

Richard F. Ferguson: Fort Erie merchant: 1850-1924.inf.Laura Pearl Kee.dght.
Mr. Richard Ferguson was born in Waterloo in 1850, the son of William and Ellen Fellen Ferguson. He came to Fort Erie in 1890, and took over the store of William Rainsford on Niagara St.in the village just opposite the ferry landing. He dealt in general merchandice, later building a small addition to the north side where he sold china, wallpaper and paints.He also sold boots and shoes. He stored furniture in a small building on the river side of the street, that was later taken over by Mr.Agrette Sr. for his fruit business. It was easier for his clerks to just run across the street and open up if a customer wanted something in the furniture line.

He was very active in real estate and had large holdings by the site of the Peace Bridge that was to come later.In 1884 he married a Miss Hanna Frances Elliot and they had three children, Laura Pearl, Harry Francis, and Allan Clarence. Mr. Ferguson's great love was horses, and they had a large stable behind the store, and another on the north side of lower Bertie.For a time he had up to fourteen horses which he showed at faires, had raced, or just kept for the enjoyment of the family. In later years Mr. Ferguson was quite bald, and took to wearing a wig. He was affectionately called "Wig Ferguson" by the people of the village.

J.L. Kraft left the farm of his parentson Kraft Rd. as a young man of sixteen and came to clerk for Mr. Ferguson in Fort Erie.Contrary to popular belief the Kraft Chees empire did not have it's beginnings here. His parents George and Minerva Kraft operated a dairy farm, selling milk and eggs etc. to the large number of Americans that had just discovered the beaches along Lake Erie and had begun building their summer homes. Back at the store J.L. among other tasks, had to sell cheese from a large wheel that stood on the grocery store counter. At the time cheese was not a popular item in ones diet, and not very profitable to the store owner. It's quality varied greatly, and it was likely to dry out in short time. It was also easy prey to the customers who helped themselves when reaching for a cracker from an open barrel.

J.L. felt a better and more economical way to merchandice cheese could be found. He left Fort Erie while still a young man, and headed for Buffalo where he joined up with a partner that had similar interests.Several years were spent there searching for a better way of processing this product. While on a business trip to Chicago in search of customers,J.L. decided this would be the place to start the business on his own.With an investment of \$65.00, determination and hard work success came with the founding of what was to become the Kraft Phenix Cheese Corporation.He did not forget his family in Fort Erie, giving all his four brothers executive jobs with the company. On many an occasion he returned to the area to acquaint the townsfolk with lifetime achievement of his.

Another clerk in the employ of Wig Ferguson was William J. Hawley, who took up the business of General Merchandise himself, first on the site of Happy Jack's, then on the west side of Niagara St. just a few doors south of the Ferguson Store. He later went into the Hardware business, and was the first Mayor of the Town of Fort Erie after it amalgamated with Bridgeburg.

In 1895 Mr. Ferguson provided telephone service from his store, eight to eight weekdays, and two to four on Sundays. He continued as local telephone manager till Mr. Johnstone took over in 1912. Mr. Ferguson retired and moved to his home on Erie St. In 1920 Francis Rung and his wife took over the store, and sold to John Charles in 1923. He sold his old grocery store, and at the new location sold only dry goods and china. Mr. Charles removed the old verandah, added plate glass windows to the front, and with an addition to the rear, doubled the floor space.

In 1945 Mrs. Lillian Young Johnston took over the business, and continued to sell only yard goods and china. Little improvement was made, and the interior of the store remained much the same, as when owned by John Charles. For one year 1972- 1973 the old store housed the Broadway Fabrics Ltd, outlet. Also located in the building was Fort Erie's first Accupuncture Centre. It's location was very handy to the numerous customers from Buffalo, who made up the greatest number of clients.

In 1976 the Salvation Army Thrift Sho moved into this location from their store on the east side of Niagara St. They continued to occupy the building till the time of the fire Oct. 10, 1988. The building was beyond repair and demolition was begun in Dec. 1988.

RAINSFORD & Ferguson Store: Niagara Blv.d west side. 1836. 1988.

Several businesses occupied the small addition to the north side.

One of the longest to occupy this store was PARKWAY BEAUTY SALON, owned and operated by Kay gagliardo. She started out in one room on the second floor of the Parkway building. Next she moved to a store just a couple of doors north of Sullivan's Fish and Chip Shop on the east side of the river road. She was asked by Mrs. Young Johnston to consider her building. And once more she moved across the river road.

Parkway Building:: 40's.

East side of the Niagara Blvd. 50's. here she stayed five years.

Young's building: 1960"s.

FERGUSON Store: west side of Niagara Blvd: opposite the Ferry landing.

1836. WM. Rainsford purchased the claim of WM. Smith to village lot #1, on which he built a home, a store, and a work shop.

1856: James Richard Thompson to WM. Rainsford.

1890. WM. Rainsford Jr. to Richard Ferguson: general Merchandice.

1912. D.H. Johnston.

Jennie Willson: Millen ery, Linens, Dry Goods & men's Furnishings.

