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Story of James Lickley and Thomas Robinson Families
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LIFE OF EARLY PIONEERS IN PETERBORO' COUNTY ONE OF RESOURCEFULNESS
TO MAKE ENDS MEET

FIRST STOCK BREEDER

BY F.H. DOBBIN

There was a time when men of marked individuality were scattered over the townships of the county, sending their energy, forethought and heartiness to furthering the progress of the settlers. The life of the pioneer begat resourcefulness. His it was to make ends meet, to do the best he might with what was at hand, both in living and in tillage of the almost virgin soil. His lot and his purpose depended on the locality in which he lived and had decided to make his home. Truly it was in the day when a fellow needed a friend, and there were those who with large hearts and full of optimism both helped and cheered from day to day. And the farther back "up country," as it was termed, the greater the need.

And so in deference to a call from a rural resident that men of the county should not be forgotten we will tell of the fortunes of one James Lickley, who came in and afterwards located along the Burleigh Road, between Burleigh Falls and Apsley. He was born in Sligo County, Ireland, in 1823. His father John Lickley and his mother emigrated to Canada when he was but nine months old and as he afterwards said, he had nothing to do with it all. The entire family resources comprises 20 sovereigns.

The hopes of this parents that beginning life anew in the promised land would lead to better things were rudely destroyed, for the next day after the vessel reached Quebec, his father while assisting other passengers to land from the vessel, fell into the waters of the harbour and was drowned. This unfortunate beginning in life in Canada left his mother a widow in a strange country, without the means of purchase for herself or her children a meal or a night's lodging (for the twenty sovereigns were in her husband's pocket at the bottom of the St Lawrence), so she sought the assistance of kind Christian friends who found her a home and then employment as a domestic. From her meagre earnings, she maintained herself and educated her son. In 1834, she moved to Montreal where she died

from an attack of cholera leaving her boy James an orphan without a relative to exercise for him parental care. This brings us to the fortunes of James Lickley who was thrown on his own resources.

For a short time he secured employment as an errand boy, or messenger and afterwards bound out for the term of four years as an apprentice to a ropemaker of Montreal, named John Converse. But fussing about the wharves and talking to the men from the sea he became imbued with the life of the sailor and at the end of his term shipped on board a trading schooner. Capt Lesperance, who was in the fish trade at Fortune Bay, Cape Cod, St George, Big River and other forts and points. He was three years in this service.

Life was apparently to offer variety to James Lickley for he returned to Quebec and for some time was engaged at Hinchinbrooke in lumbering, afterwards removing to a point in New York State named Ellenburg and there stayed until the spring of 1862. He had begun to realize his deficiencies in the matter of education and need of a better knowledge of the English language. Assiduous attendance at night school laid the foundation of such success as he attained in after years.

In March 1862 he came to the County of Peterborough and as a first work assisted in the construction of the Burleigh Road, built by the Government, with one James Walsh as the contractor. Lickley was employed in chopping and clearing the right-of-way from Burleigh Falls to the 21st mile post, about a half-mile north of Apsley. This work completed he entered the service of Campbell and Hughson, lumbermen, and was stationed at their supply camp as chief clerk, the camp being on the Burleigh road, lot xx, concession 6, Burleigh township. Four years later the firm transferred their interests to Ullyott and Sadler of Peterboro and Lickley was included in the transfer, remaining until the firm concluded its business, disbursing very large sums of money in the course of trade.

Industriously he had laid by several hundred dollars. It is related that in 1864-5 many of the settlers of North Peterboro, who had gone in on lands secured from the holdings of the Canada Company, not having means of purchasing stock. Lickley was induced by what he saw to buy for them a cow each. In accordance with wishes he organized a system of loaning a cow to each applicant, for the term of three years, when she was to be returned to him with the first birth. If by any accident the cow should be killed by falling of a tree or by lightening the loss was his. Sixty-eight cows were so supplied.

