



*A sketch of the mill on the Appanee River, drawn in 1795 by Mrs. Simcoe.*

## Old Mills of the Loyalists

By A. M. GOING

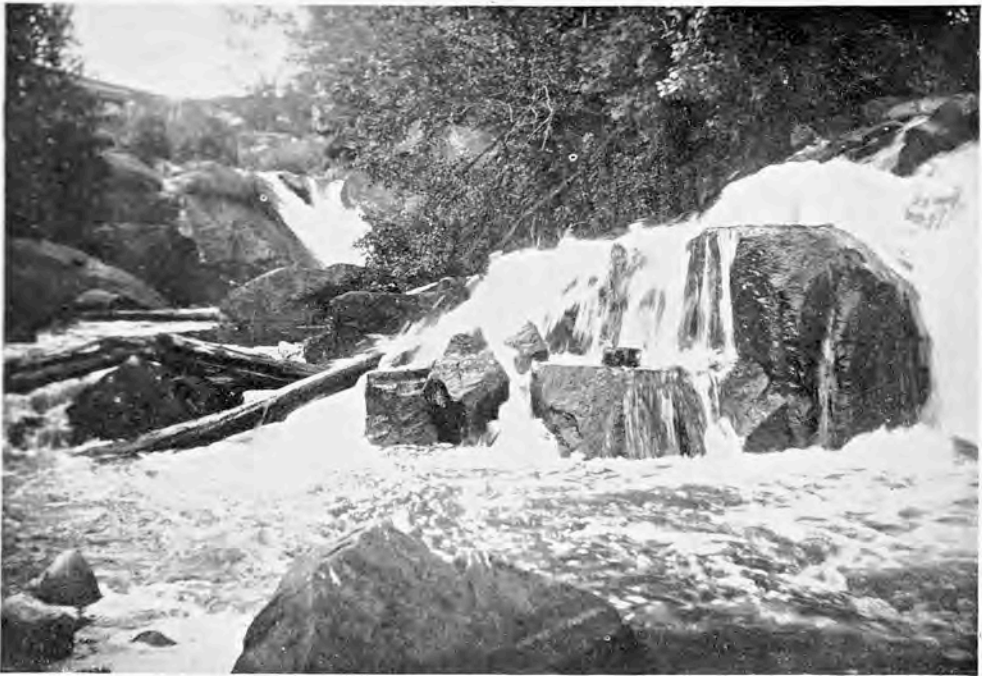
THE United Empire Loyalists of Ontario held the centre of the stage last summer. They were celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the arrival in Upper Canada of those valiant men and women who chose to face the hardships of an unknown land, over which the flag of their fathers flew, rather than to live at ease on their cultivated estates under a new rule and a new flag.

The United Empire Loyalists, who have had such a large share in the development of Ontario, came for the most part from New York and the New England States, with Captain Michael Grass. In the autumn of 1783 five ships, led by the British war vessel "The Hope", left New York carrying the families of the Loyalists bound for Canada under the care of Captain Grass. They sailed up the Atlantic coast and the St. Lawrence river and landing at Sorel, Quebec, spent the winter of 1783-1784 on Canadian soil.

In May the party embarked in bateaux and Durham boats for Catarauqui, later called by the Loyalists "King's Town", now Kingston.

It was at Catarauqui, where the river, coming from the lake district to the north, joined the St. Lawrence river at the foot of the Great Lakes, that La Salle built his clay trading post to collect the furs from the Indians, and it was on the same site that Count de Frontenac, Governor of New France, built in 1763 a rude fort of logs and rubble which he called Fort Frontenac and above which floated the golden lilies of France.

In 1758 Fort Frontenac was taken by the British forces under General Bradstreet and the flag of England, blood red against the blue of the Canadian sky, flew from its ramparts. So at Catarauqui was a British armed settlement with protection for the Loyalists. Protection was not enough, so the Governor, Sir Frederic Haldimand,



*The falls at Kingston Mills where the first mill was built in 1783.*

decided that to be ready for Captain Grass' Loyalists who were to be given three years provision of grain, clothing and house and farm equipment to enable them to begin life on their crown grants, it was necessary to provide a grist mill. Robert Clark, a millwright, one of the advance guard of Loyalists, was chosen to build the first government mill west of Cornwall. He went up the Great Cataraqui River and found the power he required in the falls that, about six miles from Kingston, dashed in foaming beauty between the granite rocks.

