

WELLS HILL: GODERICH ST. FORT ERIE: 1860's- 1890.

by Marguerite Raymond: Dec. 8, 1949.

Often referred to as a Dutch Mill, it actually was a Yorkshire Mill. It stood on the Goderich St. hill just north of the Garrison Rd., where in the 1930's would have stood the Agnew home and below on Goderich St. the Agnew China Shop.

It was a smoch mill of frame construction, octagonal in form, and built in the early 1860's. It was divided into three floors and had a revolving top on which were fastened four broad arms with shutters that turned the mill, and which were controlled by a little fly wheel at the back of the "Cap", to catch the winds blowing strong and hearty from Lake Erie. It was these broad arms that gave it the appearance of a Dutch Mill.

With the object of attracting more lucrative trade to the recently incorporated town of Fort Erie; a company of spirited men had been formed to build this mill, among whom were the Thomas brothers, Messrs: Lewis: Warren: Rainsford, and other business men of the town.

The farming areas nearby were profitable, and it seemed a good idea to lure the farmers into town with the Grist Mill, and the farmers wives into the stores. While trading their farm produce and having their horses shod in the local blacksmith shop, time out for men folk to sample the wares of the numerous taverns in town. So many errands could be done in one trip going to town from the adjacent farms in the north-west part of the township, and in all it seemed a very good business venture. So the mill was built, they needed a miller, so Joseph Wells then operating a mill in Tillsonburg, came to Fort Erie.

Some years earlier Joseph Wells had come out from England, an experienced miller and owner of several brick mills in Hull; and along with him came his wife Mercy Sanderson. He had wanted to try his fortune in Australia, however his wife objected to the great distance, and they compromised on Canada, first going to Wisconsin the mill district in the States, where he erected a mill. Selling this mill, these pioneers came to Ontario and finally Fort Erie to operate the mill on "Wells Hill" as it came to be known.

The syndicate however, for some reason petered out, and Joseph bought the mill and operated it on his own. His mill and two houses in one of which he lived (next to the later armoury, south side) were the only buildings on the hill, except for a small cottage by the ravine in which lived Father Voisard.

"MERCY WELLS PURCHASED 1877. J.W.K.D.
HARPERs date 1870 1990

The mill became a landmark, and a reckoning point for the Lake sailors for Buffalo Harbour, for on a clear day Well's Mill could be seen far out on the Lake.

Mr. Wells was of English and scottish descent, the latter on his mother's side; and his speech had the burr of the Scotsman, with it's many familiar expressions. He had a great sence of humour and also a great singing voice; which in his younger days could be heard in the Anglican Church in England. His wife was English and Wesleyan Methodist. They had a family of six, four boys and two girls, and they were all fine singers, in fact the family of singers were often referred to as the Well's Choir. All are now deceased (1949) except two grandchildren that live on Queen St., Mrs. Harry White and Mrs. John Evans. Mrs. Evans possessed a framed picture of the old mill.

But with many mills making "patent flour", then springing up throughout the country, the old mill was caught in the march of progress and trade became a near trickle. To salvage something Mr. Wells moved his mill from the top of the hill to the dirt road below; operating it by steam power and making chopped feed. Mrs. Wells died in 1890 and was buried in Mc.Afees Cemetery, and after that Mr. Wells tore down his mill, sold the land for residencial purposes and moved to St. Davids. There he operated two water mills before returning to his beloved home in Hull. There he was responsible for several brick mills one on Dansome Lane still standing in 1949 and used by the fire dept.

While in Fort Erie Joseph Wells had a froshing machine, and a merry-go-round at the old Fort Erie Grove. He died in Hull in his 80th. year, and was buried there in Yorkshire. Nothing remains of the Wells Mill except for a framed picture and an old millstone, which was used for the base of his wife's tombstone in Mc.Afee.