



## **The OCLT Newsletter**

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### **The Orono Canal**

One of the historic features of the Crown Lands property is the canal. Although it is now not much used, it has an interesting history, as recounted in "Out of the Mists: a History of Clarke Township" by Helen Schmid and Sid Rutherford. This excerpt from the book is reprinted by kind permission of Helen Schmid.

By this time (1861) the water in the Orono creek had been diminished by the clearing of the forests. This decrease in the volume of water flowing down the creek began to effect the production of the (Tucker) mill (located on the site of the current millpond, on Somerville Road). Steam power was considered. Francis Squair, a miller himself, on the south part of Lot 31, Con. 4 suggested diverting the water from the Wilmot Creek to supplement the volume of water in the Orono creek. He offered the use of an instrument to take levels and assisted in the work. Mr. Squair hoped to acquire a new mill privilege on the north half of Lot 31, Con. 4 to put up an oat mill. His plan proved feasible and a canal was dug through almost two miles of hills, swamps, etc. A number of agreements had to be signed and all signed willingly as the scheme was a public interest. Mr. Squair was the only one not to sign an agreement as he said he wanted no unpleasantness with the Trust and Loan Company to whom he was in arrears.

The canal or 'raceway' passed through the Forestry property along the old railroad tracks to the creek that passes behind the business section of the village. Today the raceway is little more than a ditch.

The work commenced in the spring of 1863 and was a real engineering feat for the times. The majority of the work was by hand labour. Farmers with teams and scrapers gave hundreds of days work. There were many doubts as to its successful accomplishment, but four months later amid shouts of the awaiting crowd, the water came pouring into the Orono stream through the 6-ft. wide, 2-ft. deep, canal. This event took place at 4 p.m. on a day late in August.

The opening of what was almost regarded as the second Panama Canal, called for a celebration. Citizens observed the day as a holiday, prepared a sumptuous dinner of beef, mutton, lamb, ham and held it in one of the grain warehouses. An ox was roasted whole. Water was the liquid used for the toasts. The cost of the canal was set at about \$2,000. To help meet this cost, the proceeds of the dinner were given to Mr. Tucker.