

The Belfry Family

- CHAPTER I

Jacob Belfry, sen., was born on the ocean, near the Banks of Newfoundland, May 28, 1777. It has never appeared that this circumstance had any visible effect upon his life in causing a desire to make his home on the sea, for if so the desire could have been gratified. His father and mother came from France. The name of his father appears to have been Peter, and the maiden name of his mother was Catharine Lachioness Young. According to the recollection of some, it appears probable that her mother was an English lady. His father died when he (Jacob) was only about seven years of age, and his mother had previously succumbed to the insidious enemy, Death. Therefore at this early period of life he was left to the

care and compassion of others which is liable to take a different direction from the parental care, although it may have been equally well intended. His guardians (in this instance his godfathers) then decided to secure a place for him in the Roman Catholic College or Seminary at Quebec,* to be educated for a priest. Therefore ten years of his early life was spent in this institution. At this place he was required to arise at five o'clock in the morning to attend mass this formed in him the custom of early rising, always beneficial to health and business. But his meals were not satisfactory, being not sufficiently provided to quench the craving of hunger. This was likely to cause a desire to leave the place, that would be strengthened as the years increased. Further, j'oung Belfry had then the opinion that the priest could not pardon sin, and therefore he was not in harmony with any instruction of this kind, nor the practice connected therewith. Then further, the Roman Catholic Church forbidding their priests to marry was adverse to his intention, therefore he had no desire to officiate as a priest. The desire of young Belfry to pursue the course of ordinary men became strong, and caused him to follow the direction of his own understanding. To forfeit his liberty, and the right to choose his own occupation and manner of living, was more than he would consent to, or remain to endure. Therefore he left college without permit or discharge, and came westward ; but his guardians being made aware of his exit, came after him and caused his return to Quebec, and, as a supposed necessary punishment for leaving college, bound him to learn the cooper trade. Thus he was compelled to be either a cooper or a priest. At the age of twenty he met with an old college mate, who endeavored to "trapan" him into service in the British army, but he refused to accept the reward of an engagement, the elements of which were foreign to his natural disposition and much against his intention. But his intended captivators were persistent, and by some means left upon him money that entangled him into their clutches, by which authority they securely bound him fast in a chair and left him in a private room of a public house. In their absence, however, he made the place lively, for a glass door of the apartment fled from an encounter with his feet. This was the manner in which others were summoned to the place of his supposed captivity, who learned from him the particulars of his treatment, and very kindly relieved him from the chair, and thus set him at liberty. This caused him to leave the place immediately; and directing his steps westward, in course of time he arrived safely in Brockville. Here he arranged to remain, and being out on the street one day he met a Miss Sherman, who very much attracted his attention. The decision he arrived at concerning her was, that she appeared to be the most desirable young lady that he had found to make him a suitable wife. The attraction was of a kind that it did not require a very long time to make satisfactory arrangements, for the same year—1797—at something over twenty years of age, he and Miss Sherman were married. One of the first duties that Mrs. Belfry had then to undertake was that of a teacher ; for notwithstanding that Mr. Belfry had received instruction at college for the space of ten years, it was mostly in the French tongue, and other necessary elements for a certain calling ; but he has often been heard to make the remark that it was his wife that taught him to speak plain and intelligently the English language. Mr. Belfry, having arranged accordingly, settled then at Brockville, and kept himself in employment at his trade, this being the means at command to earn the necessaries for existence. It was understood that his father had bequeathed him in his will the sum of three thousand dollars ; but there was no way of obtaining it, for the executors of the will were irresponsible, or at least very soon became not worth the amount of the legacy and the attendant expense of collecting it. Mr. Belfry was high spirited, for notwithstanding that he had found it impossible to collect from the executors of his father's will the amount bequeathed to him therein, he was not inclined to be disheartened. He had a willing mind to work and a strong constitution, therefore he was ready and able to perform the work necessary to provide for his own wants and those likely to be dependent upon him for a living. He was, however, a tradesman, and did work for others. A wealthy Mr. Jones had a mill for making flour, and had also the material for making a quantity of flour barrels, which he wanted made at his own place, some three miles distant from Mr. Belfry's residence. Mr. Jones engaged Mr. Belfry to make the barrels at his (Mr. Jones') place, and to dine there also. Mr. Belfry undertook the job, and when meal time arrived he was called by the servant to dine in the kitchen. When he entered the door the appearance of the place was of that kind which had no enchantment to him, who had been accustomed to a better place; he returned forthwith to the shop and began packing up his tools. Mr. Jones espied him, and was soon there to inquire the cause of so doing. "I will not dine in your kitchen," was the prompt reply. "Mr. Jones," said he, "you ought to know that my training and opportunities have been equal to your own" (or words of the same import), "therefore if I cannot dine with you I will not make your flour barrels." "Hold on," said Jones, "till I consult the mistress and make the arrangement." Having returned he said, "It is all right, Mr. Belfry ; you can dine with us at our table." This circumstance is a very good illustration of the usual character of Mr. Belfry, which had no tendency to anything in the lower grade. He had that kind of self-respect which kept him from indulging in or submitting to anything of the kind. Mr. Belfry had a shop at Brockville, where his residence was for a time, after which he moved out a few miles in the township of Elizabethtown, in Leeds county, where the fourth and fifth children (and likely others) were born. After a time he removed farther out, on a farm, not far from Plum Hollow, on Lot No. 7 in the 9th Concession of the township of Bastard, in Leeds county. Other removes were made,



