

## BRUCE BEACH HISTORY – 2009

### Louis Bellemore and the French Settlement of Huron Township

While researching the Tout family history for the 2007 Yearbook, I noted that a Frenchman named Louis Bellemore settled on Concession A, lot 36 almost a quarter century before William Tout. (Lot 36 is currently Grant and Carol Collins' farm.) The little recorded about Monsieur Bellemore is very interesting.

The first land survey in Huron Township was undertaken in 1847 to encourage settlement. E.R. Jones, P.L.S., compiled a list of all the people along Lake Range, as it was called even then, and also recorded when the settlers had first arrived and what improvements they had made to their lands. Using Jones' 1851 report, Robertson found the names of the settlers here for his book, *The History of the County of Bruce*, published in 1906.

In August of 1848, the government offered free, 50 acre farm lots to settlers in Huron Township and this offer was renewed in June of 1849. This practice encouraged numerous French Canadian settlers. For example, Louis Lizars, settled on lots 47 and 48, half way between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> concessions, in October 1848. So many French Canadians located in the area, particularly in what would become the north end of Bruce Beach, that it was known as the "French Settlement".

"Louis Bellemore, a French-Canadian, was the first [European] to locate in Huron. The summer of 1848 is given as the time when he 'squatted' on lot 19, beside Pine River, where he made some improvements and kept a tavern" (Robertson 1906:30). This was on the north side of the river, at its mouth.

"In the following spring, Bellemore sold his squatter's rights ... and moved to lot 36, and at the time of E.R. Jones' report, he had made a clearing thereon of thirteen acres in extent" (*ibid.*). Clearing 26% of his 50 acres in three years is an impressive feat. He also built a 22 by 18 foot log house and he again had a tavern. "The sign of the tavern which he kept had painted thereon, in rather crude artistic style, a bottle and a glass, with the motto, 'A French Tavern'" (*ibid.*). Thus, drinking at the Golf Course Round House follows a long forgotten precedent.

In a footnote, Robertson added that Bellemore had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. His name is not included in the list of Company employees in their on-line archives. However, *From Jane Fyfe Yemen's Scrapbook*, published in 1983, there is a note written in 1939 by William Welsh, an old Bellemore neighbour. Welsh remembered him as a Hudson Bay trader "who knew all about the West even out by Hudson's Bay", who still hunted and fished. His "son, Larry, drove a dog team on the ice to supply the few wants of the very early settlers for several winters" (1983:28).

The same footnote also states that Bellemore married the daughter of an Indian chief. Who was this Indian wife? Early settlers remembered her as “an industrious, sensible woman who could give assistance in time of illness” (Yemen 1983:51). Welsh referred to her as an Indian doctor known for her great success in curing disease with herbs so much so that she was called upon in preference to the licensed physician. Her children with Louis were: Lou, Larry, Joe, Charlie, Peter and Mary and Mr. Bellemore was described as “gifted with much good nature and good sense” (*ibid.*).

Some of these children are included in the 1852 Census from which we learn more about Louis. He is listed as a 49 year old, Roman Catholic farmer, born in “Canada Fr”. He was married to Julia, 42, who was born in Canada. Louis had more than one wife and Julia appears to be his second. There were five children in their home: three boys (Louis who was 20 and listed as a mariner, Charles, 8 and Philimon, almost 2) and two girls (Mary 11 and Julia who was less than a year old). I suspect Philimon and baby Julia are Julia’s children and the others her step-children.

The more detailed 1871 Census reveals that Louis senior was born in Quebec and Julia in Ontario. His origin is given as French and hers as Irish. In their house at this time, there was a Mary Randall aged 12 and a Robert Beatty aged 28. Beatty was described as a blacksmith, an Episcopalian Methodist and of Irish origin. (The Beatty family was settled on what would later become McCosh’s.) Also in residence was Philimon, now 21, and another Louis who was only one year old (a grandchild maybe?).

The next entry in the 1871 census is Louis’ second son, Charles, who at 29 was a labourer and a head of household. Following his name is that of 28 year old Mary, who was born in Quebec. She must be Charles’ wife. Four girls all under six, make up the rest of this household.

On 22 November, 1872, lot 36 was under Crown Patent and by February 28, 1873 William Tout owned it. Apparently, the Bellemores and the other French Canadian families moved away from our area and the French Settlement was forgotten.

A bientôt mes amis!  
Frances Stewart, BB Historian