

INDIAN TRAIL FROM MILLER'S CREEK TO LAKE ERIE  
By Audrey Miller Laurie

There is no more historic or romantic trail than that of the old Indian trail between the Niagara River and Lake Erie, now called the Ridge Road. The trail started at Miller's Creek and continued past St. John's Anglican Church, the Fenian Raid battleground, and through the main street of the village of Ridgeway to the lake at Abino Bay (Crystal Beach) Point Abino, Sherkston, Stonebridge (Humberstone Village) to Sugar Leaf (Pt. Colborne).

The trail was used to avoid the swift water in the Niagara River along what is now Fort Erie and the Peace Bridge. At some places along this limestone ridge the trail was fifty feet below the plain and often near the edge of a straight wall of rock. It was passable at nearly all seasons of the year.

MILLER'S CREEK & ANDREW MILLER FAMILY

The original home of the pioneer Andrew Miller (1766-1843) was a log cabin built close to the bank of the Niagara River a few hundred yards from Miller's Creek. It is believed that the first town meeting of which any record exists was held here on March 7, 1808. The advanced guard of Sir Gordon Drummond's army was posted at his house on 23rd September, 1814, being an important road junction. Andrew Miller was a town warden in 1818, 1818, 1820 and 1827.

The home of the second Andrew Miller or Andrew Miller Jr (1799-1862) was on the opposite bank of Miller's Creek. It was built in 1820 and was burned in 1962. A park and trailer camp operated by the Niagara Parks Commission is now on the site.

one place near the top is a large slab of rock perhaps four feet thick that spans this opening. One end lies on the main limestone and the other end on the part that separated and forms a natural bridge.

An interesting story says that this area was always wooded and a pasture for horses and cattle, and once many years ago, a cow fell in this crevice. When the cow didn't appear for milking, a search party was sent out and found the cow lodged in the narrow space, perhaps six or seven feet from the top with hooves pawing the air, nearly 50 feet from the bottom. So with ropes and help from the neighbors, the cow was pulled to safety. Old residents of the neighborhood remember that opening as being down 50 feet, but the crevice is now filled in with brush and leaves. No one seems to know just why or how this crevice was formed.

#### FENIAN RAID BATTLEGROUND

This battle took place in 1866 right in the middle of the road at the intersection of the Garrison Road and the Ridge Road, according to Mrs Earl Sherk, granddaughter of Dr. Brewster, who was the doctor in this battle. The Fenian Raid was carried out by some 1,500 Irish-Americans who sought to injure Great Britain by striking at Canada. They crossed the Niagara River from Buffalo and seized Fort Erie, then a village. The second skirmish was the one which occurred on the Ridge and Garrison roads. The Fenian occupation was brief, however, as Canadian militiamen stationed in the Niagara area drove the raiders back across the river in less than twenty-four hours.

#### EARLY QUAKER CHURCH & BURYING GROUND

Professor Dorland author of "Quakers in Canada" says the first log meeting house of the Society of Friends at

Black Creek, Bertie Township, Niagara was built before 1792 but has no definite record of the date of erection.

Meta Schooley Laws in her history (1929) of Asa Schooley family, a Quaker family who came from New Jersey in 1788 and settled on a farm which is now part of the Cherry Hill Golf Club says: "The first log 'meeting house' was on Asa Schooley's property near the present 'Barnhart' School but the Burying Ground is just back of the Ridgeway Memorial Church. Here Asa Schooley and his wife and sons are buried. This was on a Cutler Farm".

This may well be the first log meeting house of the Black Creek Meeting of which Dr. Dorland refers. Meta then goes on to say that the farm Asa settled on is now part of the Cherry Hill Golf Course on the Garrison Road (Highway No. 3A). Part of it was across the road; the Barnhart farms when she was a child. The property faced the Garrison Road and the road where the Ellsworths lived and was north of their property. They settled in Bertie about the same time.

It is believed that the second Black Creek Meeting house was erected as early as 1805 on the site of the present Memorial United in Ridgeway on Pound property. When Dominion Road was laid it went right through this historic Quaker Cemetery and destroyed it, and its few remaining graves were removed to the small plot at the rear of the Church.

From "The Selected Writings of William Lyon Mackenzie" in the *Colonia Advocate*, 22 February 1827:

"A few miles from Lake Erie, in the township of Bertie, in a quiet and retired spot, near by a concession road, stands the plain and unadorned place of worship of the Society of Friends; and at a little distance beyond, their school. On entering the latter, I recognized in the teacher my old friend Mr. William Wilson. He had from twenty to thirty boys and girls around him, the children of the neighbouring Quaker families. The healthy, happy, cheerful, and placid countenances of the young innocents it was delightful to look upon. How happy is youth when placed at a distance from the snares of vice, and far away from the

A boat service with two vessels called the "Canadiana" and the "Americana" from 1910 to 1956, steamed from Buffalo to Crystal Beach, every hour on the hour during the summer.