Jacob Michael Belfry

1777-1858

When Jacob Michael Belfry was born in 1777 in Grand Bank, Newfoundland and Labrador, his father, Peter, was 27 and his mother, Catharine, was 22. He married his first wife in 1797 in Ontario. In 1797 he married his second wife in Brockville, Ontario. He died in 1858 in Ontario, having lived a long life of 81 years, and was buried in York, Ontario.

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*This college or seminary of education was founded and endowed many years ago by the French Government. It is situated in the heart of the Upper Town, in a pleasant and commanding situation, overlooking the place of the Falls of Montmorenci, nine miles distant, and many miles of the surrounding country. The centre building of the college is one hundred and eighty feet long and four or five stories high, and there are two wings of proportionate dimensions. The massive walls are of stone, of substantial workmanship. There is a chapel attached, also spacious gardens and offices. Its system of education has become liberal. Those who desire instruction in theology receive it, and those who do not are under no obligations to adhere to the doctrines of the Church of Rome. It has professors who teach arithmetic, history, geography, the sciences, philosophy, mathematics, and the Greek, Latin, French and English languages.

of which we have not any special particulars. From the county of Leeds he removed to the Bay of Quinte district, and from the best recollection it seems to have been at this place, in the township of Fredericksburg, that Mr. Belfry bought land and paid for it, and made much improvement on the place, having a house and barn and some forty acres of clearing. In this well-to-do position, a U. E. Loyalist appeared with a claim and demanded the lot, including the home of Mr. Belfry. One hundred acres had been purchased by Mr. Belfry, and a neighbor had bought the other hundred acres of the same lot. They refused to give up the land they had bought and improved so much. The Loyalist was persistent, and had recourse by an action in law. Mr. Belfry, finding out the probable result, quietly left the place, but not without suffering the loss of the money he had paid and the improve merits he had made thereon. However, his neighbor who had purchased the other part of the lot contested the case, but finding that he must forfeit all claim to the place that he had bought and so much improved, he gave vent to his feelings that the Loyalist had no just right to his improvements, therefore he set fire to the fences and buildings and destroyed them. Mr. Belfry removed from the Bay of Quinte district to Port Hope. It was then about the year 1811, and the war of 1812 was showing some foreboding, which at this particular time could not produce anything fascinating, especially to any one whose disposition was the reverse of fighting, and more especially after having suffered much loss of property which had so recently occupied his care and attention. The captain of a schooner running on Lake Ontario, who was a relative of Mrs. Belfry, persuaded her and her husband that they, with their family, would be more secure and free from trouble by removing to the State of New York, than to remain in Canada. Knowing the position of things, the conclusion came to was to cut short their stay at Port Hope. Therefore, in the fall of 1811, Mr. Belfry with his family, and all his substance, inclusive of his stock, took passage on board the schooner, and thus were removed over to Lewiston. He then settled for a brief period on a farm near thereto, at a place called Slusser, or Slusher. At this place he did some fall ploughing, and a son and daughter (twins) were born here. But, because of the report that the Indians were likely to go over from Canada for the purpose of plunder and destruction on the American side of Lake Ontario, he concluded to remove farther inland. From this place he removed and settled on the Genesee flats, south of Rochester, N.Y. This remove was, for himself and family, a fortunate occurrence, for the Indians went over from Canada, and, according to report, murdered the family occupying the house that Mr. Belfry and his family had recently left for a more safe and suitable place. Mr. Belfry's home was then on the orchard farm of General Wordsworth, about thirty-six miles south of Rochester. The farm was somewhat extensive, and the engagement was to work it on shares. The orchard occupied fifty acres, and was planted with an apple tree and a peach tree alternately. Although difficulties had to be encountered at this place, nevertheless the stirring and industrious habits of Mr. Belfry crowned his efforts with much success. The fruit in the extensive orchard was occasionally excessive, and at times it was not convenient to make sale of the whole crop; the landlord required in that case that the unused fruit should be ploughed in to enrich the soil. It is necessary to bear in mind that the circumstances here narrated occurred many years ago, when railway accommodation was not equal to the fast times of the present day. General Wordsworth was an extensive land-owner and could therefore travel many miles (nearly to Rochester, N.Y.) on his own land. But although he was wealthy, his manner was of the true American style, to estimate others according to their character rather than their riches (that in some instances disappears on the wings of the wind), he was therefore very friendly and frequently visited Mr. Belfry, and took pleasure in nursing his American-born children. The home of Mr. Belfry, on the Genesee flats, was near to Big-Tree Village. At this place a saloon was kept in a hollow stub, cut at the top like the gable end of a house, and thus inclosed the remains of what had been an immense hollow tree. When the floods came on the flats, Mr. Belfry had to make temporary rafts, on which the sheep were put to keep them from being drowned; and the family, at these particular times, had to take refuge in the upper part of the house. The floods came only with a large freshet, in the spring, as the snow was leaving, or otherwise, at the time of an unusual downfall of rain. The floods were not detrimental to the land, for they were rich and productive; and the sediment, where left, was favorable, for the deposit was a means of enriching the soil. They were inconvenient, however, in several ways; sometimes being very disastrous to stock grazing upon the extensive acreage of the Genesee flats. During the war of 1812, flour and other necessaries were in many places very scarce, and of high price, and those who had neglected to supply themselves before this time of scarcity had overtaken them were anxious to obtain from Mr. Belfry the articles kept in store for the requirements of his own family. As this became very urgent, he found that it was expedient to secrete the barrels of flour provided for his own use in a manner to avoid the appeals made to his generosity, which was active and strong. His attachment to his own family was very great, and their wants were the first to be remembered. When the soldiers were marching by Mr. Belfry's place, on their way to the front, in the war of 1812, he, in his own generosity, threw over apples to them from the large orchard in his possession, which was, for some cause, not agreeable to his landlord for thus doing. Having followed farming on the Genesee flats for about seven years, through some difficulties and considerable success, an unusual flood of water came, that rose some seven feet where the haystacks stood, and therefore it caused much damage to stock, grain, and various things, for it carried stacks of hay away entirely. This was the cause of so much loss and inconvenience to Mr. Belfry, that it seemed desirable for him to leave the place. His business, therefore, was arranged, for his decision was to remain no longer on these flats, but practically to say "farewell" to those who continued to remain. Upper Canada, as the Province of Ontario was then called, had the reputation of an inviting place to secure good homes for intending settlers. Circumstances had made it necessary for Mr. Belfry to go where a home could be obtained without very much required outlay; therefore, about the year 1818, he moved over to St. Catharines, some twelve miles west of Niagara Falls, and remained there over the following winter. St. Catharines was not the place of destination, it was simply a halting place for a time, until a brother-in-law could overtake him. Early the next spring, before the sleighing had gone, he removed to the township of Markham, in the county of York, and settled on the farm of Christley Reesor. This place is somewhere about twenty-five miles distant north-east from Toronto, which was at that time called "Little York." The only circumstance of any importance that occurred during the location at this place, of some three years, was the addition to the family of another (Canadian-born) son. The lively and friendly disposition, and industrious habits of Mr. Belfry, were the recommendations by which he very soon made the acquaintance of others in the locality he had then chosen to remain in for a time, and for these qualities was, by them, held in high esteem.

