

## **THE SETTLERS**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

The man and his wife had just disembarked from the ship which had brought them from England. They were in Montreal, arriving there via the St. Lawrence River. Their destination was Ontario, where they planned to establish a homestead and begin a new life in Canada. The year was eighteen hundred sixty-seven and there had been a mass migration by the English, and other Europeans, to settle this new land. Their friends had arrived a year earlier and through mail had confirmed they had settled in an area close to a small town called Peterborough. There were grist mills and sawmills dotting the nearby countryside, providing incentive for small towns to pop up and flourish. The city of York, a fast-growing area on the shores surrounding Lake Ontario, was buying all the lumber they could saw, and all the flour they could mill for a booming population. Jobs were to be had for the strong and able.

Hearing this news, and with assurances from their friends for help getting started, the couple had commenced their journey to settle in this new world. They made their way to the train station, booked their tickets to Peterborough, and soon found themselves sitting in the most comfortable chairs that they had sat in in months. The train left the station with their meager belongings, a large trunk and two suitcases. However, the couple were traveling with a sizable amount of money. They hoped to buy property, build a cabin, and farm the land, as the soil was said to be productive for growing grains which could be sold to the mills. He also planned to take a job to earn additional money for the supplies it would take to make this dream come true.

The train made its way through the wilderness. The forest was endless, void of any towns until they got closer to Ontario. The train would stop at these places, pick up passengers and drop off supplies which had been bought in Montreal. After twelve stops, they finally arrived at their destination. Peterborough was a bustling place, with industries including textiles, brick factories, clothing stores, places to buy supplies of all sorts, and drinking establishments. But their main concern was to find a hotel and get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow they would hire a wagon to take them to Keene, the small town east of the city where their friends lived. Darkness was upon them as they arrived at their hotel, a coal oil lantern their only light. Sleep came easy after their long journey and their dreams were filled with adventure as their new life unfolded in front of them. Tomorrow would be the start of this life, a new beginning for these early settlers.

### **CHAPTER TWO**

The settlers woke at dawn, excited, but nervous, about their future. After a discussion over dinner the night before, they decided to buy a horse and buggy instead of hiring one to get to Keene, as they realized having future transportation was necessary. A trip to the livery stable would be the first thing on their agenda this morning. After a hearty breakfast at the hotel, they made their way to buy the horse and carriage, surprised at the selection available. They picked a horse and a good used buggy, paid the owner, and were off with a new sense of freedom. After picking up their belongings from the hotel, supplies for their trip, and getting directions from the desk clerk, they were off on their journey to Keene.

It was mid-April and due to unusually dry weather, the roads were free of mud, making their trip easy. After a six-hour uneventful journey, they arrived at their destination. Keene was a small but growing town, boasting a bank, hotel, general store, and much more. Their first order of business was to go to the bank, open an account, and deposit their life savings where it would be safe. They took the horse and buggy to the livery stable, where the horse was fed, watered, and rested. They then checked into the hotel, had a nap, and went downstairs for dinner, hoping they could get information about their friends' whereabouts.

The newcomers learned their friends were well known and liked in town, and were living in a small hamlet called Lang, about two miles north of Keene. Lang had a sawmill, called Hope Mill, and a large grist mill, which their friend oversaw. The couple were told their friends had been supplied a house next to the mill, as this was considered an important job and the position required the miller be on call twenty-four hours a day.

After dinner, they took a stroll around town, finding the people friendly and helpful. As twilight approached, they made their way back to the hotel, retiring to their room. Discussing the day's events, they decided they had made the right decision coming here, as they felt comfortable in their new surroundings. Soon a deep sleep fell upon them, their dreams of a comfortable life in this new country they could now call their own. Hopefully, tomorrow they would reunite with their friends and get a better understanding of what the future held for them.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

The settlers stirred, the dawn light coming through the window awakening them. They talked about the day ahead and discussed information one of the townsfolk had given them yesterday about a homestead for sale, the note being held by the bank. It was said the family who once lived there had decided, after five years of demanding work, to move back to England, not being able to deal with the harsh winters. They had left last summer, leaving the house abandoned for less than one year. Many of the new arrivals had little money, so buying a homestead was not usually an option. But the settlers had the funds, and buying a property such as this would save them a lot of labour and time to put a shelter together before winter.

They would investigate this later, because today they were to find their friends for a reunion which was three years in the making. They picked up their horse and buggy from the livery stable, paid the owner, and were off to Lang, a short journey from Keene. Upon arrival, they found a quaint little village which had sprung up to house the men and their families who had arrived years earlier to work at the mills. After getting directions to the grist mill, they made their way there, excitement mounting as they thought of the surprise awaiting their friends, who knew they were coming but not when.

Soon a large stone building loomed in front of them. The grist mill was a huge structure, built by hand, by strong men to harness the power of water to make flour, a much-needed commodity for the settlers and small villages in the area. They parked their horse and buggy and made their way inside, where activity and noise greeted their senses. They found their friend, and after a joyous greeting, made their way to his house, where his wife had just taken fresh bread from the oven.

The settlers joined their friends for lunch, enjoying beef stew and bread, a lunch as delicious as they had ever had.

After small talk, their friend returned to work and the new arrivals unloaded their possessions from the buggy and took the horse to the barn, where he was fed and watered. The house was large, which allowed them to have a bedroom for themselves, a luxury most new arrivals never got to enjoy. After getting settled, the couple walked over to Hope Mill, a sawmill also buzzing with activity, as it supplied finished lumber and timber to the area's inhabitants.

