of the McLean and Sills collections - the source of many photos of scenes past. Material also came from *The Huron Expositor* and references mentioned in the opening section.

The Early Years



The present town of Seaforth owes its rise from a muddy crossroads to a thriving community to several individuals who risked their capital on a potential unseen by others. The area was known as Guide Board Swamp in pioneer days.

The first settler in the area was Andrew Steen who, in the early 1840s, cleared a plot on what is now the southeast corner of Main Street and the Huron Road (now Goderich Street or Hwy 8) and erected a cabin. The second notable land transaction was part of ten acres cleared by a speculator named McGregor. On it, Irishman Andrew McKernan purchased three acres for a log home, tavern and a grocery store.

The remaining portion of the McGregor land was later purchased by Christopher Sparling, who with his brother George, owned land in the area including lots at the four corners. Christopher Sparling convinced the Buffalo, Brantford and Goderich Railway to run a line through his property on the south side of the present town. In 1856, one year before the line reached Goderich, George Sparling had his land surveyed into town lots. The news that the railway was coming attracted three lawyers (Patton, Bernard and Lefroy) from more settled parts of Ontario and they purchased the McGregor land from Christopher Sparling and laid out a village in 1854-55.

To ensure the success of their investment, the trio offered the railway land for a station. The company accepted on the condition that they got a station building as well. Seaforth and Egmondville merchants quickly financed the required construction.

With the Huron Road at the north end of town and the rail station at the south, Seaforth's success was ensured. About the same time, a northward road to Grey

Twp had been cut. The village's success was further solidified when James Dickson, the local Member of Parliament, had the south end of that road into the recently opened Grey Twp moved from the rival village of Harpurhey to the Seaforth main street about 1859.

It is interesting to speculate whether the fact that Patton, a driving force in the development, was a partner in the firm of Sir John A. Macdonald had anything to do with the successful maneuvers which brought the road and the railway to town.



Merchants and professional people from the villages of Egmondville and Harpurhey rapidly moved to the new centre and by the early 1860s the town could proudly boast of having a doctor, blacksmith, three hotels, a post office, wagon maker, several retail establishments and successful firms engaged in the building trades and the buying and selling of grain.



The importance of the grain trade continued for many years. At one time several firms were handling over a million dollars of wheat each season and Seaforth was considered the busiest terminus in the province. As would be expected, milling was an important industry and the firm of Beattie & Armitage shipped 15,000 bags of oatmeal to Great Britain in 1878. The oats were shipped in from as far as the United States and manufactured in local mills.

On January 1, 1868, Seaforth was incorporated as a village with a population of 1,056. As well, an area of 400 acres were drawn from Tuckersmith and McKillop Townships in the south and north.

On the heels of their new status came a new industry. Salt was discovered southeast of the junction of the railway and Main Street. The first salt works was built on the property of a pair of Doctors, T.T. Coleman and W.C. Gouinlock. Their operation called the Seaforth Salt Works became the largest in town although several others, most notably the Eclipse works and the Merchant Salt Co. all produced substantial quantities. The Seaforth Salt Works survived the longest, operating into the 20th century under Dr. Coleman's sons, Thomas F. and Edward with the name changed to Coleman Estate. All vestiges of the salt works are now gone; they were located to the north-west of the rail crossing on Main Street.

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