THE FOUNDING OF KIRKFIELD, ONT - Papers and records - Ontario Historical Society

THE FOUNDING OF KIRKFIELD, ONT.* By A. F. Hunter. The circumstances connected with the founding of Kirkfield, a village of some importance in Victoria County, are worthy of a place in the annals of the Province. In the autumn of 1859, three settlers from the vicinity of Queensville, in the Township of East (Jwillimbury) — Jacob Dixon, Jacob Belfry, and Silas Smith — took up locations on the site of Kirkfield, built log houses, and moved their families thither, and these became the first families within the village. Dixon started the first tavern, and Silas Smith opened a general store. At this time contractors were building the Victoria Road, and this made it necessary to have a place of accommodation and trade, as the nearest place on the west was Beaverton, several miles distant. Contractors and sub-contractors and jobbers of various kinds swarmed around the new village. Dixon's public house was a hewed log structure with one room, serving as dining-room, kitchen and bar-room, where the township council meetings of the day also were held. Smith's store had the addition of an upstairs- or loft where some other gatherings took place, as for example a Good Templar's Lodge. The doorway of Belfry's house was lacking in altitude, so much so that a person of ordinary height had to bend down to enter it. A short way south of the corners at which the new village took its rise, when the above-mentioned settlers located here, there was an old clearing near the foot of the hill, overgrown with second growth pines, with the remains of two log cabins, dwelling and stable, where the pioneer of the place, Mr. Munro, had first settled some twenty-three years earlier, but he had afterwards erected more commodious buildings on another part of the farm and had moved his family to the new home. It was while this family lived in their first abode that the first white child was born on the site of the future village in 1839 — John Munro, who is still living about a mile south of the village. It was Mr. Munro, Sr., who named the village. The first white child born in Kirkfield after the beginning of the village was Robert Frederick Smith, — who was born May 7, 1860, and is still living in the State of Pennsylvania, U.S.A. At the time of the origin of the village, there was a good farming settlement on the top of the hill southward. The McKenzie family, of whom Sir William is a member, were also early residents: in fact, they owned some of the land (a farm) upon which the village is now built. Kirkfield is at the intersection of the Portage Road (from Lake Simcoe to Balsam Lake) and the eighth concession of Eldon. The first settlers in the * In the compilation of this article the Secretary is indebted to Lt.-Col. Geo. E. Laidlaw for some interesting facts gathered from Mr. Samuel Truman, and to others.