His first applicant was Billings Kilborne, farmer and for years rural postmaster, of Chandos township, who located in 1863. During the next ten years Lickley's herds increased to such an extent that he was the largest owner of cattle in the county, notwithstanding that he actually sold a large number. At one time the herd, all told, numbered 260 head, and besides a large flock of sheep scattered over an area from Young's Point to the borders of the County of Haliburton., the value of which the cattle ran into many thousands of dollars. Lickley said that if by chance he met a stray cow on the road he never threw a stone at her for fear she belonged to one of his own herds. Nor would he let others do so for the same reason. He never married, lived the life of a bachelor, honest, ever hospitable and during his life earned the confidence and friendship of all. He knew the lands and woods of the northern townships as if a book were before him. Was consulted on matters of timber limits and settlement. A familiar figure in Apsley during the earlier years of the village and until he passed away.

We have been dealing with the affairs of a man who lived "up country," that is north of Stoney Lake. Suppose we come south and say something about a man and woman who lived in the township of Smith, not so very far from the city, on lot 15, concession 8. And whose names were remembered and revered long after they had passed away as of those

who exercised the true spirit of helpfulness without money and without price.

Among the first of these to arrive on the lands of the newly surveyed township of Smith – this was in the latter part of 1818 – were comprised the McGibbons, Tullys, Waltons, Bells, Edmisons and others and Thomas Robinson. He came to look out the land and his family followed in 1820. The party (this was six years before the survey of the future town of Peterboro had been made, and only a trail, marked by the blazes on the trees, defined what we now know as the Chemong Road) having come in from Smith's Creek (Port Hope) after devious tribulations, halted at that little three-cornered plot of land at the junction of Reid and Stewart streets in fact at the beginning of the Chemong Road, and built a shack or shelter, and there lived while selection was made and Once this was done the applicant had to make his way to York (Toronto) and before the authorities complete the location. Returning afterwards to take formal possession and perform the duties of settlement.

Among these, as has been noted, was Thomas Robinson, the grandfather of our esteemed fellow citizen T.W. Robinson. Thomas Robinson located, built his first rude cabin, industriously cleared his lands and found time to do good. And as what we have to tell relates to the entirely personal side of the man, and his excellent wife, details of the struggle of the pioneer may be omitted.

In those days, when physicians, ministers and teachers were not only scarce but in this locality entirely wanting, the elder members of the Robinson family were for years among the most ardent if indeed not the only, practical advisers or amateur practitioners of at least the first two named professions. They inaugurated a series of meetings in connection with the Methodist Church, of which they were most devoted members. These meetings were held in the log cabins of the settlers.

Those who remembered have said that Mr and Mrs Robinson were fine singers and were the leaders in prayer and song of the good old-fashioned backwoods meetings. Mrs Robinson also gained much celebrity as a physician and midwife doing all, however, without the remuneration or reward, save what a clear conscience and delight in doing good to her fellow beings carried to her heart. It was quite a common thing for her to go distances of thirty miles on horseback, in the night, through the storms and forbidding forests, across creeks and swamps to render aid to the sick. Many of the sturdy men of the second generation of the county round about were ushered into being under Mrs Robinson's care.

As would be expected there was large aspirations, and these combined circumstance led to an exceptionally wide field of friendship, let alone of acquaintance, and when the old couple passed away in 1858 no king or prince could be more lamented by their vassals than were they among the pioneers and their families.

From such parent stock should come men, and women, who would have high ideals for public service. Of the grandsons, one was Rev John H. Robinson, another Rev Isaac Robinson, who did yeoman missionary service in the North West, and the third our good friend Thomas W. Robinson of 525 Weller street, for many years a prominent in the commercial life of the town and city. A faithful member of George street Methodist church, identified with its activities, taking responsibility in its intricate affairs, and as teacher, leader and superintendent of the Sunday School, he has watched the infant church grow and expand, to its pretty proportions, setting off branches that took root in other sections of the city, growing to size and renewed importance in the faith.