

“Sketch of the Life of William Lang,” *Carleton Place Herald*, Feb. 9, 1938
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[*the article was written in 1901*]

Four score years ago on the 18th of last July - in the year 1821- among the Scottish settlers who landed on Canadian soil from the Buckingham, a staunch sailing vessel, after a voyage of seven weeks, was the family of the late Arthur Lang. Besides himself and his wife there were two sons and two daughters by his first wife and two daughters by his second wife. The two sons were Mr. William Lang, now an aged and highly respected nonagenarian resident of the township of Beckwith, and the late Thomas Lang, father of Mrs. Duncan Hamilton, of Almonte. The daughters of the first family were Mrs. Alex. Smart, of Clarendon, and Mrs. Francis Thompson. Of Alexandria Bay, who has been dead for some years, and Mrs. Adam Currie, now in Manitoba, and Mrs. John Neilson, who is dead. Of these the one with whom this sketch has to do is the eldest son, Mr. William Lang.

Mr. Lang was born in the town of Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, on October 22nd, 1811, so that he has now entered upon his ninety-first year. Though not ten years of age when he turned his back upon his native land, he has yet a clear recollection of many things that happened then, and can relate with wonderful distinctness for one who has reached the age when faculties usually become impaired, stories of the early days. Of the voyage over the sea much has been forgotten by him, but a diary kept of the trip, and from this extracts that will be of interest will be given to the public in a later issue. One of the incidents of the voyage

remembered by Mr. Lang is that when the Buckingham was ailing along the Irish coast it was driven by stress of weather on the coast near the famous Wicklow Mountains, and was quickly surrounded by a band of natives who were looking for wreckage, but as a revenue cutter hove in sight no violence was attempted, though such occurrence were common in those days on every coast in every country.

Quebec was reached on July 16th, 1821, and from that city these plucky Scotch settlers proceeded to Montreal by boat. At Montreal their earthly possessions were loaded in batteaux, and the slow tedious journey up the St. Lawrence to Prescott began. Mr. Lang and Mr. Neilson, were then sturdy boys, and were sent on ahead of the boats to walk to Lachine, a distance of nine miles. They started out bravely, but soon lost their way, and as they could not make the Frenchmen whom they met understand their predicament they were compelled to their chagrin to retrace their steps and get fuller directions from the seniors of the party. The road along the St. Lawrence was even at that early day a good one, and a good part of the journey was made on foot by the stronger members of the party, who preferred walking to the confinement of the small boats. These boats were rowed by Frenchmen, and came up the river in company with several Durham boats, which were fitted with sails to be used when the wind was favorable, and at other times were propelled by oarsmen. When passing up the Long Sault Rapids they were towed by oxen. Here an accident was narrowly averted. Some of the boats got caught in the ropes that were used for towing, and it was only by

the prompt cutting of the rope that at least an unpleasant experience was avoided.

The party left the batteaux at Prescott and travelled from that town to Lanark village in wagons. We, who now complain of the few ruts in our public highways while riding in our buggies and phaetons with their accommodating springs, can form but a very faint idea of the torture to which these passengers must have been subjected while travelling over a rough bush road, and through soft swamps. The present generation may well exclaim, "Truly we have a goodly heritage, and our lives have fallen to us in pleasant places." The pleasure (?) of travelling in the wagons was reserved for the women and the children, the others having to do the journey on foot. There was at this time a government depot at Lanark from rations and farming implements were supplied to new settlers according to fixed regulations. This depot was in charge of a Colonel Marshall, and each settler was given an axe, two hoes and other necessary implements with which to prosecute the work of clearing and cultivating the land from which they were to obtain their subsistence. Immediately after reaching Lanark the new settlers had their first experience in providing homes for themselves. There were no comfortable houses awaiting them there, and from the woods around them they had to procure the material with which to erect places of shelter for themselves. These were rude bush huts, made by setting up poles in the form of a wigwam and covering them with a thick layer of balsam and pine branches, and when completed they served the purpose fairly well. In these rude shelters the women and children of the party were left while the heads of the families went out into the almost pathless forest in search of land upon

which to locate. From Lanark they proceeded down along the Clyde and the Mississippi rivers, desiring to procure land near a good stream of water. People of today can form very little idea of what that journey was like—through woods and swamps, over fallen trees and rocky ridges, beset by myriads of good healthy mosquitoes, and loaded with provisions and accoutrements necessary for the trip. They journeyed on till Ramsay township was reached before Mr. Lang's father sighted land which pleased his fancy. Here he selected lot 14 on the tenth line—the farm upon which Mr. John Lang lived for many years, and upon which his son Henry is now living. A little clearing was made and a log shanty with a roof of scooped out logs was built and made ready by Mr. Lang for the coming of his family. It was a rude shelter to bring them to, but it was to be home to them, and "home" to those people under such circumstances meant a great deal more than it does to many today who live in affluence and dwell in palatial residences. When everything was ready Mr. Lang returned to Lanark for his family. But misfortune was on the trail, and ere he got back the building was destroyed by fire, and the labourious task of rebuilding had to be undertaken, and the work was not completed when the people arrived. From Lanark the journey was made down the Clyde and Mississippi rivers in rough boats built by the men. A good many portages had to be made, and it took some days to complete the trip. When coming down Mississippi Lake they stopped at an island, and while preparing a meal a big Indian hove in sight coming towards the camp in majestic strides. Instantly stories of blood-thirsty doings of these wily savages flashed across the minds of the company and fear filled every heart.

