

History of Dornoch

The Village of Dornoch has had a long and interesting history, as Canadian settlements go. The first people to stay overnight at Dornoch were probably ancient people who would find the large spring on the north/east corner of the Village, a good camp ground and the fish in the river Styx no doubt were very plentiful. The first white overnights were most likely the surveyors who came up the Garafraxa, an ancient Indian trail, which ran from Lake Ontario to the deep Sound on Georgian Bay. From this trail the townships on east and west sides of the road were laid out and surveyed in the 1840's. The chief surveyor was Charles Rankin, an English land surveyor. Some of his descendants still live in the Dundalk area.

One of the first settlers to take-up farms in the area was the MacIntosh family from Dornoch in Scotland. The Ledinghams, Corletts, Riddells and Stewarts came in 1841 - 1843.

A Mr. Bartholomew Griffin was an early arrival and built a hotel on the south/east lot. The barn on the property still stands today but the hotel went down in the 1940's. For some years the Village was known as Griffin's Corners, later on as Smith's Corners after the Smith family who settled on the north/east lot. However, the MacIntosh family named the crossroads, "Dornoch" after their home village in Scotland, and that name remains to this day.

In the 1850's, a Presbyterian Church was established near the crossroads. Later, a beautiful Catholic Church was built where it stands today on the hill overlooking the river and the Village. The present day Presbyterian Church was started in 1900 and completed in two years. Two sawmills were built near by - the Dargavel Mill on the north/east bank of the Styx where the river crosses #6 Hwy. and the Linley Mill at the bottom of the high hill west of Dornoch and still called Linley's Hill by the older generation.

The first hostelry, The Griffin Hotel, built by first settler Barth Griffins, was an overnight stopping place for people going north into the wilderness in search of a better life and free land or to the Georgian Bay Towns of Owen Sound, Meaford, Wiarton and The Bruce Peninsula.

The bar, at the Griffin Hotel, was an attraction which stayed in operation for many years meeting the needs of the thirsty. A later hosteller was Dan Omarra, who operated until prohibition came in the 1920's and shut down all legal liquor establishments. This however did not prevent people from getting thirsty. This was taken care of by at least 2 bootleggers who could not abide this suffering and started up making beer. A whiskey still, for more substantial thirsts, also flourished in this area.

A Post Office was established in the early 40's, 2 general stores and a blacksmith shop, 2 Public Schools and a livery stable were part of the thriving settlement. A family doctor was soon practicing in the Village and is still remembered fondly by many of the older residents, many of whom were brought into the world by kind Doctor Smith.

We hope you will enjoy your visit to the Dornoch Inn and this historic Village whose friendly people welcome you and bid you.

"Please come back again, soon!"