In 1797 there were only a few families residing around Crystal Beach. One of the first to settle was Joe Morris at the top of Rebstock, later becoming the Rebstock homestead. David Baxter came to the homestead west of Schooley Road in the same year. Daniel Pound resided east of the Ridge Road in 1802. David Ellsworth settled on Cherry Hill Road. The Haun family dates to 1786, and Harry Hawn of Haun's Planing Mill on the Derby Road has lived there continuously since the village was founded. Michael and his son Earl, descendants of the Sherkston Sherks, resided on Schooley Road since the turn of the present century. Their home is now the Riviera Motel with a swimming pool in the orchard. John Schooley, a brother of Mrs Michael Sherk lived next door at the top of Schooley Road.

#### POINT ABINO

The point commands a magnificent view of the lake and the sandy beaches of the nearby bay. The sand dunes, some of which reached a height of seventy-five feet are still impressive, although hundreds of tons of fine white sand have been carried away for industrial purposes over the years. Many of the original trees, some of which were majestic black walnut were cut down for fuel for the lime kiln which operated on the point years ago. The water in the vicinity of the point holds the remains of many ships and barges which have come to grief there throughout the years. Many sailing ships used to seek shelter from the fierce lake storms in the protective waters of Bay Beach. Later when the lighthouse with its fog horn was built it must have seemed like a haven.

The point was once the site of an Indian village and the old Indian burying ground was located very near the Buffalo Yacht Club building. The Indians were Attawandarons or Neutrals. They made flint arrow heads, spear points, knives and tomahawks, and were the great munition makers of their day. They sold these products impartially to the Hurons and the Iroquois, yet retained an abundance for their own defense. Neither rival dared to attack or even antagonize a people so powerful. My cousin, the aforesaid A.W. (Bert) Miller has shown me these flint beds and told me of the "Garden of the Gods" a beautiful natural garden behind one of the houses owned by Americans who keep it very exclusive. He also said no one seems to know its origin.

The point was named for the French priest, Father Claude Aveneau, who stayed here for a short time before going to his mission to the Miamis on the St. Joseph where he served from about 1702 to 1708.

EARLY SETTLERS: There was much dispute about land settlement in early days at Point Abino. It is said the first permanent white man's home here was built in the 1790's by a family named Dennis. The Dennis family were Quakers from Pennsylvania. He built a one and half story house of logs and it stood on the south side of what is now known as Yacht Club Hill. It stood within one hundred feet of the Holloway Memorial Chapel erected in the 1890's in honour of Mr. and Mrs Isaac Holloway who owned the land from Hay Hill to the tip of the point. Holloway held the land under a crown deed but his neighbour, J. Otway Page, also claimed it. The dispute was finally settled by the Privy Council in London, Eng. It was found that a surveyor's error many years before gave Page water frontage to which he was actually not entitled. Page was awarded the property known as the Pine Woods while All I. Holloway

son of Isaac Holloway, was given a right of way along the waterfront to his land on the point. Michael Sherks, the first ancestor of Sherks in Sherkston owned in 1797, rear parts of lots 31 and 32 B.F.L.E. His first log cabin was across the road from the present Otway-Page home. There was also a graveyard on lot 32 B.F.L.E. for in a United Empire Loyalist Association Transaction of 1897 "Sketch of the Family of Otway-Page"

"My mother died in 1852, full of years aged 84; and she was laid to rest, by her special request on the bank of Lake Erie on lot 32 B.F.L.E. overlooking Point Abino Bay, a most beautiful spot in front of a few garden acres which had been her delight to cultivate during her earlier years, but now for years overgrown with wild sweet Balsams. This little plot had been consecrated as the burial place of pioneers many, many years previous to 1852 and was made more sacred as the last resting place of all that was mortal of one who was a noble heroine, and with all the attributes of the kindest mother."

During the last half of the 19th century, Point Abino was more industrial than residential. At various times there was operated on the point, a saw mill, a lime kiln, a sand hopper, a small railroad and two boarding houses for the workman. They housed most of the engineers of the sand hopper, located on the west shore, while the sand shovellers themselves lived in shanties on the site of the present Yacht Club.

Early residents at Point Abino were very much shut off from Buffalo as at first there were no roads in the vicinity. Webb Haun operated a bus service along the shore to Crystal Beach from where most of the people on the point commuted to Buffalo via the Beach boat. About this time also a launch service began between the Point, the Buffalo Canoe Club and Crystal Beach. The 40 foot boat, the Myrtle, operated by Cyrenius Michner used to meet all the commuters on the dock. More than 1,000 newspapers were sold every morning to the commuters at Crystal Beach. The Myrtle was driven out of business by the larger boat, the "Mario L", owned by Charles F. Adams. This 51 foot boat made the trip