Carlton Willson :Customs Broker& Insurance.

1920. Francis Rung ,Wife & Edward Rung.

1923. John Charles: Dry Goods & China.

1945. Mrs. Lillian Youn Johnston: Yong's Dry Goods & china.

1972. Broadway Fabrics.

Fort Erie Acupuncture: (Dr. Docherty)

1976. Salvation Army Thrift Shop.

1988. Fire destroyed the building beyond use.

The small addition to the north side that had originally been added by Mr. Ferguson, was at the time Young's took over, rented seperatley from the main building.

the Fort Erie Post Office.

1953. Bailey T.V.

Parkway beauty Salon. (Kay Gagliardo)

1981. Peace Bridge Trader;s Post & Auction Barn: (Coleman Bagu)

1986 Augie's Electonics

While removing the fire debris from the site of the store a number of Indian burials were uncovered.

The fire Monday morning Oct. 10th. housing the Salvation Army Thrift Shop destroyed the oldest standing merchant building in Fort Erie. The Rainsford family of Irish stock came to the village in the early 1830's. Margaret a widow arrived with her two sons and two daughters. They purchased land on the east side of the river road where they had a store and a workshop.

post office

William Rainsford aquired the property on which the fire took place in 1834. As this land was part of the Military Reserve there was considerable communication with the Government about it's purchase. The following qotes are taken from the original papers in my possession.

" That your Memorialist in the year 1834 purchased from William Smith Esquire his interest in a Licence of Occupation granted by Hall, Ordinance Dept. to him for a certain building lot, on the Niagara River at a place which will appear by the annexed assignment.

That your Memorialist has erected there a dwelling house, store and a work shop, in value about three hundred and fifty pounds". Dated Jan 18, 1851.

As time past a William A. Thompson a wealthy businessman from the United States and a large land oner in the Fort Erie area, tried to take over the holdings of William Rainsford. He had a big fight on his hands, but would not vacate till he received some compensation for the loss of his home and store. It wasn't till 1856 that he was given full title to the lands by James Richard Thompson. In 1858 William sold to Willism Rainsford Jr. pts. lot 1 & 2 on the west side of Niagara St., Lot 2 was at the N.E. cr. Forsyth St., and lot 1, south of this which exstended to the lands of Alexander Douglas. By the middle 1850's William still held possession of his lands on the east side of Niagara St.

In 1844 the Hon. James Kerby transfered over to William Rainsford Sr. the Post Office property and the job of Post Master, which he held for a number of years. The old Rainsford home stood just north of Hardware store of Mr. William Hawley. Henrietta Rainsford the last of the family on her death in 1927, left the old home to a friend Emma Mc. Donald. She continued to occupy the building till the time of her death when it wassold to Mr. Marinaccio. The old homestead was demolished to provide room for parking.

The Rainsford general store was taken over by Richard Ferguson in the 1890's.

RAINSFORD:::

The Rainsford family apparently came to Fort Erie in the middle 1830's. A complete listing of this family in order, has not been found. It is a fact that the Rainsfords did purchase several lots in the heart of the village, on the east side of the river road, where they had a home a store and a post office. As this property was on the Military Reserve there was considerable communication with the government about its purchase. These letters in my possession are marked George Rainsford no doubt the first of this family to settle here. Mr. Thompson a powerful land owner from the U.S.A. who had settled in the village, laid claim to the lands however the title remained with the Rainsfords.

Village lot # 4 on the west side of the river road was sold to Margaret Rainsford in 1837, by Thomas Cook. This was the middle lot in the block, between John St. and Forsyth, the land on which the old American Hotel was built, now the Anglo American. On Jan. 28, 1842 Margaret Rainsford sold this property to Collingwood Forsyth, and he along with a Mr. Thomas Macklem ran the original Hotel.

In 1858 Wm. Rainsford Sr. sold to Wm. Rainsford Jr. pts. of lot 1&2 in the 1st. con. on the west side of the river road. Lot 2 was at the N.E. cr. of Forsyth St. and lot 1 was south of this. Lot 2. extended north to the lands of Alexander Douglas. Wm. Sr. obtained the land from J.R. Thompson in 1856. Wm. Sr. was still living on the east side of the river road in the early 1850's.

In 1844 the Hon. James Kerby transferred over to Wm. Rainsford Sr. the post office property and the job of Postmaster, which he held for a number of years..

The old Rainsford's home stood on the west side of the st. in the middle of the block bounded by Forsyth and Bertie. It is thought to have been built in the middle 1850's as it is shown on maps of that period. Next to it on the north side was their General Store. In the 1890's this went from the Rainsfords to Richard Ferguson and was still standing till the fire in 1988. The old homestead however was demolished in the late 1950's after the death of its last occupant Miss Mc. Donald.

Township lot #3 sold Aug 14, 1856 to Thomas Rainsford by Kenneth Reid and his wife Mary Jane (Hardison):: 100 acres.