Equal to the occasion, however, was the late John Steele, who was one of the party, and he seized a huge loaf of bread and presented it to the Indian as an evidence of their friendly intentions. The peace offering was not accepted, and the Indian passed by on his way to his camp on another part of the island and paid no attention to them, but they breathed easier when he was out of sight. A night was spent on the north shore of the river above the falls at Carleton Place, beds being spread on the ground and the only covering over the travelers their blankets and the empyrean blue overhead. When Mr. Lang's family reached their destination the second shanty was not completed, only a part of the roof being on, and when they awoke on the first morning in their cabin home, the floor on the uncovered portion of the building was white with snow.

Then began the real work of making a home for themselves. Trees had to be felled, cut into logs and rolled together for burning, and stumps removed, and the soil prepared for seeding. About the only staple article for market and the one upon which the early settlers had largely to depend for procuring what money was required by them was potash. To make this the ashes from the burned logs were gathered and made into potash and taken to Brockville where it was sold. In connection with this industry, Mr. Lang tells of cutting logs on the ridge at Almonte where Dr. P. C. McGregor lives and dragging them down to the riverbank where Mr. J. B. Wylie's house stands and converting them into potash. As Mr. Lang was the oldest of the boys he had a large share in the hard work that had to be done, but the fact that he is still hale and hearty at ninety years of age is proof that it is not always hard work that shortens our days. When about fifteen or sixteen years of age

he helped his father, who was a carpenter, erect the barn which stood on the farm until it was burned down a few years ago, when the fire caused so much destruction to property in Almonte and along the river bank at Mr. Henry Lang's, and Mrs. D. Miller's. In 1838 Mr. Lang married Miss Agnes Neilson, daughter of the late John Neilson, and sister of Mrs. Gavin Hamilton and Mrs. William Smith, of Ramsay, and a few years afterward they moved to the township of Huntley, where Mr. Lang had procured a farm—lot 5 in the eleventh concession—and here they proceeded to do what he had helped his father to accomplish—make a home for themselves in the forest. The road at that time was little more than a path through the woods, and difficult to travel, but many trips were made over it by Mrs. Lang carrying a basket of eggs and butter on one arm and a child on the other. Wild animals were very numerous, and tin horns had often to be blown to frighten bears and other depredators out of the grain fields. Mr. Lang's sterling character was early recognized by his pioneer neighbors, and his advice and counsel were sought for by many, and when so disposed he can relate some humorous tales in connection with the matters in which his assistance was called for, not even matrimonial confidences being considered too sacred for his ear. In those early days religious and educational advantages were not very great. The first school in the section in which Mr. Lang lived, now school section No. 7, Huntley, was built in 1850 and there was no church nearer than Beckwith, to which even people from Almonte went in those days until the stone church was built at the eighth line, Ramsay, when they attended service there. Mr. Lang was one of the very few settlers

fortunate enough to possess a span of horses and a wagon; and as he drove regularly to church his conveyance seemed to be possessed of the proverbial elasticity of the modern street car, as no matter how many were in it he always seemed to be able to make room for one or two more, should he overtake them walking to church. After the establishment of St. Andrew's church in Almonte, Mr. Lang attended services there, and was for many years a much respected elder. Trained in the old school his convictions of right and wrong were deep-rooted, and with him there could be no compromise between these two. No heart could be kinder to a penitent wrong doer, nor none sterner to a wilful offender.

In 1882, after about forty years residence in Huntley, Mr. Lang sold his farm to the late Patrick Ryan, and moved to the eleventh line of Beckwith, where he has since lived. In 1888, he and the partner of his troubles and his triumphs had the pleasure of celebrating their golden wedding, but Mrs. Lang has since passed away. A family of nine children were born to them, six of whom are still living.

When Mr. Lang camped with his father on the banks of the Mississippi there was not much indication that there would ever be a town of the importance of Almonte grow up at this point. A government depot occupied the site of the town hall, and here the settlers obtained certain of their supplies. Mr. Daniel Shipman came later on and had a sawmill further down the river. A Mr. Shepherd also put up a sawmill but it was burnt down. Another was built by him, but he became involved financially and sold out and went to Brockville. Mr. John A. Gemmill, father of Lieutenant Colonel Gemmill, kept the only store in Almonte at that time in a building which stood near the

junction of Country and Bridge street. Almonte's first school was also located near there and taught by Mr. Lang's father the late Arthur Lang, who was the first school teacher in Ramsay township. The first Roman Catholic church was a frame building which was erected by the late Thomas Lang, a brother of Mr. William Lang. His father died in 1849.

Mr. Lang though now in his 91st year is still hale and hearty and is able to move about with considerable activity. Unlike many who reach such patriarchal years his interest in present events is still as keen as ever, and he can converse freely on the things which are happening about him, and takes quite an intelligent concern in the affairs of both church and state. With a firm belief in the wisdom and goodness of an all-wise Providence, he accepts, what is as best, and does not waste time in worry. In such a frame of mind he enjoys to the full the blessings of life and should the hopes of his many friends be realized, he will be spared to enjoy the brightness of many years to come.