

JAMES S. LAIRD

James Stewart Laird was born 1st October, 1842, on the site now occupied by the town of Blenheim.

His father, Joseph Laird, with his wife, Janet Stewart Laird, and their small daughter, Jane—all born near Glasgow, Scotland, came to Canada by sailing ship in 1842, and settled in Harwich, Township, County of Kent. He began life as a farmer a few years later on a wild farm about one and a half miles from Blenheim. Four other children, James Stewart, Archie, Thomas and John were born to them, and his grandson, Joseph, Jr., inherited the farm. Joseph, the immigrant, became a prosperous farmer, and died at his home near Blenheim, his wife having passed away in the previous year.



On the voyage from Scotland came also James Laird, the father of Joseph, bringing with him his family consisting of the following children: John, Alexander, James, Janet and Elizabeth.

The subject of this sketch acquired his earlier education in the public school and then spent three years as a pupil in the grammar school of Chatham. His first work was as a school teacher, to which he devoted four years at Kent Bridge. He then took up the study of Land Surveying, and served under Augustine McDonell, obtaining his commission as a Provincial Land Surveyor, 6th April, 1867.

From that time he practised his profession at Maidstone Cross until the year 1873, when he removed to Windsor, and later to Essex. In addition to the usual private practice, Mr. Laird made the following surveys for the provincial government:

1879—The concession line between the 3rd and 4th Concessions of the township of Raleigh, also the concession line between the 4th and 5th concessions, and the line between lots numbers 18 and 19, in concession —, in the same township.

1897—the allowance for road between lots 6 and 7 in concession east of River Ruscom from the town line between Tilbery West and Rochester.

1887—Subdivision of the Township of Lumsden.

1889—Subdivision of the Township of Pacaud.

1891—Subdivision of the Township of Gorham.

1893—Subdivision of the Township, of Capreol, and in

1896—Subdivision of the Township of Curtis.

He also had an interest in the subdivision of a number of other original townships, and in the early '70's made a subdivision of the Indian Reserve in Anderdon.

In the early seventies, the Municipal Drainage Act was introduced in Essex County. Mr. Laird's services were in immediate demand by the local municipalities. For the next quarter century, he carried on the most extensive practice in drainage engineering in the Province. His services were much sought as a professional witness in drainage litigation, and few drainage disputes in Western Ontario were settled without his appearance as a witness. His engineering practice is continued by his son, James S., Jr.

Besides being prominent in his chosen calling, Mr. Laird took an active interest in public affairs, and served for ten years as reeve of the Town of Essex—being also a member of the County Council for ten years, and in 1892 he was warden of the County. Politically he was a Liberal, and in religion a Presbyterian.

Mr. Laird was twice married—(first) to Adeline Arnold, of Kent County, who died leaving him with one daughter, Janet, and (second) to Mary Beattie, a daughter of Thomas Beattie, one of the pioneer settlers on the Talbot Road, in Maidstone. In the latter union there were born, Ethel Geraldine, James S., Jr., who later became a civil engineer in Essex, Ruth Helen, John Bruce, Archie Burns, who was killed in the air service in the Great War, William Wallace, Josephine and Donald Murray.

Full of years and honours, James S. Laird died at his home in Essex on 21st November, 1928.