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**Description:** An Alliston Historical Society newsletter which contains an early history of the Town of Alliston. The history leads up the incorporation of the Town, covering the years from 1847-1890.

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**Contributor:** Shirley Gibson, Mary Lou Moir, Steven Englehardt, Ambrose Heydon, Irene Ford, Jean Baker-Pearce, Helen Willis, Bob Wales

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# Alliston Historical Society Newsletter

Vol. 1, No. 1

August 1990



Alliston has good survival instincts. It has had to survive fire and dam busting with bridges washing out. It can survive the new format in local government, if we know where we're coming from!

Now is the time to become aware of our roots. There is a solid foundation on which to build. It will allow matters to be considered in an historical context. Whatever turns out to be significant can be considered for preservation in some form. Decisions can be made that make sense to the town, that help develop a sense of place, a sense of community.

In this way, Alliston will be put in the picture. It will be able to retain something of its character and charm and the pleasing features of a small town.

Let's boost the image of Alliston in celebrating the centennial of the town.



Mrs. Wm. Fletcher  
Alliston

Wm. Fletcher  
1st Settler at Alliston.



## Mr. and Mrs. William Fletcher

William Fletcher chose a prominent site on the high ground of the north bank of the Boyne River for the building of his home with lumber from his own trees and sawmill.

### Founder's Home at 44 Fletcher Crescent

This home is unique in its historical significance to the Town of Alliston.

1. The home of the founders of Alliston.
2. The oldest structure in Alliston, standing for 141 years.
3. The focal point of the pioneer community.

There is a public process to follow in plaquing involving the Alliston Historical Society, the Town Council, the Owners of the property and the Community.

The park, east of Banting Memorial High School was once part of a planned burial ground.

The Town of Alliston  
dedicated this Park  
in 1959  
to commemorate  
the resting place of  
The Founder of Alliston  
and his wife

William Fletcher 1791 - 1878  
Margaret McGirr 1797 - 1881

### List of Officers

Pres. Shirley Gibson  
Sec. Mary Lou Moir  
Treas. Steven Englehardt

### Committee Members:

Ambrose Heydon  
Irene Ford  
Jean Baker-Pearce

**Motion:** that the Alliston Historical Society take the initiative with and through the present Town Council of Alliston to have the original Fletcher homestead plaqued.

*This first newsletter made possible by a generous contribution from Helen Willis.*

## EARLY ALLISTON HISTORY

(leading up to the incorporation of the Town – covering the years from 1847 to 1890)

Prepared by Bob Wales from earlier outlines and research mainly at the Simcoe County Registry Office, with special thanks to the staff there.

1847 – Feb. 5 – By-law #33

- The District of Simcoe to build a bridge over the Nottawasaga River
- William Fletcher chooses a mill site on the Boyne River on Lot 1 Con 1 Essa Township
- Moves from south end of Tecumseth Township Lot 14 Con 3 where he first settled in the early 1820's

Nov. – With a couple of axes and a cross cut saw, eldest son John helps erect a log shanty, "composed of logs in the round with gable ends and round poles for rafters and was roofed with clapboards fastened with small poles. It was floored with split cedar and moss." (Site occupied by James McGarvey's work shop at the time of John Fletcher's death in 1904, Briscos to-day)

1848 – Apr. – Rest of Fletcher family move up

Summer Fletcher family have saw mill

Sept. 8 P.D.K. of Essa has a letter in the Barrie Magnet requesting a post office; "It is but 15 years that the first men that went to settle west of the Nottawasaga River, in Essa and Tosorontio, had to cross that stream on a tree that they felled across it, at present there are upwards of 70 inhabitants west of it. A good frame bridge has been erected over the river. Statute labor and wild land tax are making good roads for us; 2 or 3 enterprising individuals have already availed themselves of our water privileges on which they are building mills at present.

The nearest post office is at Bond Head, 20 miles away. We have petitioned repeatedly, but, as often is the backwoodsman's lot, our requests were neglected or forgotten." The post office came in 1851, to West Essa, 2 1/4 miles north east of Alliston.

1849 – William Fletcher builds frame residence, still standing at 44 Fletcher Cres.

1853 – Fletchers with Alex Grant build a grist mill, with Grant as miller (fire loss, 1911, was situated south side of the Boyne between Mill St. and the present foot bridge named for Eleanor Beattie). His daughter, Margaret, was the first white child born in Alliston. She married William Banting and was the mother of Fred Banting. The 1854 house became home to Walter Storey, the Blacksmith. Although offered to the Town because of its historical significance, demolition took place in 1960's. Grinding stones from the Fletcher Mill (Earl Rowe Park) are preserved at the South Simcoe Pioneer Museum. (Its preservation is now assured, being chosen as the Centennial Project for the Town of Alliston.)

1854 – Methodists build hall (on site of McBride Block, 44 Victoria St. W.) Also serves as school.

1855 – Orange Lodge is formed.

Thomas Scott bought the lands on which the Dominion Hotel now stands and commenced manufacturing furniture.

