

## Roe arrived after War of 1812

*The following article was written by the late Edward Roe, a grandson of William Roe.*

William Roe was born in Detroit on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1795, son of Walter and Ann Laughton Roe. Walter was a lawyer, the first to practise in what was then Upper Canada. He had travel to Fort Detroit by river and lake shortly after he graduated in Montreal and received his Commission from the Governor, Lord Dorchester. Although all the territory west of the Detroit River had been deeded to the U.S.A. by the Treaty of Paris 1783, their forces had not reached Detroit to take over until the year 1796.

William Roe was therefore born in Detroit but under the British flag. The Roe and Laughton families could have retained their considerable U.S. possessions by swearing allegiance to the U.S.A. but they preferred to relinquish those and they moved their families across the river to Canada.

Walter Roe, who was mayor of the village of Detroit at the occupation, handed the keys of the town to General Dearborn who then moved in to the Roe residence. The Roe family settled at Sandwich, Ont. where their records are among the earliest in the parish of All Saints.

We know little of the early life of William, his two brothers Walter and John Alfred, and his sister Caroline except they received good educations, intermingled freely with the surrounding Indian children and learned their language fluently. At the outbreak of the War of 1812 we find William at York in the office of his father's friend Prideaux Selby, then Receiver General of the infant settlement.

When the American forces invaded York, William, then 16 was ordered to conceal the government securities in a safe spot. The mother of the Hon. George Allen helped him to secure the bags of gold on his person, covered him with a large cloak, and securing a horse and wagon he drove out Kingston Rd. To what was later Victoria Park Ave, and buried the money. When the enemy had withdrawn William recovered the gold and returned it to the authorities.

He and a friend, Andrew Borland, who suffered from wounds received in the 1812 War had been in the habit of riding up to what later became the village of Newmarket, to trade with the Ojibway Indians, whose language was familiar to them. These meetings were held under a great elm tree growing on what is now Timothy Street. Roe and Borland decided to located in Newmarket and go into general business. However, Borland's poor health prevented his long remaining in the partnership. William Roe obtained a government grant of land bordered by what were later Main, Timothy, Prospect and Water Streets. When Main Street was numbered it was from south to north, and the house which Roe built on the south-east corner of the property became No. 1 Main St.

The house was a large colonial type building, the second built in the town, and was a split-level type, front door on Main St. and the kitchen and dining room opening on a lawn above the Holland River branch. The Indians could therefore paddle up the river to the Roe stores, which continued on Main St. north of the house.

On the loss of his first wife, William Roe was left with three young children, a boy William Jr. And daughters Sarah and Julia. His mother the widowed Ann Roe, came from Sandwich to take charge of the household, her son Walter Jr. accompanying her. Her daughter Caroline married a Dr. Morton of Holland Landing and her son John Alfred took up farming near Blenheim. William Jr. became a "mariner" on the S. S. Heaver owned by his uncle, John Laughton, on Lake Simcoe. However William Jr. was killed by a fall from his horse when only 21 years old.

Newmarket had grown, stores were built on the unoccupied Roe property on Main St. Some fine families had settled there and in the surrounding country-side and there was plenty of gaiety for the young Roe ladies to take part in before marriage. William Roe had been appointed Postmaster of Newmarket in 1837 and continued that position until his death in 1879. He was a very busy and influential man, made frequent trips to Montreal and New York on business and was highly esteemed throughout the country. There were few physicians in Upper Canada in the early 1830's. William Roe had learned a few simple remedies from an Army surgeon and was widely sought after by settlers and Indians who fell ill.

In addition to his large store containing general merchandise, Mr. Roe was familiar with land deals and assisted the public in the matter of grants, purchase, mortgages, sales, etc. He acted as Reeve in the early days of village. He was instrumental in raising funds for building the first Anglican church and his square family pew was a feature of old St. Paul's.

In 1854 William Roe married again this time to a young English lady, Sarah Ruston. The ceremony was at the Sibbald Church, Georgina. Eight children resulted from this marriage, four girls and four boys.

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