

What life was like in 1852, Grey County?

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In 1852, Grey became a provisional county in what was then Upper Canada. The change and progress that has occurred since its formation is outshone only by the early development of this area.

The first European settler to arrive was Charles Rankin in 1833. He was a government surveyor who surveyed the major portion of the county. Rankin settled in St. Vincent Township¹ and later relocated to the Town of Sydenham, now the City of Owen Sound, permanently. Collingwood Township² was the first to be surveyed and St. Vincent Township the first to be settled. The Town of Sydenham was settled in 1840, twelve years prior to the creation of the county. About this same time Sydenham and Derby Townships³ were also being settled. The Town of Durham was laid out in 1842 and Meaford in 1845. Hanover however was not surveyed until 1855. Osprey Township⁴ would not see its first settlers until 1846, making it one of the last townships in South Western Ontario to be settled.

The County of Grey became a provisional county in 1852. The county was named after Charles the second Earl of Grey. The first meeting of the Provisional Council of Grey was held in the Town of Sydenham. The county buildings were completed a year later in 1853. Two years after the formation of the county in 1854, Grey County became fully independent from Simcoe and Wellington Counties.

In 1837, work began on Garafraxa Road now Highway 6. The road was begun in Sydenham and Fergus but construction had to be delayed because of war. In 1848, Rankin was ordered to survey what is now Highway 10. Forty miles were opened by 1852, however some portions were still impassable by wagon. Work also began on the Durham Road in 1848. The railway did not come to Grey County until much later in 1873.

At the time of the formation of Grey County in 1852, the population was 13,000. Trade and commerce grew from the natural resources in the area; fish, fur, forests and minerals. It was the age of the mill and the tavern. Churches were located in houses and although there were some schools, others still had to be located in homes. The first high school was built in Owen Sound and was the only one in the county for many years. Early on the county was divided into three divisions for education purposes. They were named East, West and South Grey. In Owen Sound the newspaper 'The Comet' had been created a year earlier in 1851, and was the only circulating newspaper in the area at that time.

¹ St. Vincent Township is now part of the Municipality of Meaford.

² Collingwood Township is now part of the Municipality of the Blue Mountains.

³ Sydenham Township is now part of the Municipality of Meaford. Derby Township is now part of the Municipality of Georgian Bluffs.

⁴ Osprey Township is now part of the Municipality of Grey Highlands.

Grey County has come a long way since 1852. In the year 2000, the population was 82,860. The economy remains largely based on agriculture; however, tourism is becoming increasingly important to the region. Grey County has eight recently amalgamated municipalities.⁵ There are presently six high schools governed by two school boards. A number of newspapers are in circulation in the county, both local and regional. Although many changes have occurred over the years, heritage and tradition remain important throughout the county.

Sources:

Brownbridge, J. Davidson, G. Turner, B. Turner, M. *Peace, Plenty and Progress: A History of Osprey Township.*

Cumming, Ross. ed. *Historical Atlas of Grey and Bruce Counties, 1880.* H.Belden & Co. Toronto: 1975.

Rutherford, Ruth. *Grey County's 125th Year, 1852-1977.* Hanover Typocraft Limited. Hanover: 1977.

Grey County Website: www.greycounty.ca.

⁵ The new municipalities are the Blue Mountains, Chatsworth, Georgian Bluffs, Grey Highlands, Hanover, Meaford, Southgate and West Grey.