

## Submitted By CRA Executive Member Daryl Rutt

### Neutrals and Mississaugas

The Neutrals, who have lived in Niagara since the 1300's, were called Attawandaron by the Huron, meaning "people whose speech is awry," or "a little different". The population of the historic Neutrals ranged from 20,000 to 40,000 persons. They lived in large villages and farmed the 3 sisters (corn, beans and squash). The French who first met them in 1610 described them "as strong, healthy and numerous. They lived in the most fertile and warmest part of Ontario. They were determined to remain neutral in the conflicts between the Iroquois from south of the Great Lakes and the Ontario Iroquoians who lived to the north of the Neutral. They thrived on trade, rather than war."

Around 1650, the Iroquois Confederacy declared war on the Attawandaron; by 1653, the Confederacy had practically annihilated the smaller nation, destroying their villages. The last mention of the Neutrals in French records was in 1671.

The Mississaugas are a subtribe of the Anishinaabe-speaking First Nations, closely related to the Ojibwa. The name "Mississauga" comes from the Anishinaabe meaning "[Those at the] Great River-mouth." The first French explorers met them in 1534, when the Mississaugas lived along the Mississagi River and on Manitoulin Island. The Mississaugas gradually moved south into the Kawarthas, the Credit River and into those areas of Niagara left vacant by the Neutral after their defeat.

### Niagara Purchase Treaty of 1781

The treaty was concluded with the Mississaugas for the "tract of land situated on the West side of the said Strait or River, leading from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, Beginning at a large white oak tree, forked six feet from the ground, on the bank of the said Lake Ontario, at the distance of four English miles measured in a straight line, from the West side of the bank of the said Strait" in return for "12 thousand blankets, 23,500 yards of cloth; 5,000 silver ear bobs; 75 dozen razors and 20 gross of jaw harps." (The tree is still there, across from Strewn winery.)

Part of the treaty was the regular provision of gifts to the natives. An Indian Council House was built on the common west of Fort George where it functioned much like an embassy to the Aboriginal people in the region. Treaties and military alliances were negotiated, concerns raised and issues resolved. The Indian Council House was destroyed during the War of 1812 but rebuilt and used until 1822.

### Early Niagara Settlers

Large numbers of loyalists during the American Revolution sought refuge in Fort Niagara. The necessity of providing food for the refugees resulted in a proposal by Colonel John Butler to settle and cultivate the west bank of the river which became known as Newark in 1781. According to Butler's 1782 census, there were 84 recorded settlers in the area. This number would grow to 800 by 1785.

In 1791, the British government laid out a town plan on a military grid in four acre parcels subdivided into one acre lots. This pattern extended as far west as Simcoe St. and is still in evidence today. Chautauqua at the time was well outside the town plan. In 1792, John Graves Simcoe was appointed as the first governor of Upper Canada. Newark became the seat of government for the new province from 1792 until 1796 when the capital was moved to Toronto. During the time that Governor and Mrs. Simcoe lived in the Town, it became the centre of military and social life for the fledgling province. Many fine Georgian and Regency houses were built and a Canadian portage route from Chippawa to Queenston enhanced Newark's status as a commercial centre..

### Chautauqua Settlers

William and James Crooks emigrated from Scotland to Fort Niagara and, in 1795, moved their business to Newark, where they were involved in milling and a distillery. James Crooks purchased 100 acres in Niagara Twp on the lake Ontario shore at the east bank of One Mile Creek. The estate was called Crookston and boasted a two-storey brick house and an orchard with quince, pear, apricot and nectarine trees. The other farm in the area, nearer Two Mile Creek, on the 20<sup>th</sup> century rifle range, was owned by John Secord Sr. and later John Jr.

Both these farms were on cleared areas that had probably been open savannah when the settlers arrived. Much of the land had been kept open by the original native inhabitants who used fire to control the woodlands for farming and to improve hunting grounds.

#### The War of 1812

On May 27, 1813, at 9:15 am, an American armada appeared out of the fog and attacked between One Mile and Two Mile Creeks. The invading ships raked the lakeside clearings with cannon fire before landing 2,300 troops. After heavy fighting on Crook's and Secord's farms, the Americans overcame the small British, native and militia forces and swept on to take Fort George and then to occupy Niagara on the Lake for the rest of the year. The day after the battle, casualties from both sides were buried where they had fallen and may remain under Chautauqua to this day. A hundred years after the battle, the fields were being mined for lead and cannon balls are still occasionally dug up in the area.

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#### Tourism comes to Niagara on the Lake

Following the war, the re-built Niagara on the Lake experienced a period of prosperity as a commercial and political centre. However, these happy times ended in the 1840's with the opening of the Welland canal and the transfer of the county seat both to St. Catharine's benefit. Late in the nineteenth century, the introduction of lake steamer service and railroad lines from Toronto and Buffalo laid the foundation for the revival of Niagara as an important resort area. Though it was off the beaten path, the area was known for its fresh air, moderate climate and waterfront location. Wealthy American visitors came to stay for summer vacations resulting in construction of some large Victorian residences with balconies, verandahs, and large airy rooms to accommodate extended families and servants. The Queen's Royal Niagara Hotel was constructed in what is now Queen's Royal Park. Tennis courts, a lawn bowling green and a pavilion for parties and dances attested to the popularity of Niagara on the Lake as a summer resort.

#### The Niagara Assembly

The Chautauqua movement was founded in the town of Chautauqua, New York in 1874, by Methodist preachers, including John Vincent, who wanted to start a school for Sunday School teachers. It quickly grew into something much larger, encompassing four main pillars: Spirituality, Recreation, Entertainment, and Education. "Daughter" Chautauqua resorts started up in locations with access to waterfront and leisure activities and in proximity to major cities. They would have lectures and preachers and singers as a way of spreading ideas before radio and television. The Chautauqua in New York is still going strong (and its main street is called Vincent).

In 1887, the Niagara Assembly established a Chautauqua on the shore of Lake Ontario on the old Crooks farm north west of the town of Niagara on the Lake. They built a three-storey Chautauqua Hotel on the shore and a 4,000-seat amphitheatre surrounded by a circular street and radial streets (see plan) some of which persist to today. The street leading from the amphitheatre circle to the lake was named Vincent after the Chautauqua movement founder. The remaining streets were named for renowned leaders from the religious, literary or education fields.

Tourists travelled to the Chautauqua dock by steamer or took a rail spur line from the Niagara on the Lake dock. While several large Victorian houses were built along the shoreline, most summer attendees stayed in tents or temporary structures along the streets which were newly-planted with silver maples. Activities at Chautauqua followed the four pillars and included tennis lawn bowling and swimming at the hotel beach. There were even rowboats for rent on Landsdowne pond.

The Niagara Assembly never gained a solid financial footing and, by 1894 faced foreclosure. A new company, the Niagara Syndicate, took over and carried on until 1909 when the hotel burned down in a flash fire that put guests out with nothing but their bed clothes. The entire Chautauqua property was sold in 1918 to the Mississauga Beach Land Company who subdivided the property for sale of lots. (see 1922 plan).

#### The Cottage Years