From the east as far as Elizabethtown (now Brockville) where other Loyalists had settled, and from as far west as Cobourg, men brought by water or on their backs through the forest, their grist to mill at Kingston. It was a meeting place for old friends, who tied their flat-bottomed boats to the trees at the edge of the back water and, while their grain was being ground, exchanged the news of the day.

In 1833 Colonel By completed the Rideau canal from Ottawa as far as Kingston Mills. When he found it necessary to build the last locks at that

point, the first mill was moved a few hundred yards to the east. With a descendant of the United Empire Loyalists we visited its site, where now a power house has made use of the dam built by Robert Clark. We saw clearly in the dark granite the drill holes made by the sappers who blew out the rock for the flume of the mill, and as we crossed the green of the locks and passed near the two maples our friend pointed to a mill stone, sunk in the earth, the seat used by generations of picnickers. "That is one of the stones of the first mill in Ontario to grind grain for the United Empire Loyalists," he said. Across the great railway bridge roared a train. Little did the passengers who looked from its windows at the woded gorge, the locks, and the spires of Kingston in the distance, realize that here was ground the first wheat grown in Upper Canada.

We walked back to the car, passing one of the block houses built by Colonel By to protect the inland waterway from Montreal to the garrison at Kingston. The loopholes can be seen in the walls and still the lockmen who live there



*"The Basin", Kingston Mills, showing, at right, the maulting boxes under which the old mill-stone lies, and the second lock.*

climb an outside stairway to the entrance. It is a picturesque relic of the past.

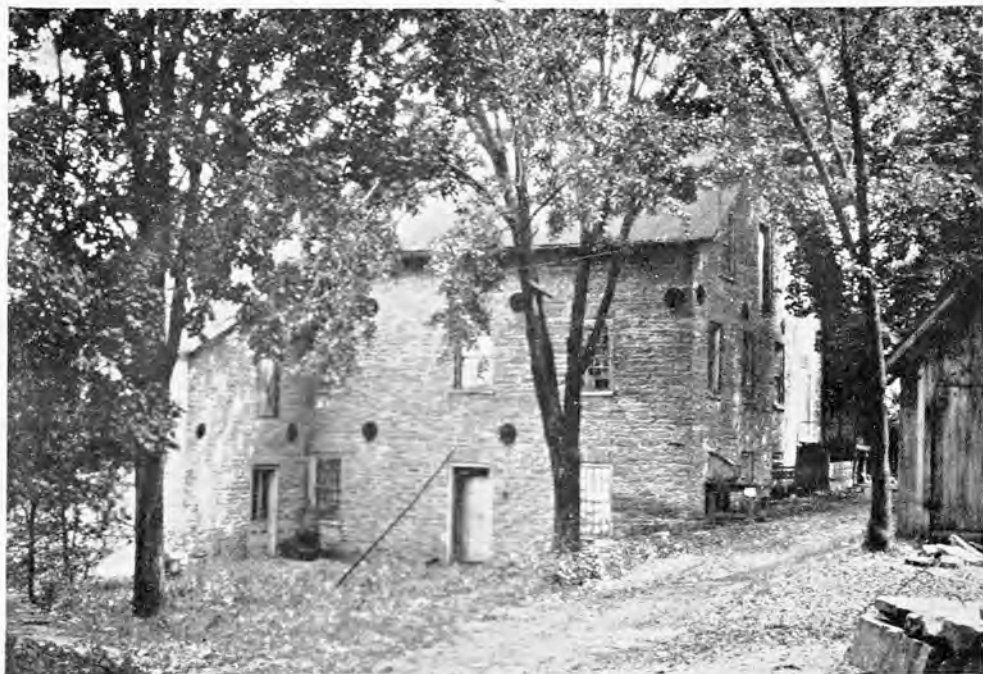
As the clearings in the forest grew larger more food was raised and the settlers found ways of making the Indian corn, which was so easily grown, into meal. The descendants of the Loyalists who were with Captain Van Alstyne, the leader of the section of Captain Grass's party who followed the shore line from Kingston up to the Bay of Quinte and landed at Adolphustown, will tell you tales of the "Hominy Block," used in their grandparents neighbourhood. The stump of a tree was hollowed, perhaps by a cannon ball brought from the fort and heated red hot. Into this hollow was put the corn and then pounded with a pestle, until a coarse meal called hominy was ready to make porridge for the family. Larger mills, called the Plumping Mills, were taken from farm to farm.