They stopped a minute and took in the beauty of the river and the wilderness surrounding them. A feeling of peace and calm swept over the couple as they returned to the house for dinner. Root vegetables, pork, and bread were on the menu, followed by bread pudding for dessert. They then retired to the living room, where they caught up on all the important events which had happened since their departure from England.

Soon the evening became late, and after wishing each other a good night, everyone retired to their bedrooms. Tomorrow, the newcomers would ride back to Keene, go to the bank, and inquire about the homestead that was for sale, wishing to get set up and on their own as soon as possible. Their dreams were now becoming a reality, their luck being uncanny. They soon both drifted off into a deep sleep, enjoying a peace they had not enjoyed in months, dreaming about a tomorrow which would change their lives forever.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

The next morning the settlers found themselves at the bank, nervously awaiting the arrival of the bank manager, to discuss the sale of the homestead. He soon arrived and ushered them into his office, offering them comfortable chairs to sit in and coffee to drink. He explained to them the homestead consisted of a one room cabin, sitting on thirty acres of land, ten acres of which had been cleared and planted in grain by the previous tenants. It had a small livestock barn, a woodshed, and an implement barn, where the buggy and farm equipment could be stored. A large garden also graced the property. It was found on good road, halfway between Keene and Lang, and because of its excellent condition it was priced at four hundred fifty dollars. The location was given and the settlers, excited about seeing their probable future home, went on their way.

After a short journey, they arrived at the property and were elated to find everything they had been told was correct. The cabin was in fine condition, boasting an excellent fireplace and a good chimney. These were crucial, as it would supply warmth and a place where all the cooking would be done. The furnishings were included, and other than new chinking between the logs, the structure was move-in ready. The woodshed was half full of good firewood, a definite asset. It was demanding work keeping a cabin in enough wood for the winter, so a head start on this was a plus. The implement shed was empty, meaning the couple would have to buy a plough and seeder if they planned to farm the land. The livestock barn was large enough for an oxen team, their horse, and pigs. A fenced outdoor area was next to the barn, which would give the animals some room to move around, and a chicken coop attached to the barn was also included. The garden was large, with two apple trees which would supply an important staple for the settlers.

Lilac bushes surrounded the house, supplying a fragrant odour and making the property even more desirable.

A walk on the acreage provided the couple a feel for the land, which was forested, mostly with cedar. To their surprise, a river ran through the property, something the bank manager neglected to tell them. This would supply a way to get cedar logs to the mill, another source of income. The ten acres of cleared land would need to be rehabilitated, but the soil was rich and productive looking. The settlers were thrilled with the property and were excited to talk with the bank manager about buying it.

The couple left and headed back to Lang to share the good news with their friends. Upon returning, more good news was in store. One of the men working at the mill was leaving, to concentrate on his farming at home, creating an opening. Working at the mill was back breaking work and the turnover was high, but the settler took the job knowing his savings would not last forever. This would allow him to earn money to get started farming, hopefully the following year. Dinner was served and after small talk, the couple retired to their room for a peaceful sleep and hopes for continued luck in achieving their goals.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The settlers awoke, excited about what the day would bring. Their plans were to go to Keene and meet with the bank manager about buying the property. After a hearty breakfast, and obtaining a letter of reference confirming his new job, they were off. One hour later, they were sitting in the bank office discussing the purchase of their new home. The price they had discussed was agreed upon, four hundred fifty dollars. They would make a cash down payment of two hundred fifty dollars, with the bank holding a note on the remaining two hundred dollars. Payments were to be ten dollars per month. The paperwork was signed, and the settlers were now proud homeowners.

Since the morning was still young, the couple decided to go to their property to get an idea of what their immediate needs were. They then picked up their belongings from their friend's house, planning to spend the night in their new home. A shopping trip was also in order. The general store in Keene was small, but well stocked with household merchandise. A purchase of a coal oil lantern, blankets, cooking utensils, and food was made. In the future, they would go to Peterborough to shop for things they needed but could not buy locally.

With their buggy loaded with supplies, they headed to their new home. Upon arrival, the first thing they noticed was the sweet aroma of the lilacs in bloom. It was as if Mother Nature had put out a welcome mat for them, bringing new life to this once vibrant homestead. A fire was built in the fireplace, as the day had dawned cool and wet, leaving the cabin with an uncomfortable feeling of dampness. Cleaning was the first order of business, as the cabin had sat empty for a year, allowing dust to accumulate and families of mice to call the structure home. The crackle of the fireplace caught the new homeowners' attention, as warmth spread throughout the building, making them feel cozy and comfortable.

After the cleaning was finished, the couple decided to take a walk before cooking dinner. The river beckoned, drawing them like a magnet to find a favorite sitting place on a big rock,

enjoying the peace and serenity this new land offered. The future looked bright for these settlers, and they knew, with challenging work, they could have a good life in this new land.

His job worked out well, allowing them extra money to buy seed and farming equipment to become a self-sustaining farm. Two children were born, and the settlers spent ten years here, finally selling the property and buying a bigger house and farm in the area.

Not all stories of immigrants migrating to Canada in the eighteen hundreds ended on a happy note, as pioneering life was hard and unpredictable, sending these mostly young and eager people back to their home countries after a short stay.