1856 – William Turnbull of West Essa opens a general store (on the site of the Windsor House) Alliston named for the birthplace of the founder, in Yorkshire England.

1857 – Grant of Post Office with George Fletcher first Post Master operating from his home.

1861 – Farmer's Inn started by Thomas Lounds of West Essa. Acquired by Patrick Foy in 1868. (Several businesses including Granny's Attic occupy another Foy property nearby, still known as "Foy's Lot". The land between Victoria and Wellington is being improved and may be called "Foy's Lane".)

George Fletcher has cleared 1/2 acre for potatoes. His yield – 30 bushels.

1862 – William and John Buyers built a school at the Scotch Line corner. (Part of it still exists beside PUC). The Alliston Star is founded by George Fletcher.

Sept. 6 The Presbyterians open a fine frame church with a burial ground in the rear. (Melissa Graham has identified a burial stone found in the back yard of 78 Wellington St. W. It recalls the early deaths in 1877-8 of 3 of John and Isabella Graham's children. These are the "Scottish Grahams".

1864 – Thomas Drury, first Postmaster of West Essa from 1851 moves into Alliston. Diary entry for Sept. 5 1863, "raised a house at Alliston." The early Bradford storekeeper has kept a diary from 1832. West Essa dates from the same year, when the Ruthvens and Bryces settled on the "Scotch Line"

1867 – Confederation. Jocelyn Symons is descended from a Father of Confederation, Hon. Wm. MacDougall.

1868 – Aitken, Knight & Crossley establish a foundry and agricultural works. (Where the Beer Store is to-day.) Mr. John Wilson later took over from Crossley.

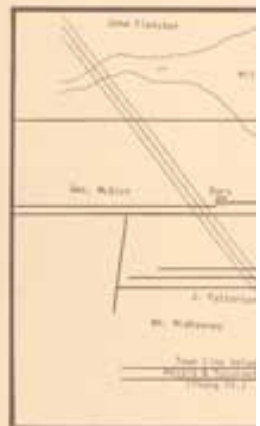
1872 – Wesleyan Methodist Church is erected (became St. John's United Church.)



Fletcher's grist mill sat on the Boyne River from 1853 to 1911. From Lisle, Everett, Cooks



The Dominion House (purchased by R.W. Booth in 1881, later for horse and buggy. Prep for the 12th of July celebration)



The Hamilton and North York Railway land acquired in the 1870s



"The train is coming! The cry in 1877 as the first train arrived in Alliston"



the south bank of the Boyne  
They bought grain in 1882  
own and Alliston.



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estern Railway map showed  
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train is coming!", was the  
n arrived.

- 1873 - Masonic Lodge is formed.  
7 lumber mills within a 3 mile radius according to the Alliston Star.  
Railway agitation abounds.
- 1874 - June 18 By-law #230 of the County of Simcoe incorporates Village of Alliston containing 500 acres, cornering on 4 townships. First Municipal Elections to be held in the Temperance Hall.
- 1875 - First Village Council with George Fletcher as Reeve. Among the Councillors is P.D. Kelly. Patrick Dunn Kelly was in hardware. The Kelly Block was until recently the location of the Alliston Herald.  
The Treasurer, James Drury is paying out 50¢ for each shade tree planted in the village. (His house at 118 Victoria St. E. was demolished in 1987. It was a 17 room house.)  
The total assessment was \$175,000.  
Tavern licenses were \$30.00 per annum, liquor licenses \$35.00.
- 1876 - St. Paul's Catholic Church is built with Father Gibney.
- 1877 - May "Farmer's Inn Lot" is sold to Mrs. Wm. C. Hand for \$143.85 in hand. (Grandmother of Mabel Hand) The Hand house is built at the corner of Wellington and Paris by Alan Ferguson of the Allison Planing Mill (Restored by Mark Izzard) Wm. Craig Hand is training to be a vet. He becomes active in the Agricultural Hall and Driving Park. (It is built on what became the CPR Stockyards after 1905. The move is made to Riverdale Park. The Museum Building was the Agricultural Hall. The last Alliston fair is held in the late 1940's)  
The first Train arrives, the Hamilton & North Western. Represents the first municipal debt of \$8,000.  
Norton's Brick Yard is in business (located north of Riverdale Park, scene of much house building to-day.)  
Alliston Woolen Mills begun by Joseph Walker - granted 10 year exemption on taxes, became Cunningham & Walker.  
John Casserly Hart becomes Clerk succeeding John Gilbert who left for England (serves to 1892).
- Winter Bad Fire - wipes out a large part of the village including the Dominion House.
- 1878 - George Fletcher splits Conservative ranks to run as Temperance Candidate. Alliston now has 3 licenced hotels and 2 liquor stores.
- Sept. 26 William Fletcher dies at age 87.  
(In 1959, the Town of Alliston dedicated the park east of Banting.)  
The Village Plan put on by landowners: the Fletchers, Wm. Fields, George McGirr and T. Gordon. (first Postmaster of "Old Everett" from 1868)  
The village was laid out into residential lots of 66' (the business lots having been laid out earlier at 100') by C.A. Lett PLS. Charles Augustus Lett was a brother of the early insurance man, Frederick Lett who married Celia Fisher. She lived to be 107.
- 1879 - T.P. Hodgkin, the Pump Man receives a grant of \$135.00 in his failed attempt to dig an artesian well at the corner of Victoria and Church (Patton's). (The Hodgkins House is to-days Le Coq Rouge, at the tracks).
- 1880 - Dr. T.M. Armstrong makes the move into the village from Rosemont where he started his practice in 1860. The Drury House becomes the Doctor's House.
- 1881 - Market House Co. is formed with John Fisher as President. They build on the site of the old Town Hall. Among the subscribers is T. M. Brown, capitalist (Thomas Milton Brown's home was the "castle" at the High School, demolished in 1968 for an addition to Banting).  
R.W. Booth rebuilds the Dominion Hotel (Damian's Roadhouse Restaurant)
- 1882 - Joseph Fletcher goes west to help found a temperance colony, the origin of Saskatoon. W.D. Latimer begins work in McLaren's Carriage Factory, south east corner, Victoria and Paris. By 1890 he has bought the business block from Captain McLaren. Allan Latimer's hobby was collecting pictures of Alliston history, which proved helpful in illustrating the 1947 Centennial Book edited by Alliston historian and grand old man, Ernest Cumberland.
- 1884 - Vulcan Foundry is rebuilt by Knight & Wilson with bonus from village.
- 1885 - Alliston Public School with 6 rooms is erected on Albert St. with George McGirr, Chairman Trustee Board (grandfather of Jean Corrigan who compiled the Tweedsmuir History Book of the Alliston Womens Institute, kept at the Library).  
Alliston Union Cemetery Co. is formed to oversee the operation of a new, larger burial ground for the congregations of Knox Presbyterian and St. John's Methodist.  
Mary Drury is the only lady shareholder. John Fisher is President and serves for some years. The first plots sold for \$3.00. The caretaker, William Buyers received \$1.50 for the digging of a grave. (In 1898, Abel Kinsey, the undertaker was paid \$8.00 for a coffin, \$10.08 for burial of indigent).



