

The History of Pictou – Part 2

In 1787, Governor Walter Patterson sold what is now the central area of the Town to John Patterson, one of the Hector settlers, who would become known as the Father of Pictou. Father John subdivided the land, built houses and wharves and laid out Water, Church and George Streets.

In those early years the town was variously known as Coleraine, New Paisley, Alexandria, Donegal, Teignmouth, Southampton and Walmsley. The origin of the name is unclear, while many believe it to be derived from the Mi'kmaq. Pictook, meaning the place of exploding gas or fire under the ground. This name remains after more than 200 years.

In the early 1800s, vast coal seams were discovered in the vicinity of present day Stellarton. This led directly to the birth of the industrial revolution of Canada. Foundries, shipyards and glassworks mushroomed in the Pictou and New Glasgow areas. Labour was needed to fill the factories resulting in significant population growth.

Exports and imports increased accordingly and Pictou became an important centre of culture in an as yet largely unsettled and undeveloped colony. In these early days, coal vessels would have to wait at times for weeks to load their cargo and it was said that one could cross the harbour on the decks of the anchored square riggers.

Five years after the Incorporation of the Town, the 1879 Teare's Directory described a prosperous community with all of the modern day conveniences.

"The town has gas works, Brass and Iron Foundries, Tobacco Factories, Tanneries – one within the limits of the Corporation owned by Messrs. R. Campbell and Son and the other immediately outside of the town the property of John Logan Esq. – both of which are doing a very extensive business and affording work to a large number of hands. Here too, there are several excellent stores, including hardware, dry-goods, books and stationery, grocery drugs, boots and shoes, and a variety of others. The town contains three banks with several Savings Banks, also Fire, Life and Marine Insurance Companies, Telegraph offices, many excellent hotels, a most efficient Fire Brigade and a widely circulated newspaper."