Then three years after Kingston Mills began to work, Robert Clark again was commissioned to build a government grist mill. This time he went farther west and at the falls of the Appanee

river, which motorists of the King's Highway No. 2 cross as they enter the pretty town of Napanee, another mill was built. That it was a lovely spot when Mrs. John Graves Simcoe, wife of the first Governor of Upper Canada, paid it a visit, is evident from the sketch she made of it which is still preserved. This mill was bought by the founder of a well-known Canadian family, Richard Cartwright, grandfather of the late Sir Richard Cartwright.

The third mill was built about 1796 by the United Empire Loyalists of the Bay of Quinte district. Major Van Alstyne, who had his Crown grant at Adolphustown, also owned the land opposite on the high cliff on the shore of Prince Edward County.

On top of the cliff is the lake known as "The Lake on the Mountain." From the days when the Indians were the only dwellers on this lovely spot mystery has surrounded this small lake, which was said to be fed from some unknown source. Legends have come to us from the Indians who regarded the lake with awe and many stories of its hidden depths.



*The old mill part way down the mountain known now as Wilson's Mill, Glenora.*



*The foundation, still standing, of the carding mill on top of the mountain beside the Lake on the Mountain.*



*The Rankin Mills at Collins' Bay showing the carding and grist mills.*



*A logging scene on the Napanee River about 1820.*



*The Asselstine Woollen Mill, the only mill left whose water wheel turns its machinery today as it has done since 1810.*

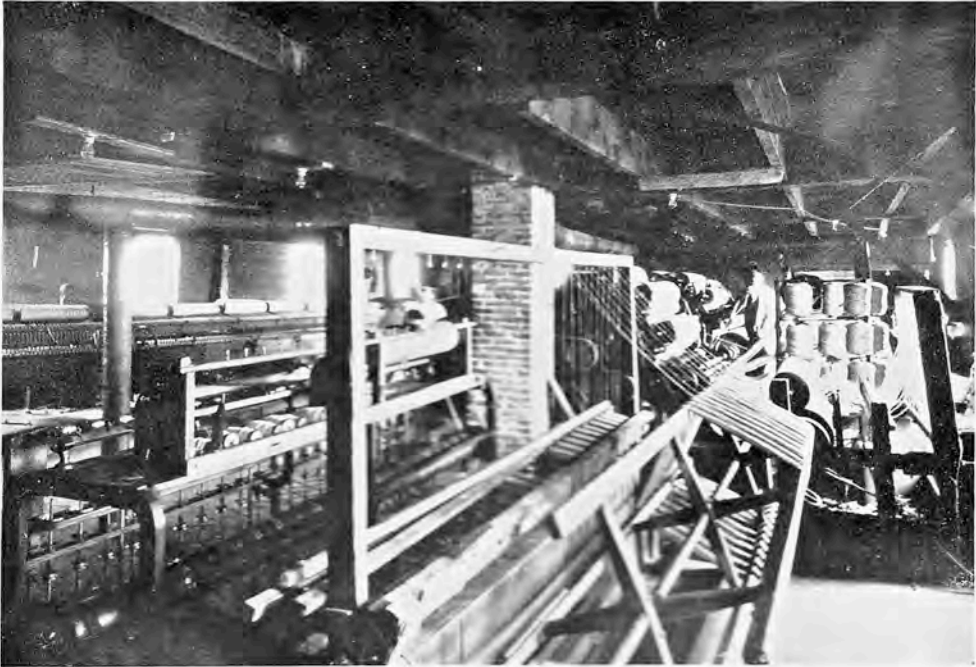
have sent scientists to sound its waters. Science, alas, has a cold-blooded way with mysteries.