*John Fisher Home 100 Victoria St. E. dates from 1877-8. John Fisher, President: Market House Co., Alliston Wooden Mill, Alliston Union Cemetery.*



*Drury-Hutchinson Home 118 Victoria St. E. dates from 1877-8. Hutchinson was the haberdasher (The Old Stanton Store) demolished in 1987 for an apartment building.*



*Alliston, from the top of the water tower looking south east, the William Fletcher house is central foreground. George Fletcher's home is at left. The grist mill would be just to the right of the photo. The bell tower of Alliston Town Hall is top right and the spire of the Wesleyan Methodist Church (St. John's United) is at top left.*

- 1887 – Warden of Simcoe County John Stewart, Reeve of Alliston. A druggist by profession. He was a member of the first graduating class of the Ontario School of Pharmacy in 1871. Bought the drug business from P.D. Kelly (sold to J.R. Hipwell in 1892). Fisher & Bell legal partnership formed.
- 1888 – Willie John Fletcher builds first electric light plant. Rebuilt of brick in 1890.  
Fire Hall built for \$150.00 on land donated by W.J. Fletcher. (His house is on the double lot at 107 Victoria St. E.).
- 1889 – Mercer Brothers receive 5 year exemption on taxes to manufacture implements. (Co-op building)
- 1890 – Cash or Barter. Hart's A 1 House (on the site of Hydro Office) is paying farmers 20¢ a bushel for potatoes or a pound of tea. Starting with groceries he added boots and shoes and was the wine and spirit merchant.
- Aug. 13 A vote was taken to approve electric street lighting 5 lights to cost a total of 90¢ a night. But not before a meeting of rate payers in the Opera House.  
Dr. James A. Sutherland the dentist is advertising for 200 pigeons.  
Early egg packers were R. & J. Scott, and W.S. Ellis (father of Sandy Ellis who wrote an oral history of Alliston and area "All About Us").
- Dec. 4 Proclamation to become the Town of Alliston.
- 1991 – Centennial year for the Town of Alliston.  
The students of Banting Memorial High School – History Department under the direction of their teacher, Steve Englehardt, are publishing a pictorial history book of the development of the Settlement into the Town of Alliston as we know it today. The book is subsidized by the Town of Alliston, Banting Memorial High School, Ministry of Culture & Communications and the Alliston Centennial '91 Committee. Pictures were researched and provided by various town residents with collections of old photographs that have been reprinted for the book. Orders will be taken for this book at the Municipal Offices. It will be in circulation by May 1991.

### Coming Events

Please accept this as your invitation to attend a dinner meeting of Alliston Historical Society on Tuesday, September 18 at 6:30 p.m. at Alliston Curling Club, Albert Street, Alliston. Tickets are \$12 for this hearty home cooked beef dinner. There will be a guest speaker on historical preservation. A special guest will be Arthur Fletcher, chairman, sites committee, Essa Township. Tickets available from members of the executive of the Society.