But there was no doubt of the available water power and as the need of a grist mill for the settlers arose, Major Van Alstyne and a man named Lake decided to build a mill half way down the mountain side and to cut a tunnel in the rock for the water which would come from the lake. The mill was known as the Stone Mills and later became the property of Stuart Wilson, who built a saw mill and a carding mill. His son, James C. Wilson, developed the industry on the mountain side and it became a flouring mill in which the grain bought from the settlers was ground into flour and shipped by water to larger centres.

About the year 1820 there was living on the Adolphustown shore a newly arrived Scotchman, Hugh Macdonald, and his wife, who had come from Sutherlandshire with their children to make their home in Canada. With them was a curly-headed little lad of five years named John Alexander, their

second son. He was to become Sir John A. Macdonald, first Prime Minister of Canada. Hugh Macdonald the sturdy Scotchman, had a hand in building one of the mills on the mountain, we learned from Fred Wilson of Belleville, who having inherited the property from his father lived for some years in the handsome house near the lake and gazed daily at the magnificent view of the Bay of Quinte, with its smaller bays and islands.

The Stone Mills, as they are still called, were sold some years ago to the Ontario Government as a fish hatchery, it being found that the water of the lake, is so pure that the young fish thrive in it. It is at the shore line below the Stone Mills that the landing known as Glenora receives your car when you cross on the ferry on your way to Picton. The new highway, which will take visitors through the United Empire Loyalist region beside the Bay of Quinte, following the old Indian trail made into a country road in 1803 when Asa Danforth, was given a government commission to build a road from Kingston to Ancaster, will



*An interior view of the Asselstine woollen mill showing the looms and machinery.*

use the ferry at Glenora and tourists will climb the steep hill to the Lake on the Mountain.

Nearer Kingston the new highway will take you past the old mills at Collins' Bay. Here in the early part of the nineteenth century came a United Empire Loyalist, Anthony McGuin. He built a raceway, where vines clamber today, for a mill whose wheels were to be turned by the water of a small river flowing into the Bay of Quinte. Later he built a carding mill and then a grist mill. Not far away was his distillery where the strong waters, plentiful in those days, were made. His nephew, David McGuin Rankin, inherited the property which passed to his son, Anthony McGuin Rankin, who from 1911 to 1926 represented the county of Frontenac in the Provincial Legislature. The mill wheels have been still for some years but the property remains in the family, for David McGuin Rankin, bearing his grandfather's name, practises law in Kingston and is County Magistrate of Frontenac. He and his sister live in the old stone house near the mill.

But the only mill whose great water wheel turns its machinery today as it has turned it since 1810, is the Asselstine Woollen Mill near Odessa, a few miles from The King's Highway No. 2. We visited it one day when the willows by the creek were waving a welcome as of yore, when the birds were singing in the ecstasy of early spring and an oriole, just back from a winter in the south, flashed his orange coat above the grey old mill that still turns the wool of the sheep that graze on the farms settled by the Loyalists into soft white bats, that you may see turned into yarn and woven into cloth. In every Loyalist home was a spinning wheel, cards for carding the wool, and in many of them looms for weaving the full cloth with which the family was clothed. But gradually carding mills were built as at The Stone Mills and at Collins' Bay. In 1810 Isaac Fraser, M.P.P. for Lennox in the early part of the nineteenth century, whose house may still be seen at Millhaven, followed the stream that flowed into the Bay of Quinte back a few miles and built what is said to be the oldest woollen mill in Canada still at work.



*Mill Creek as it enters the Bay of Quinte. It is on this stream that the Asselstine Mill is situated, a few miles from this spot.*

Michael Asselstine, a son of a prominent Loyalist, married a daughter of Isaac Fraser and bought the woollen mills from his father-in-law and in the Asselstine family the mill still remains.

The revival of handicrafts has "brought grist" to the old mill. Kingston women are doing art weaving and find in the yarn made at the Asselstine Woollen Mills, washed and dyed in their homes, just what they need for curtains, rugs, carpets and coverlets. So we visit the mill and climb up the

rough outside stairway to the large room, lighted in the dark autumn evenings by lanterns and heated with an ancient stove. We see the men at work, the machinery turning by the water wheel seen from the road. We go into the room where the bats of wool are and have them weighed for us as we talk to Mrs. Breeze, who runs the mill for the owner. "We are very busy" she says, "We ship the yarn all over Canada and we are going to make the same grey homespun which was so popular long ago."

